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## Asian tourism in Europe: consumption, distinction, mobility, and diversity

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### ABSTRACT

While research on Asian tourism has increased in recent years, studies on Asian travellers' consumption patterns in Europe are still rather rare. Taking a sociological perspective, this research examines Asian tourists' consumption in Vienna in relation to their sense of distinction and mobility. Combining results of a quantitative survey of 560 tourists from China, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand with semi-structured interviews of tour guides and representatives of a destination marketing agency, the authors tested a hypothetical model of factors driving Asian tourists' status consumption. While Japanese and South Korean tourists tended toward lifestyle consumption, Chinese and Thai visitors were more likely to engage in material consumption to gain social status. The authors explain the variation of status consumption across Asian tourist groups in terms of the mobility and socio-cultural characteristics of the middle class from the four countries.

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Tourism consumption; social distinction; mobility; Asia; middle class

Outbound travellers from Asia, particularly China, have increasingly gained research attention (Li, 2016; Pearce & Wu, 2016; Yang & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018). Meta-analysis of literature on Chinese outbound travel shows that the most studied regions are Asia, Oceania (particularly Australia), and to a lesser extent North America (Jin & Wang, 2016). Very few studies have analysed Chinese (Fugmann & Aceves, 2013; Jørgensen, Law, & King, 2018; Lojo, 2016; Prayag, Cohen, & Yan, 2015) or other Asian (Balaz & Mitsusake, 1998; Bernal-Barella & Scharfenort, 2015; Kanlayanasukho & Pearce, 2016) travellers in Europe.

Asian outbound tourism is diverse, covers broad geographical regions, and is not only driven by Chinese travellers. The ongoing growth and complexity of tourism from Asia (Cohen & Cohen, 2015; Yeoman & Beeton, 2014) demands research that considers the cultural diversity of the region. In this study, 'Asia' refers to four selected countries: Japan, South Korea, and Mainland China, as well as Thailand. Although tourism scholars started the discussion on cross-cultural tourist behaviour of Asian visitors in the late 1990s (Reisinger & Turner, 2002), comparative studies have yet to explore differences between Asian markets.

Tourism has been conceptualised as a social need driven by enhancement of travellers' social standing (Correia, Kozak, & Reis, 2016) within a globalised geography of tourism, consumption, and prestige, with Europe becoming an increasingly important destination for the

dynamic Asian outbound market. For Asian tourists, Europe is a 'must visit' destination well known for its cultural heritage, luxury products, and geographical proximity to European countries (Arlt, 2006; Pendzialek, 2016).

Studies have approached Asian tourism largely as an economic phenomenon dominated by marketing and business management perspectives, and have paid less attention to sociological aspects (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, 2015), especially tourism consumption (Sharpley, 2018). In light of the neglect of sociological perspectives of Asian tourism, this study grounds its theoretical stance on major concepts of tourism consumption, social distinction, and mobility. While 'travel has remained an expression of taste since the eighteenth century, it has never been so widely used as at present' (Munt, 1994, p. 109). Impressing others to achieve social status through the display of wealth has been conceptualised as conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899/1957) and symbolic consumption or capital (Bourdieu, 1984). However, the question of how various forms of tourism consumption across different groups lead to social distinction remains unanswered.

The present study is timely and significant, as it addresses a number of gaps in the literature. First, Asian tourism research of recent years is China-centered and neglects dynamics and development of other established and emerging countries (Bui, Wilkins, & Saito, 2018). Second, most studies highlight differences

between Asian and Western tourists but generally do not analyse differences between Asian nationalities (Reisinger, Mavondo, & Crotts, 2009). Third, research rarely examines European destinations despite their increasing prominence on the Asian tourism landscape (Jørgensen et al., 2018). Consequently, the main objectives of this article are:

- (1) To examine the relationship between tourism consumption of Asian travellers in Europe and their sense of distinction. To examine the role of mobility and status consumption of Asian tourists in Europe;
- (2) To examine diversity of Asian tourists in regard to consumption, social distinction, and mobility; and
- (3) To expand the knowledge of Asian outbound tourism as a social phenomenon.

This study combines the three conceptual areas distinction (status theories), (tourist) consumption, and mobility to discuss similarities and differences among Asian tourists in Europe. The authors deploy a mixed methods approach including a quantitative survey with 546 Asian tourists in Austria's capital city Vienna and semi-structured interviews with Vienna-based tour guides and an officer of Austria's National Tourism Office (ANTO).

## Literature review and hypotheses development

### *Consumption and social distinction*

Consumption is conceptualised as the 'active ideology that the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and prepacked experiences' (Bocock, 1993, p. 50). A four-fold typology that involves experience, integration, interaction, and classification specifies that consumption aims to classify consumers in relation to other consumers and therefore includes 'practices [that] serve both to build affiliation and enhance distinction' (Holt, 1995, p. 10). This perspective links to Veblen's and Bourdieu's theories on status consumption, which ground the theoretical foundation of this study.

In *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Veblen, 1899/1957) defines conspicuous consumption as leisure activities for which people spend money and time in order to display wealth. The desire for status trickles down the social class hierarchy since each class aims at emulating the class above (Simmel, 1950), with both higher and lower social classes being influenced by the demonstration effect of conspicuous consumption (Trigg, 2001).

A contemporary development of the theory of conspicuous consumption is reflected in the work of Bourdieu, a French sociologist and philosopher who conceptualised 'distinction' as the combination of different forms of

capital and embodied dispositions that form the basis of taste and consumption (Bourdieu, 1977). The kinds of capital, or resources, that people possess influence their capacity to act with respect to consumption and mobility. Capital can be economic, symbolic (prestige, honour, (mis)-recognition), social (mobilisation of social networks), or cultural, and takes three distinct forms (embodied, objective, institutionalised), with one form of capital translatable into others (Bourdieu, 1986).

While Bourdieu's and Veblen's theories considered consumption on a national scale, the global trickle-down model (Üstüner & Holt, 2009) applies status consumption theory to geographic regions. This model argues that consumers from emerging regions seek to copy middle-class consumers of more developed regions because goods from these regions symbolise powerful global status. However, this model has been criticised as following the myth of Western lifestyle emulation and ignoring glocalization, indigenisation of Western practices, and the political economy of global consumption (Gray & Coates, 2010; Üstüner & Holt, 2009). For example, the consumer revolution in China does not simply follow the Western model but is the result of significant changes in social, economic, and technological structures in the country (Jin, Moscardo, & Murphy, 2019).

Bourdieu's status consumption model is based on Western research and does not adequately explain status consumption in less industrialised countries (Üstüner & Holt, 2009). The pattern of taste has yet to be investigated thoroughly in tourism (Ahmad, 2014), raising the question of how to (re)conceptualise consumption and social distinction in the context of Asian outbound tourism. This study combines the three conceptual bodies of distinction – status theories, (tourist) consumption, and mobility – to develop an analytical framework to examine similarities and differences among Asian tourists in Europe.

