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## Travel experiences and aspirations: a case study from Chinese youth

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**Key words:** Chinese students, previous travel experience, holiday aspirations, cultural values

**Abstract:** Understanding cultural values is vital in tourism as these influence an individual's travel experiences and expectations. Students represent an important segment of the international tourist population, and Chinese student tourists are an increasingly significant part of that segment. It is therefore important to understand how cultural values influence Chinese students' experiences and aspirations. Will their past travel experiences influence future aspirations? Using data collected from a free-elicitation method, this paper reports on the travel experiences and aspirations of 284 Chinese students. It explores the notional link between past experiences and future aspirations and discusses the impact of Chinese political history and cultural values on tourist experiences and motivations. Implications for marketing are drawn out.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Student tourists**

Youth travel accounts for over 20% of international arrivals (UNWTO, 2008). Among them, university students play an important role; 'students are experience-seekers who travel in search of culture, adventure and relaxation' (Richards & Wilson, 2003, p.5), as well as presumably for (higher) education. These experiences serve to give youth tourists 'a thirst for more travel' as they build a 'travel career' (Pearce & Lee, 2005), possibly choosing increasingly novel destinations as they more experienced. Furthermore, a link can be made between past experiences and future travelling behavior (Jang & Feng, 2007). Therefore, understanding the values and meanings students place on their experiences and aspirations is important in predicting future trends in tourism. It is particularly useful when trying to predict Chinese tourist behavior where there is little past data on which to base predictions. International outbound tourism is relatively new in China (Wolfgang, 2006), indeed, travelling overseas has only become authorized within the last twenty years (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kling & Wang, 2011).

## **1.2 Chinese student tourists**

China has become an important source market in the world due to its rapid growth in outbound tourism (UNWTO, 2010). China has become the largest tourist-generating country in the world (UNWTO, 2015). Globally Young tourists aged 16-25 account for 21% of overseas travellers (UNWTO 2013). This suggests that Chinese students represent a source of both present and future income for the tourism industry both within China and abroad.

As well as representing a market for tourism, increasing numbers of young Chinese are choosing to study abroad. Currently there are 440,000 Chinese students studying abroad (BBC, 2011). By 2014, the number is expected to reach 600,000 (China Daily, 2011). And competition between nations as far afield as Europe, North America and Australasia to attract these students is intense (Brown & Atkas, 2012). The image and attractiveness of potential study destination countries will have a major influence on their choice of where to attend university (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). In addition, students may be expected to take the opportunity to travel during their time at the host university (Wang & Davidson, 2008). As Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe (2008) observe, international students travel widely whilst studying abroad, yet their impact on the receiving destination has been under-researched.

## **1.3 Cultural influences on travel experiences and holiday aspirations**

The influences of cultural values on an individual's consumption behavior have been researched widely (Soares et al, 2007; Woodside, Hsu, & Marshall, 2011). Likewise, travel motivation and behavior are influenced

by cultural elements (Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Reisinger, 2009; Reisinger & Turner, 2003). The experiences of individual tourists are also derived from the values of their culture (Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Of interest to the current study is that much of the existing research has been conducted in Australia, Europe or USA. There is therefore both a lack of empirical findings relating to the Asian region and a dearth of studies on Asian tourists' (Kim & Prideaux, 2005). Li et al. (2011) state that due to cultural and social-economic differences, Chinese travelers may have particular expectations that are not well understood by western destination marketers. It is therefore of great importance to understand the ways the Chinese student search for holiday experiences and aspirations. The aim of the study is to identify the holiday experiences and aspirations of Chinese students; will past experience inform long term aspirations, and how does culture influence travel experiences and aspiration among this particular group? Given the magnitude of the Chinese tourist market, it is of great importance to understand the travel aspirations of future Chinese tourists.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Tourist motivation and holiday aspiration**

Motivation is regarded as one of the most important variables that explain tourist choice and behavior (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996). A lot of research attention has been devoted to the subject (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010), including: Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs; Dann's (1977) and Crompton's (1979) push and pull factors; Beard & Ragheb's (1983) leisure motivation scale; Iso-Ahola's (1982) escaping and seeking dimension; Pearce & Caltabiano's (1983) travel career ladder or travel career pattern (Pearce & Lee, 2005). Researchers tend to agree that motivation is multi-dimensional, and could be influenced by many factors, such as gender, age life stage, previous travel experiences, an individual's cultural background, social roles and social pressure (Jonsson & Devonish, 2008; Lee & Sparks, 2007).