### *Tourism consumption*

The consumption of places, commodities, cultures, and identities is essential to international tourism (Meethan, Anderson, & Miles, 2006). Tourism consumption has been approached from psychological and sociological perspectives (Urry, 1990), including push-pull factors (Dann, 1981), economic and sociodemographic characteristics (Bojanic, 2011), and values and lifestyles (Reisinger & Turner, 2002).

Importantly, the rise of mass tourism led to the transformation of 'real' experiences to meaningless 'pseudo events' (Boorstin, 1964) – 'fraudulent substitutes for the absent real thing' (Franklin, 2003, p. 214). Mass tourism

travellers often move in a safe bubble offering 'tightly controlled osmosis' (Bauman, 1996, p. 12), with their performances and consumption patterns controlled by social and spatial regulations (Edensor, 2000).

However, from another perspective, sightseeing can be viewed as a modern ritual with 'a collective sense that certain sights must be seen' (MacCannell, 1999, p. 42) and tourism attractions take on meaning through tourists' consumption. The Foucauldian notion of 'gaze' has been applied to tourism contexts and suggests that tourists, no matter where they travel, have pre-constructed images and expectations that need to be fulfilled or consumed once they reach a destination. The concept of the tourist gaze (Urry, 2002) holds that places are consumed both literally (through consumption of products and services at the destination) and symbolically (through consumption of meanings that are attached to places) (Rakić & Chambers, 2012).

Two forms of tourism consumption hold particular relevance for this paper: cultural consumption by visitation to cultural attractions and material consumption by shopping. This study defines cultural tourism as

all movements of persons to specific cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, arts and drama outside their normal place of residence ... to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs. (Richards, 1996, p. 37)

Cultural attractions such as monuments and museums have become crucial objects of international travel and constitute the largest sector of the European attraction market (Richards, 1996). Closely allied to cultural consumption is a focus on the 'experience economy', which has recently been identified as a major tourism trend in the Asia Pacific region Tolkach, Chon, and Xiao (2016).

Material consumption in the form of shopping has gained increasing interest in recent years (Zaidan, 2016). Tourists who seek novelty, uniqueness, and unusual or exotic goods and experiences often engage in luxury shopping (Park & Reisinger, 2009), which is a major motivation for Chinese outbound travel to satisfy its consumers' focus on materialism (Tsai, Yang, & Liu, 2013). Importantly, luxury shopping generates prestige and value of places (Correia, Kozak, & Kim, 2019).

Both cultural and material tourism consumption are influenced by travellers' sociocultural background, a factor that strongly influences shopping behaviour (Moscardo, 2004). Cultural differences between Asian and other consumer groups have further been identified in regards to product consumption (Rosenbaum & Spears, 2006) and shopping for luxury goods (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). Against this background of consumption in relation to social distinction and the

discussion of material and cultural consumption in tourism presented above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 1:* Tourists' perception of material offers in the destination influences their material consumption.

*Hypothesis 2:* Tourists' perception of cultural offers in the destination influences their cultural consumption.

*Hypothesis 3:* Material consumption significantly contributes to tourists' sense of distinction.

*Hypothesis 4:* Cultural consumption significantly contributes to tourists' sense of distinction.

### **The importance of geographical and tourism mobility**

Bourdieu's (1986) analysis of conditions for bodies to move through social space implies a vertical context of social mobility by accumulation of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. The more the society valorises movement, the greater is the significance of mobility, that can turn into new indexes of prestige, power and symbolic status (Salazar & Jayaram, 2016). Mobility as capital is defined in the term 'motility', that 'encompasses interdependent elements relating to *access* to different forms and degrees of mobility, *competence* to recognize and make use of access, and *appropriation* of particular choice" (Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004, p. 750). As 'mobility is a resource to which not everyone has equal relationship' (Skeggs, 2004, p. 49), mobility capital serves as 'a very crucial force of stratification' (Manderscheid, 2009, p. 18). Social pressure implies a common perception that those who are unable to travel, or whose freedom to travel is curtailed, are somehow inferior to those who travel on a more regular basis (MacCannell, 1999). The implied inferiority and social exclusion are the result of the global hierarchy of mobility, which enforces the freedom to maneuver of the dominant while imposing constraints on the 'decisional freedom of the dominated side' (Bauman, 1998, p. 69). Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed.

*Hypothesis 5:* The mobility capital is unevenly distributed among travelers.

### **Consumption, social distinction, and mobility of Asian tourists**

The socio-cultural background of Asian tourists in this study reflects characteristics of the middle class and the range of factors influencing mobility and consumption. The emergence of a middle class was crucial to fuel Asian outbound travel. Every year over 100 million

people enter the middle class in the Asia Pacific region (PATA, 2015). The middle class in Northeast and South-east Asia has experienced diverse paths of development (Goodman & Robinson, 2013). For example, South Korea has industrialised and grown rapidly over the last four decades and has risen to rank among the world's leading economic powerhouses (Hedrick-Wong, 2007). The middle class in China has taken a different route to affluence, with a new generation of middle class emerging in recent years (Tsang, 2014). Thailand's middle class is the product of a relatively long period of economic development (Sinpeng & Arugay, 2015).

As noted earlier, Asian mobilities depend heavily on socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions. Japan liberalised outbound travel in the 1960s, followed by Korea in the 1980s (Bui & Trupp, 2014). Thailand's outbound travel grew strongly in the 1990s until the Asian economic crisis in 1997 (UNWTO, 2013). China has been regulating outbound group travel through its approved destination status (ADS) policy, which by 2005 included all European Union member states (Arlt, 2006). During this time, visa and immigration regimes resulted in differing levels of travel freedom among Asian citizens (Bui et al., 2018).

As an example of how tourism as a form of consumption is culturally framed, the Chinese middle class prefers components of traditional culture (as reflected in Confucianism) to be part of tourist consumption (Fu, Cai, & Lehto, 2017). Notions of individualism versus collectivism explain tourists' behavioural tendencies of group conformity, emphasis on public possession, & gift giving (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). As another example, Japanese travellers are extremely sensitive concerned about social interaction and relationships as 'the traveler is "sent" as a representative of an enduring group' (Graburn, 1983, p. 46). However, the growth of elite forms of consumption, such as tourism, reflects new patterns of transnational class stratification, as exemplified in the growth of outbound travellers from China, who increasingly seek to consume cultural capital in Western countries (Arlt, 2006; Wong, McKercher, & Li, 2016). For Asian tourists, Europe is well known for its cultural heritage and 'the source of western civilisation' (Arlt, 2006, p. 125; Pendzialek, 2016). With their newly acquired wealth, they have been quick to buy up 'old-world' prestige (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014), and the wave of mass media conveying Western values (Fujita, 2009), especially that of individualism, has given rise to the 'imagined West' among Asian sojourners (Bui, Wilkins, & Lee, 2013).

Research has shown that Asian tourists in Europe are not a homogenous market. Balaz and Mitsutake (1998) discussed early patterns of tourism exchange between

Japan and Europe, and identified young females, business executives / administrative workers, and conference participants as important target groups. Japanese visitors to the European Alps preferred package tours for safety reasons and were attracted by branded hotels (Mueller, Peters, & Weiermair, 2009), whereas the South Korean tourists in Europe favoured more independent and small-group travel (Bui & Trupp, 2014), and the Thai travel experience in Europe includes a fun and entertainment factor (Kanlayanasukho & Pearce, 2016) as well as an interest in classical music, natural attractions and brand-name products (Trupp & Bui, 2015).

Even within national groups differences have emerged. An increasing number of studies analysed Chinese travel to Europe (Fugmann & Aceves, 2013; Lojo, 2016; Pendzialek, 2016; Prayag et al., 2015; Zhu, Xu, & Jiang, 2016). The fast-growing Chinese outbound travel segment can be broadly classified into two categories (Li, 2016). The first generation has been characterised as package tour travellers who hastily tick off one sight after the other, whereas parts of the second generation are more sophisticated and individualised and more interested in experiences than in counting visited attractions or countries. The latter group has shown increasing interest in European second-tier destinations with a preference for deeper experiences and intangible lifestyle-related attractions (Jørgensen et al., 2018). Linking consumption, distinction, and mobility to the diversity of Asian tourism in Europe, this study proposes:

*Hypothesis 6: Asian tourists differ in their patterns of consumption and sense of distinction.*

Acknowledging the diversity of Asian tourism in Europe, this cross-cultural study of Asian tourist consumption focussed on tourists' sense of distinction and mobility using Vienna, the capital city of Austria as the focal point of analysis. A conceptual model grounded in literature integrates the major constructs in this study and links them by a series of hypotheses (Figure 1).

## Methods

Most prior research on Asian outbound tourism is purely quantitative and should be supplemented by qualitative data (Jørgensen, Law, & King, 2017). This study employs pragmatism as an epistemological framework that 'can provide a philosophy that supports paradigm integration and helps mixed research to peacefully coexist' (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 125). As a mixed-methods approach allows greater diversity of views and higher validity and reliability (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), this research triangulates themes emerging from qualitative data with quantitative survey results and

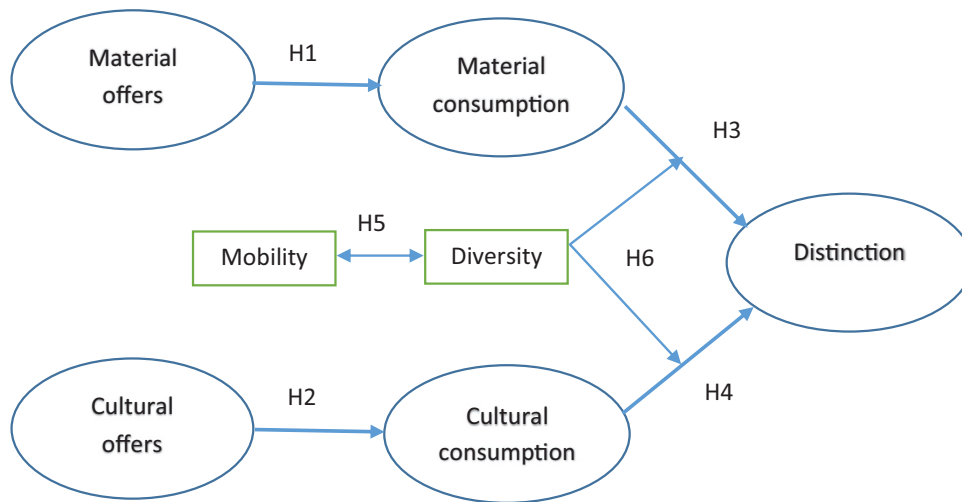


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

compares data sourced from consumers (Asian tourists) and producers (European travel services and destination marketing agencies).

The capital city of Austria, Vienna, was selected as case study and data collection site as Vienna is located in the middle of Europe, belongs to the most visited cities on the continent and has experienced considerable growth of Asian tourism in recent years (see Figure 2).

Moreover, Vienna is well known for its historical and cultural heritage which is popular among Asian visitors (Vienna Tourism, 2019).

Quantitative data were collected in Vienna through a five-part survey consisting of sections assessing trip characteristics and visitors’ awareness of Vienna’s tourist icons, followed by questions exploring how tourists think of Vienna as a destination. The items for this