Pearce & Caltabiano (1983) propose a travel 'career ladder', suggesting travel motivation changes as a person acquires more experiences; starting from low level basic physiological needs to relationships and eventually self-fulfillment. Later, a travel career pattern (Pearce & Lee, 2005) was modified to recognize that 'dominant' needs may change in either direction. However, this model did not mention the influence of a memorable experience, whether this might remain or change peoples' motivation is unclear. Jang & Feng (2007) believe that satisfied experiences will lead to repeat visits in the short term, but argue that people are looking for novelty in the longer term, suggesting that people are looking for something new in their travel aspirations. Whether and how a tourist's previous experiences influence their future aspiration is unclear.

Aspiration is defined as strong desire, longing, or aim (Collins Dictionary 2013). This may be related to long term motivation. The power of aspiration in influencing consumer behaviour cannot be ignored as Cocanougher &

Bruce (1971) recognize that there is a strong relationship between the development of an individual's consumption aspirations and his or her perceived behaviour in the context of referencing social groups, or in marketing terms an 'aspirational reference group' (Hoyer & Macinnis, 2010, P393). Aspiration might drive to future consumption, resources and life-circumstances permitting. However, there is very limited research in the tourism literature concerning aspirational travel. Blichfeldt (2007) suggests that a holiday may fulfill a gap between a person's aspirations and actual lived experience, suggesting the influence of aspiration on holiday choice.

## **2.2 The meaning of memorable experiences**

Like all tourists, students seek experiences (Richards & Wilson, 2003). These are subjective, emotional states full of symbolic significance for the individual (Uriely, 2005). Researchers suggest that leisure experiences are about feeling, fantasy and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), escape and relaxation (Beard & Ragheb, 1983), entertainment (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Farber & Hall 2007), novelty and surprise (Dunman & Mattila 2005). Kim, Ritchie & McCormick (2012) recognize that customers want more than just a satisfactory experience, therefore the need for research on what constitutes memorable experiences. They develop a 24 item scale to measure memorable experiences. Based on Kapferer's (1998) prism and Echtner and Ritchie's (2003) work, the extrinsic factors that influence tourist experiences include destination physical attributes and the destination image (brand personality), while the intrinsic factors include personal benefits and meaning (sense of identity), and, how the interaction between the tourist and the host community is explained by social and cultural interactions.

The value of the experience depends on the meaning given to it by an individual (Wilson & Harris, 2006). This is derived from their personal life narrative, as a rite of passage or a moment of self-authentication (Abrahams, 1986), from a sense of achievement when mastering a physical challenge or making an intellectual discovery (Beard & Ragheb, 1983) leading to a flow experience of absorption in the activity (Baum, 2002). Travel can also be a journey in search of spiritual goals or self-discovery (Sharpley and Stone, 2010) or transformation (Obenour, 2004). There is also a strong social element to the meaning as shared experiences can bring 'rites of integration' (Arnould & Price, 1993), creating close bonds between people (Obenour, 2004); what Turner (1974) called a sense of 'communitas'. Visiting a particular destination can be a means of establishing identity (Noy, 2004)), gaining recognition (Otto & Ritchie, 1996) and status or kudos (Curtin, 2005). Williams (2006: p.483) argues that leisure consumers 'create their identities and develop a sense of belonging through consumption'. Recently, Hibbert, Dickinson & Curtin (2013) argue that it is identity that influences holiday decision making, that identity is pre-existing, and that holidays are a means to demonstrate, confirm, or even avoid one's identity.

## 2.3 Cultural values and their influences on the meaning of experiences

Research has suggested that culture influences values and that people from different cultures have different preferences and expectations (Adler and Graham 1989; Hofstede 1980, Pizam, Pine, Mok and Shin 1997). Researchers agree that cultural values influence an individual's consumption behavior (Woodside, Hsu, & Marshall, 2011) and travel considerations (Reisinger, 2009). The meanings that tourists give to a destination are derived not only from their personal characteristics and experiences but also from the values of their culture (Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Tourists visit a destination with a set of assumptions created by the interaction of the visitor's own cultural background and their understanding of the historical and cultural significance of the location (Obenour, 2004; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Seddighi, Nuttall & Theocharous, 2001; Snepenger, Snepenger, Dalbey & Wessol, 2007). Mok and Defranco (2000) believe that an understanding of cultural values is vital in tourism marketing as customer satisfaction is largely based on meeting (and ideally exceeding) expectations.

Cultural values shape people's beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Fan 2000). They serve to give a sense of shared identity distinguishing one cultural group from another (Leavitt and Bahrami, 1988). Hofstede (1980) describes this as the collective programming of the mind.