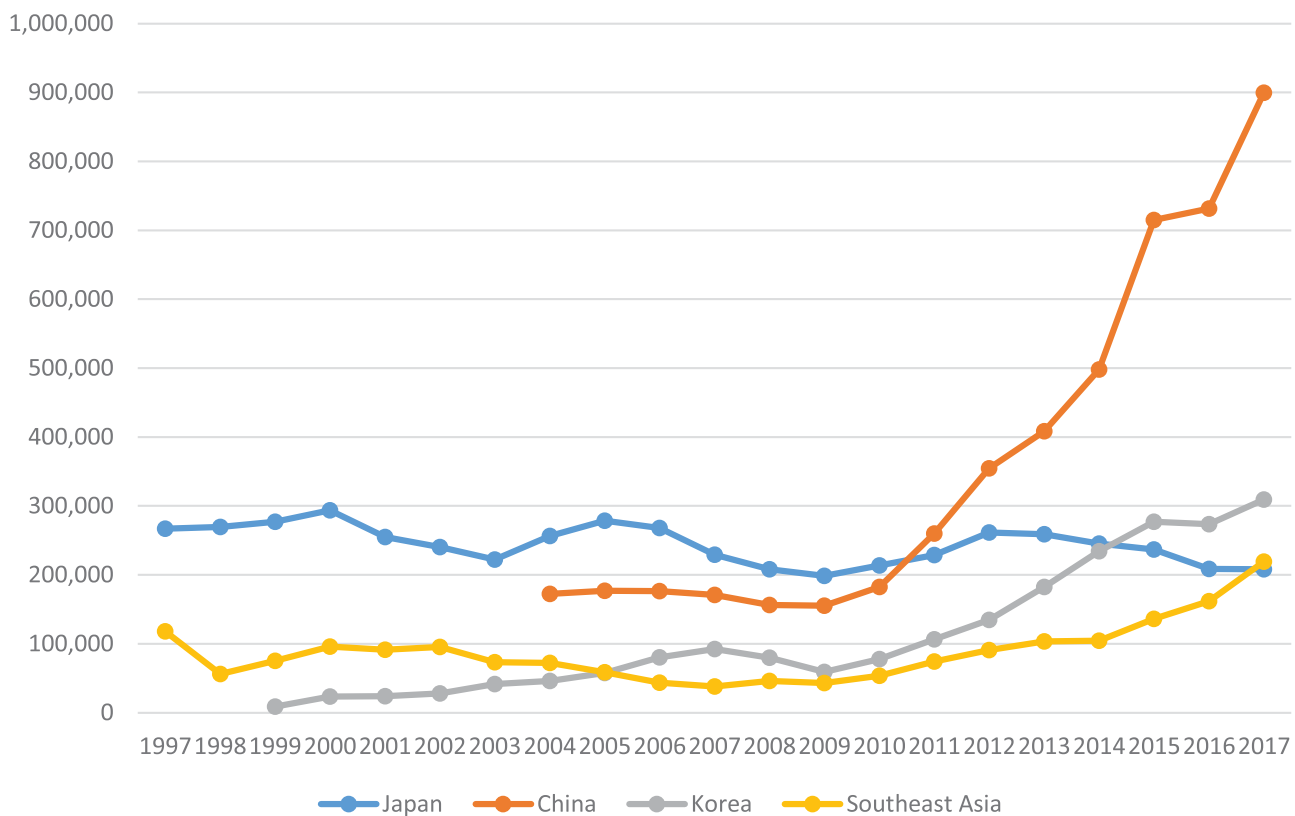


Figure 2. Selected Asian tourist arrivals in Austria (1997–2017). Source: Meldestatistik der Statistik Österreich 2018, (via [www.tourmis.info](http://www.tourmis.info)).



section derived from previous research on Austrian tourism (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2003; Pikkemaat, 2004). The survey also focussed on perception of distinction and consumption of tourism services and commodities, containing items derived from the social distinction scale and items on shopping (Sparks & Pan, 2009). The final section collected respondents' socio-demographic information. Prior to administration of the survey, a professional panel comprised of four university professors and research students reviewed the measurement items. Finalized items were written as statements where respondents indicated their agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Questionnaires were developed in English and translated into Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Thai by bilingual translators, with translation equivalence ensured through a third party who was fluent in both languages.

Questionnaires were pretested, revised, and subsequently distributed to Asian tourists in major attractions in Vienna over two years. While data collection was spread across different locations in the city, convenience sampling was applied in the sense that respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate (also see Tables 1 and 2 on respondents sociodemographic and travel characteristics). In total, 560 questionnaires were collected. To ensure that respondents met the definition of tourists, data exploration eliminated respondents who stayed more than 365 days in Europe or more than 3 months in Austria. As a result, a sample of 546 responses remained for analysis. Description data analysis techniques were used to identify demographic characteristics of the respondents and inferential statistics using chi-square and ANOVA were employed to compare means between different groups. In addition, structural equation modelling (SEM) and multiple-group analysis were used. Visual display with charts and graphs were employed where relevant.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of respondents ( $N = 546$ ).

Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	216	40.1		
Female	322	59.9		
Average age			35.9	13.4
<i>Nationality</i>				
Chinese	180	33.6		
Japanese	124	23.1		
Korean	141	26.3		
Thai	91	17.0		
<i>Highest level of education</i>				
University/College	455	85.0		
High school	61	11.4		
Basic education	19	3.6		
<i>Financial level</i>				
High income	102	19.2		
Middle income	404	76.1		
Lower income	25	4.7		

**Table 2.** General characteristics.

Items	Chinese ( $N = 190$ )	Japanese ( $N = 124$ )	South Korean ( $N = 141$ )	Thai ( $N = 91$ )
Self-arranged (%)	71.1	60.2	92.8	57.8
Group tour (%)	28.9	39.8	7.2	42.2
Previous visit to Austria (%)	20	27.4	40.7	31.9
Previous visit to Europe (%)	63.9	65.3	76.4	67.8
Length of stay in Vienna (days)	3.5	4.2	3.9	4.1
Length of stay in other parts of Austria (days)	3.2	1.9	3.1	1.2
Length of stay in Europe (day)	33.2	10.6	19.3	6.6
Average spending (Euro)	976	333	298	1993
Average age	36.2	37	33	37.6

Complementing the quantitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five official Vienna-based tour guides who work with tourist groups from Asia, particularly China, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand. Also interviewed was the representative of Austria's National Tourism Office (ANTO) in Tokyo, whose office is responsible for marketing Austria as a destination to travellers from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. The selection of interview partners followed a purposeful sampling strategy where respondents can be described as 'information rich' (Patton, 2002). These interviewees are regarded as experts in the field of Asian tourism in Vienna since they have years of experience in guiding and observing tourists from Asia and can thus provide further information on spending patterns, travel, and consumption preferences as well as on differences within Asian groups and possible changes over time. All semi-structured interviews were coded using NVivo software. Codes were further classified into categories (themes) and relationships representing various dimensions of Asian tourism consumption in Austria.

## Findings

### *Asian tourism in Austria*

While international tourism in Austria is dominated by tourist arrivals from other European countries (especially Germany), tourism markets from emerging world regions, especially from Asia, have gained importance (Bernal-Barella & Scharfenort, 2015). Austria has been described as the land of classical music, culture, historical buildings, and age-old customs and traditions (Schweiger, 1992). Culture in this sense and as outlined below follows a rather narrow interpretation of fine arts 'encapsulated in images of historical buildings and an arts culture based around opera and classical music performances' (Luger, 2006; Wenger, 2008, p. 170). This image is re-enforced by The Austrian National Tourism Office, which promotes the country as a destination for

culture- and nature-based activities in both winter and summer seasons, with the major cities additionally highlighting shopping opportunities (Vienna Tourism, 2019).

Until the 2000s, Asian tourism in Austria mainly comprised Japanese visitors, who provided a rather loyal and stable market from the 1970s. However, in 2011, Japanese tourists in Austria were outnumbered by Chinese visitors (including Hong Kong, but excludes Taiwanese), in 2015 by Korean visitors, and in 2017 by Southeast Asian visitors (Figure 2). However, while Asian tourist arrivals have grown significantly in recent years, the average duration of stay in Austria is low; for Japan, an average of 2.1 nights per stay, followed by Southeast Asia (1.7), South Korea (1.5), and China (1.4) (Austrian National Tourist Office, 2019).

### **Socio-demographics and travel characteristics of Asian tourists**

Descriptive analysis provided a demographic profile of Chinese (190), Japanese (124), South Korea (141), and Thai (91) survey respondents. The respondents are stratified into middle- (76.1%) and high-income (19.3%) groups, who are relatively young (average age of 35.9) and have high education (85% having university/college degree). Participants were predominantly female (59.9%), as shown in Table 1.

Analysis revealed no difference among the four groups in regard to their highest level of education. Further, the Japanese group had the highest proportion of respondents who self-classified into a high-income group (23%), followed by 20% of Chinese, 18% of Thai, and 15% of South Koreans, who also tended to be younger than the other groups (average age of 33) and more independent (92.8% arranged the trip by themselves). This profile is consistent with travel trends stated by Vienna Tourism Board (2019) and the qualitative interview data.

There are also many younger tourists who come as backpackers and spend considerably more time ... These young people are usually well educated and speak foreign languages. They do not rely on Korean-speaking tour guides and are more adventurous in planning their vacation (Korean tour guide).

In contrast, about 40% of the Thai and Japanese tourists were group travellers, having a longer stay in Vienna but a shorter stay in other cities of Austria. This difference might reflect that the Chinese sample in this study might have been in Europe for purposes other than tourism, and were perhaps students, workers, or migrants. In terms of expenditure, Chinese tourists are the big spenders, while average expenditure of Japanese and Korean are relatively low (Table 2).

### **Tourism consumption and social distinction**

Interviews with Vienna-based tour guides and the ANTO tourist officer showed that Asian tourism consumption broadly falls into the two categories of cultural and material consumption. Cultural consumption comprises rather rushed consumption of mainly tangible and classical cultural attractions as well as the experience of lifestyles or practices that seem exotic. Material consumption, on the other hand, relates to different forms of shopping tourism.

#### **Cultural consumption**

Classical culture and heritage refers to historical buildings, museums, classical music, and fine arts and is popular among all Asian groups. A typical tour of Vienna would entail a bus ride along Vienna's historical ring road, a visit to St. Stephan's Cathedral and Schönbrunn Palace, a classical museum visit, a stop in the souvenir shops along the major shopping street, and lunch or dinner in an Austrian restaurant.

Vienna is perceived by the Korean visitors as an interesting cultural place in Europe ... (Korean tour guide).

Most of them have a high interest in culture. They come for the classical music, for the imperial heritage (Japanese tour guide).

The organisation and structure of a visit to Vienna result in tourists being rushed into seeing as much as possible. An interview partner referred to the 'running tour':

I call it the 'running tour' because they have to visit five countries within eight days: Germany, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary and Austria. So the tourists will see many places but just only the highlights (Thai tour guide).

Similarly, a running tour is typically designed for Chinese tourists rushing through Europe on a 14-day, 12-country, 10-city excursion led by a tour guide:

The typical [Chinese] tourist is a ten days traveler through Europe who visits five to six countries but has not much knowledge about Europe (Chinese tour guide).

Having visited a lot of international countries is related to prestige and symbolic capital, and is particularly ascribed to package tourists:

They can now return home and tell their friends and families that they have been 'everywhere' in Europe. Package tourists often have a 'show-off' mentality; they travel to be admired by their friends (Korean tour guide).

#### **Material consumption**

Vienna-based tour guides associate Asian tourism largely with shopping and luxury consumption. Luxury hotels



are most important for Japanese visitors and least important for Korean visitors.

They [Japanese tourists] stay in luxury hotels. That's what the Japanese tourists do. They stay mostly in 4–5 star hotels when they come to Austria. This is the highest percentage when we compare with other nationalities coming to Austria. Koreans ... tend to be a little bit younger, and not stay frequently in 5-star hotels so much (ANTO officer in Tokyo)

In addition to brand-name purchases, souvenir items play an important role. Tourist groups are regularly taken to souvenir shops where they usually have 30 min for buying gifts for family or friends and mementos. Brand-name shopping has generally been associated with Asian tourism, and interviews indicate that luxury consumption of branded items is particularly important for Chinese.

Shopping is very important for Asians, you see them on the Kaerntner Strasse [Vienna's main shopping street for luxury brand names], you see them everywhere. This is now not a new phenomenon. Each Chinese they say consumes 590 Euro a day, for luxury products such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton and so on (Chinese tour guide).

And with respect to Thai tourists:

Generally, 30% [of Thai tourists] are shopping tourists only ... and for this group, most of them are interested in shopping in Kaerntner Strasse instead of visiting the historical part of the city (multiple groups tour guide).

Insights from interviews with tour guides and ANTO officers also show the importance of cultural and material consumption. For instance, marketing campaigns for the Japanese market have started to focus on 'office ladies', women between 20 and 35 who work but mostly live at their parents' home and thus have a relatively high disposable income, which they use for travelling in small, mainly female groups. While their main interest is in shopping, they are also keen to 'experience the city [Vienna] through the eyes of the local people' and are looking for insider tips and unique experiences.

For Chinese and Japanese travellers in particular, Austria and Vienna have an image of a relaxed destination. The proclaimed Viennese charm and sociability is also marketed to and appreciated by Japanese visitors. Marketing of lifestyles (rather than tangible products) has become more important and the Viennese coziness has been translated as *kokochi yosa* to the Japanese travellers and is reflected in the coffee house culture.

There is a lot about the coffee house culture ... and Austrian mentality. It is very hard for Japanese to understand we spend the whole afternoon in a coffee place just reading a newspaper (ANTO officer in Tokyo).

**Table 3.** Measurement model.

Items/Scales	Factor loading	t-value	AVE	Composite reliability
Perceived cultural offers			0.47	0.82
Historical monuments	0.58	N/A		
Music and performing art	0.71	10.85		
Museums	0.76	10.87		
Perceived material offers			0.49	0.83
Local markets	0.62			
Food and drinks	0.71	11.59		
Brand name goods / souvenirs/gifts	0.76	11.72		
Cultural consumption			0.46	0.74
To attend concerts and performance	0.72	N/A		
To visit museums	0.64	7.10		
Material consumption			0.63	0.90
To do shopping	0.86	N/A		
To purchase gifts and souvenirs	0.86	21.49		
To shop unavailable things	0.63	15.51		
Distinction			0.53	0.85
The trip is considered fashionable	0.82	12.78		
The trip is considered luxury	0.77	12.63		
The trip is considered prestigious	0.59	N/A		

Note: ( $N = 560$ )  $\chi^2 = 181.65$  ( $df = 67, p < .05$ ),  $\chi^2/df = 2.71$ ; GFI = .96; CFI = .94; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .055; SRMR = .041.

### Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis testing starts with the assessment of reliability and validity of the measurement scale. The results of the CFA (Table 3) indicate a good fit of the measurement model to the data set, where the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and comparative fit index (CFI) are greater than 0.95, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) are less than 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1998). The construct reliability for scale development (CR) is greater than 0.70, surpassing the critical value of 0.60 (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991). Evidence of convergent validity exists if the factor loadings of the measurement items of a latent construct are statistically significant (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In line with the guidelines, all confirmatory factor loadings are significant (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003), standardised factor loadings are greater than the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2005), and all constructs have AVEs that exceed the cut-off value of 0.45 (Netemeyer et al., 2003).

Drawing on the hypothetical model established to describe the interrelationship between the constructs (Figure 1), a structural model presenting paths of four hypotheses (H1–H4) was tested against the data set. Results show significant paths, thus supporting all four hypotheses (Table 4). In other words, destination cultural and material offers significantly influence tourist cultural and material consumption (H1 and H2). Both cultural

consumption and material consumption positively correlated to tourist perception of distinction, thus supporting H3 and H4 (Table 4). Visual display of the path analysis is presented in Figure 3.

### Mobility

A test of H5 compared mobility capital using the index of travel restrictions and the socio-economic indexes of the four countries of the study (Table 5). The Henley Passport Index (HPI) (2019) ranks all countries' passports according to the number of nations and territories their holders can visit without a prior visa. This index relates to access to different from of mobility (Kaufmann et al., 2004). Table 5 shows that Japan and South Korea lead in the ranking of travel freedom. Thailand and China fall into the lower half of the ranking and thus face more barriers to international travel. Similarly, socio-economic indicators presenting competence and appropriation dimension of mobility capital (Kaufmann et al., 2004), such as the Human Development Index (HDI)

(UNDP, 2019) and World Bank (2019) income classification indicators (WBI) between the countries differ (Table 5). Japanese and Korean citizens possess higher cultural and economic capital than Chinese and Thai citizens. Although the national-level indicators ignore socio-economic variations within different social classes in one nation, freedom of travel between nations differs significantly. Higher and lower mobility is also reflected in the uneven distribution of economic and cultural capital.

In terms of accessibility, Japanese and South Korean passport holders can enter Austria (and most other European countries) as tourists without obtaining a Schengen visa. The process of applying for a Schengen visa from China or Thailand is costly and can be time-consuming. Applicants must present a roundtrip reservation and travel itinerary, travel health insurance, proof of accommodation, evidence of employment status, and proof of financial means such as bank account statements or a sponsor letter. Applicants often need to travel to respective consulates or hire visa agencies who deal with the procedures. The processing time of visa

Table 4. Structural model (N = 560).

Fit indices	Path	Estimate	t-value	p	Note
$\chi^2/df$					
$p$					
GFI					
CFI					
TLI					
RMSEA					
SRMR					
	$R^2$ Material consumption = .22; Cultural consumption = .19; Distinction = .45				

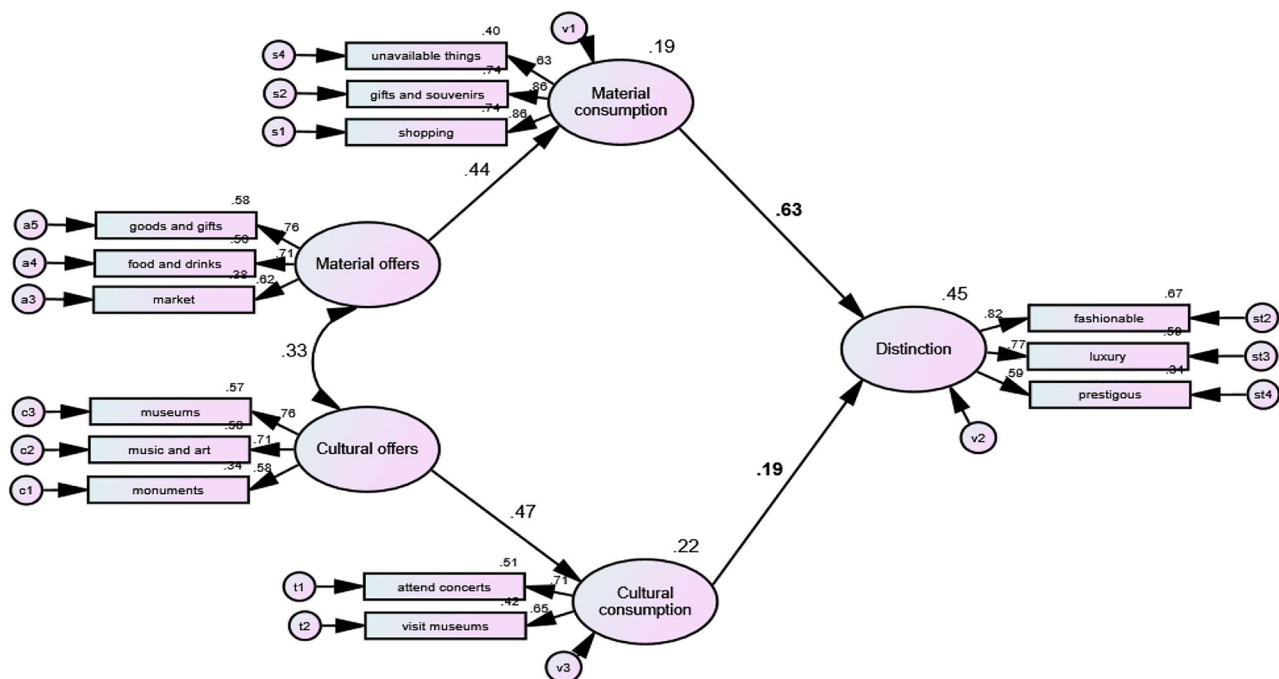


Figure 3. Structural model.

**Table 5.** Travel freedom (HPI), income and human development indices.

	HPI		WBI	HDI	
	Rank	Score		Rank	Index
Japan	1	190	High income	19	0.909
South Korea	2	189	High income	22	0.903
Thailand	68	75	Upper middle income	83	0.755
China	69	74	Upper middle income	86	0.752

applications may be several days to several months. Visa issues for Chinese and Thai tourists were also highlighted by Vienna-based tour guides:

It is now very difficult to obtain a [tourist] visa. Many of our customers just received their visa on the day before departure (multiple group tour guide).

Comparison of travel characteristics, travel patterns, destination perception, and tourist consumption preferences of the four Asian markets shows links between consumption and mobility. Not surprisingly, more independent tourists from South Korea are travelling and staying longer in Europe (Table 2). In addition to socio-economic measures, mobility capital becomes a new indicator to measure social status and the likelihood of consumption among those who can afford to be temporarily mobile. Further, diversity in mobility serves as a prior condition to assess differences between the four groups.

### Cross-cultural analysis

H6 aims to assess the relationships among constructs across the four groups. First, measurement invariance was tested between the unconstrained model and a model where certain parameters were constrained to be equal between the respective groups. Multiple group analysis in AMOS 25 resulted in four subgroups by nationality. Comparison of models with the factor loadings constrained to be equal across relevant groups revealed no significant differences between these models, with  $p = 0.061$  ( $>0.05$ ). Once the factor structure was invariant across groups, the hypothetical paths H1–H2 and H3–H4 were assessed across groups using a multiple-group analysis function.

The Japanese group differed significantly from other groups in the relationship between cultural consumption and distinction ( $\beta_2 = 0.24$ ,  $t = 2.24$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). For the South Korean, Thai, and Chinese groups, the dependent paths between cultural consumption and distinction are insignificant. The strongest link between material consumption and distinction was found among the Thai travellers ( $\beta_1 = 0.77$ ,  $t = 6.62$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), followed by Chinese ( $\beta_1 = 0.66$ ,  $t = 7.42$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and South Korean ( $\beta_1 = 0.60$ ,  $t = 6.54$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and was weakest among the Japanese ( $\beta_1 = 0.54$ ,  $t = 5.24$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 6).

In addition, an ANOVA test was conducted on five constructs of tourists' perception of cultural and material offers in the destination, cultural and material consumption, and distinction. While tourist perceptions of cultural and material offers in the destination are similar, tourists' evaluations of the importance of cultural and material consumption as well as perceptions of distinction vary (Table 7). In particular, the Chinese group had a high degree of positive answers to destination offers and likelihood of consumption, while South Koreans were less enthusiastic about consumption and did not perceive travel experience as a distinction. Similarities between the Chinese and Thai groups occurred with respect to material consumption.

Further analysis revealed the shopping preferences of the four groups. Big shopping items such as brand-name fashion, jewellery, and watches are on the top of the shopping list for Thai and Chinese tourists. Japanese and Korean visitors prefer small shopping items such as confectionaries and sweets (Table 8).

**Table 6.** Comparison of structural model across groups.

	Path	Estimate	t-value	p
Chinese	Material offers → Material consumption (a1)	0.58	3.76	***
	Cultural offer → Cultural consumption (a2)	0.44	6.69	***
	Material consumption → Distinction (β1)	0.66	7.42	***
	Cultural consumption → Distinction (β2)	0.13	1.18	0.15
	$R^2$ Material consumption = .34 Cultural consumption = .19 Distinction = .47			
Japanese	Material offers → Material consumption (a1)	0.64	5.87	***
	Cultural offers → Cultural consumption (a2)	0.49	3.68	***
	Material consumption → Distinction (β1)	0.54	5.24	***
	Cultural consumption → Distinction (β2)	0.24	2.24	***
	$R^2$ Material consumption = .414 Cultural consumption = .24 Distinction = .35			
South Korean	Material offers → Material consumption (a1)	0.27	2.34	***
	Cultural offers → Cultural consumption (a2)	0.41	3.27	***
	Material consumption → Distinction (β1)	0.60	6.54	***
	Cultural consumption → Distinction (β2)	0.05	0.51	0.61
	$R^2$ Material consumption = .07 Cultural consumption = .16 Distinction = .35			
Thai	Material offers → Material consumption (a1)	0.19	1.50	0.13
	Cultural offers → Cultural consumption (a2)	0.54	3.69	***
	Material consumption → Distinction (β1)	0.77	6.52	***
	Cultural consumption → Distinction (β2)	0.21	1.78	0.08
	$R^2$ Material consumption = .04 Cultural consumption = .29 Distinction = .46			

**Table 7.** Tourist consumption.

Items	Chinese (N = 190)	Japanese (N = 124)	South Korean (N = 141)	Thai (N = 91)	F	Sig.
<i>Cultural offers</i>						
Museums	4.22	4.09	3.39	4.05	2.97	0.19
Music and art	4.56	4.57	4.41	4.09	7.56	0.00
Monument	4.43	4.46	4.20	4.34	3.29	0.11
<i>Material offers</i>						
Goods and gifts	3.66	3.33	3.40	3.49	3.02	0.18
Foods and drinks	3.55	3.53	3.35	3.36	1.16	0.10
Markets	3.42	3.57	3.24	3.15	4.14	0.00
<i>Cultural consumption</i>						
Attends concerts	3.59	3.52	3.30	2.90	8.09	0.00
Visit museums	3.89	3.63	3.70	3.80	1.95	0.12
<i>Material consumption</i>						
To do shopping	3.11	3.13	2.7	3.07	4.29	0.01
To purchase gifts and souvenirs	3.15	3.31	2.7	3.19	7.38	0.00
To shop for unavailable items	3.28	2.75	2.5	3.04	12.54	0.00
<i>Distinction</i>						
Fashionable	3.09	2.65	2.19	2.87	20.07	0.00
Luxury	2.29	2.38	2.04	2.29	2.53	0.06
Prestigious	2.99	3.17	2.42	3.88	28.52	0.00

The results of analysis of perception of destination offers, consumption, and distinction show that four groups of travellers from East and Southeast Asia differ significantly from each other. Therefore, H6 is supported empirically.

## Discussion

Approaching Asian tourism as a social phenomenon, this study draws on the theory of status consumption and mobility and employs a mixed-method research design to examine the relationships between tourists' consumption and their sense of distinction. Comparison of four Asian nationalities highlights diverse patterns and mechanisms of consumption and counters homogenous representations of Asia. Placing hypothesis-testing results against the backdrop of the Asian middle class allows insights into the sociology of tourism in the Asian context to emerge.

The primary contribution of the paper is its approach to Asian tourism consumption from a sociological perspective, linking consumption to social distinction and mobility in the context of transcontinental travel

between Asia and Europe. The sociological stance of the study allows researchers to explore and explain Asian tourist consumption in relation to the tourists' micro socio-cultural background as well as the macro cultural economic context of the region.

Generally, Asian tourists strongly associate cultural and material offers and consumption with the Austrian destination. They show a particularly high level of consumption of cultural attractions such as historical monuments, music, and museums. Elements of Austria's 'high-brow' culture are also reflected in the campaigns of Vienna Tourism and its marketing sheets for China, Japan, and South Korea (Vienna Tourism, 2019). This finding confirms previous research that identified Europe's cultural heritage as an important pull factor in attracting Asian visitors (Arlt, 2006). However, cultural consumption by Asian tourists displays characteristics of the tourist syndrome (Bauman, 1996), given the short time group tourists have available at each of these attractions.

Consumption of material offers found in tourist shopping behaviour in this study reflects existing market analysis indicating that Thai and Chinese tourists have higher shopping expenses than Japanese and Korean tourists (Tourismuspresse, 2018). The positive relationship between material consumption and sense of distinction across all four segments of Asian tourism in Vienna exemplifies Bocock's (1993) contention that meaning is found in buying things. The relationship between material consumption and sense of distinction is particularly strong among tourists from emerging economies such as China and Thailand, and to some extent among visitors from South Korea. The importance of material consumption can also be explained through the importance of gift-giving in Asian societies. Consumption to maintain 'face' might be evidenced in this study, supporting Wong and Ahuvia's (1998) contention of personal taste and family face in Asian consumption.

The Japanese attribute cultural consumption to their sense of distinction, indicating that they pursue deeper engagement with cultural offers in Austria, reflecting MacCannell's contention that tourists seek meaning through tourism. Perhaps different paths of middle-class development and earlier removal of travel restrictions resulting in

**Table 8.** Shopping preference.

Items	Chinese (N = 190)	Japanese (N = 124)	South Korean (N = 141)	Thai (N = 91)	$\chi^2$	Sig.
Brand name fashion and accessories	26.6%	20.2%	17.0%	32.6%	8.87	0.03
Jewelry and watches	24.0%	16.0%	17.0%	37.9%	17.29	0.00
Confectionary and sweets	44.8%	53.4%	41.8%	36.7%	6.41	0.09
CD/DVD/Books	15.0%	12.8%	8.6%	11.5%	3.01	0.39
Drinks and liquor	20.5%	29.3%	12.9%	14.0%	12.92	0.00
Souvenirs and gifts	71.7%	58.7%	71.4%	70.8%	7.08	0.07
Other	6.7%	6.1%	1.5%	6.9%	5.34	0.15

greater travel experience, coupled with a high level of economic development and personal income, might provide an explanation for the sense of distinction linked to cultural consumption. The Japanese are also less likely to display wealth through luxury possessions, show more interest in regional lifestyles such as the Viennese coffee house culture, and want to experience the city through local eyes.

The status consumption examined in this study partly reflects the traits of the conspicuous consumption trickle down model (Üstüner & Holt, 2009). While the survey data only show a linkage between material consumption (shopping) with a sense of distinction among Chinese tourists, interview data indicate that Chinese travellers are increasingly interested in local and regional lifestyle products. Conceivably, Chinese trends of cultural consumption might follow the path of the first mover, Japanese tourists. Such interests and consumption patterns not only point to the rise of the experience economy and activity (Tolkach et al., 2016) but also demonstrate that tourists want to feel trendy and unique. Thus, the linkage of cultural consumption to status consumption might become more significant among markets other than Japanese tourists if the study is replicated in the future.

Consumers are endowed with different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that influence their mobility. The more the society valorises movement, the greater the significance of mobility as a form of capital that can turn into new indexes of prestige, power, and symbolic status (Salazar & Jayaram, 2016). Chinese and Thai tourists travelling to Europe already distinguish themselves from other domestic or regional travellers by surmounting numerous visa barriers. Within the destination, they display high levels of conspicuous consumption, an activity that indicates that they are elite and rich. As economic development and travel liberation in China and Thailand occurred later than in Japan and South Korea, in those countries long-haul travel to Europe remains a luxury exclusively accessible to the upper class. In contrast, Japanese and Korean tourists classify themselves through their lifestyle and freedom to travel rather than through material possessions.

The diversity of Asian tourist consumption patterns might be related to their level of mobility. Japanese and South Korean tourists enjoy the privilege of freedom to travel, whereas the Chinese and Thai are among the restricted groups of travellers. In other words, Japanese and South Korean possess higher mobility capital in comparison to Chinese and Thai counterparts. Citizens from countries with higher travel constraints, or lower mobility capital such as China and Thailand, however, display higher levels of material

consumption. Chinese and Thai holders of Schengen visas have additional costs for visa applications or must draw on personal networks to receive sponsor letters in order to travel to the destination. Once at the destination, they have higher expenses than the Asian groups with greater freedom to travel, which according to this study's model also leads to the generation of symbolic capital or social distinction. In the Thai context, leisure travel among rural residents is a mark of distinction, enabling workers to claim 'recognition as equal and modern citizens' (Mills, 2012, p. 102). The dimension along which those 'high up' and 'low down' are plotted in a society of consumers is their degree of mobility – their freedom to choose where to be (Bauman, 1998). Linking spatial mobility and social mobility evident in our research reiterates Kaufmann et al. (2004) contention of mobility as capital. The distribution of mobility capital is unequally distributed among the four studies groups. Residents from areas rich in economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital are also rich of mobility capital. The findings, therefore reinforce Skeggs's (2004) argument of unequal mobility resource endowment. This study explores the dual meaning of travel mobility: inter-continental geographic mobility and social mobility, where travel is a tool for social distinction. Evidence from the study reinforces Bourdieu's (1986) metaphor of capitals that move people vertically through social space, which encompass not only economic, social and symbolic capital, but also mobility capital.

In terms of practical contribution, this study bridges a perception gap between tourism production and consumption with respect to marketing and product design for traditional (Japanese) and non-traditional (China, South Korea, Thailand) markets for European destinations. Results highlight the gaps between the pre-packaged experience prepared by destination marketing agencies and tour companies and actual tourist consumption. Tourists might superficially express interest in cultural attractions, but their actual consumption and sense of achievement from the travel experience lie in their material consumption. Additional data on tourist shopping expenses also demonstrate that Chinese travellers have become the biggest spenders, using half of their travel budget for shopping, particularly for watches, jewellery, clothing, shoes, and cosmetics (Tourismuspresse, 2018). In other words, cultural distinction and material distinction are two outcomes of the travel experience. Destination marketing focuses on the former, whereas tourists are actively looking for the latter – indicating that marketing campaigns and messages to Asian markets might have to be revised. Moreover, qualitative interviews suggest that the 'second generation' of Chinese tourists seek more authentic



experiences in Europe. This finding demonstrates the dynamics and quick transformation of Asian outbound tourism to Europe and suggests destination marketing organisations and destinations must be pro-active toward such emerging trends.

## Conclusion

While recent years have seen a surge of studies investigating the rise of Asian outbound tourism, relatively little research addresses the diversity of Asian tourism consumption. In contrast to studies that cluster different Asian nationalities into one analytical category (Reisinger et al., 2009), this research examines diversity within the consumption patterns of Asian tourists. This study demonstrates that consumption practices influence tourists' sense of distinction and mobility, and that tourists are endowed with different forms of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) which they need to realise their trip. However, they also aim to accumulate additional forms of capital during their trip, which can lead to a higher form of social distinction (or symbolic capital).

The study's findings on diversity of Asian tourists advance the understanding of this emerging market and de-centralize the current focus on Chinese tourists, and also suggest the importance of embracing a sense of diversity across Asian countries. Combining concepts of mobility, consumption, and distinction, the study contributes a novel perspective to the scholarship of Asian outbound tourism consumption in non-Asian travel destinations.

The study has a number of limitations. First, the study covers only four countries from Asia and did not include the Indian and Arabian markets, which are geographically and historically closer to Europe. A comparison of East Asia to South Asia and the Middle East could further broaden knowledge of differing Asian consumption patterns. Second, in-depth study of Asian tourist consumption through interviews with Asian tourists and participant observation at the sites of consumption could provide additional understanding of motivation and practices of consumption and related processes of distinction. Third, the study design, which examines similarities and differences between different Asian tourists on the basis of nationalities, misses details on subnational levels. These limitations, however, open opportunities for further research to validate this study's findings and propositions.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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