Hofstede's (1980) study on cultural values has been widely cited. Hofstede (2001) suggests that China has a masculine orientation towards assertiveness, achievement and success, which suggests the dominant values in society are success, money and material. China has the lowest individuality score in Asia, as a collectivist society, it stresses relationships with family or other groups. China scores highly on power distance, indicating respect for authority and acceptance of inequalities. China also tends to be uncertainty-avoiding rather than adventure-seeking. Table 1 illustrates China's score on Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

*Table 1. China's Score on Hofstede's Cultural Values*

	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance
China	80	20	66	30

Source: Hofstede 2001

'Traditional' Chinese cultural values are formed from interpersonal relationships and social orientation (Mok & Defranco, 2000). Confucianism and Taoism are the key philosophies influencing Chinese society (Kwek & Lee, 2010), they encourage a respect of nature, a notion of harmony, and regard one's task in life as trying to acquire skills and education (Mok & Defranco, 2000). The Chinese harmonious relationship with the natural world is viewed as one of the major differences between Eastern and Western societies (Reisinger and Turner 2003). Yau's (1988) value

orientation model classifies Chinese culture into five orientations: man-nature orientation, man-himself orientation, relational orientation, time orientation and personal activity orientation, of which the most influential factor on marketing to Chinese consumers is relational orientation, which include the respect for authority, interdependence, group orientation and face(ego). However, the open door policy since 1978 has great influence on the values of Chinese people in understanding capitalism and materialism (Sofield & Li, 2011). Young generations, particularly those born after the 1980s, are greatly influenced by modern western culture and media (Xu, Morgan & Moital, 2011). This combination and evolution of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ values may influence individual travelling behavior in complex and subtle ways (Kwek & Lee, 2010). Ryan and Huang (2013 p7) state that ‘for many Chinese, to be able to afford to be a tourist, to travel and to see the sights of their country while enjoying comfortable serviced accommodation is a symbol of being part of the modern world, or being a global citizen’. Therefore, due to cultural and social-economic differences, Chinese tourists may have particular expectations that are not well understood by western destination marketers (Li et al. 2011). However, careful consideration is needed in using cultural dimensions to explain travel behavior (Xu et al, 2009), as within each culture, there is wide spectrum of different attitudes and behavior, which is unlikely to be fully explained by cultural factors.

Nevertheless, researchers broadly agree that cultural values influence consumer behavior (Soares et al, 2007; Woodside, Hsu, & Marshall, 2011). However, there is still limited research on the implications of cultural values in destination marketing (Mok & DeFranco 2000). There is also very limited research into holiday aspirations among Chinese youth.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Free-elicitation method**

This paper reports findings from four open questions on a survey of Chinese students studying tourism management, using a free-elicitation technique. Often used in the psychological literature, Reilly (1990) was the first to use free-elicitation in tourism research. Echtner & Ritchie (1993) used the same method to measure destination images. They claimed free elicitation to be useful in allowing unique images of each country to emerge. Indeed, the advantages of such a method are that ‘it allows for spontaneous responses’ (Parfitt, 2005: p.91), and it avoids imposing the researcher's biases on the respondents (Berg, 2007; Reilly, 1990). Recently, Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland (2011) used this method in their study of visitors’ memories of wildlife tourism, using four open questions on a survey. The results of open questions are ‘more likely to reflect the full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondents’ (Denscombe, 2007: p.166).

#### **3.2 Question design**

The free-elicitation questions discussed in this paper formed part of a comparative study of UK and Chinese student travel behavior. The questionnaire contained two pages of conventional closed questions about students’ travel behavior. At the end of the second page there were two open

questions designed to elicit the value and meaning that students give to their travel experiences. The first question (What is the most memorable or enjoyable place you have visited?) was asked in acknowledgement of the notion that ‘lived experience can never be fully grasped in its immediate form, but only reflectively as past presence’ (Van Manen, 1990: p. 37), and ‘lived experiences gather significance as we reflect on and give memory to them’ (Curtin, 2005: p. 3). It is claimed that remembered experiences have a great influence on future holiday decisions. However, this is an under-researched area (Braun-Latour & Loftus, 2006; Kim et al., 2012). The second question (What is your dream country for a holiday?) was asked because the researchers sought an understanding of how previous experiences (Pearce & Lee, 2005) related to ‘ideal’ destinations. Therefore, an investigation of future aspirations might be useful to understand motivations, in particular, to explore whether a positive experience will lead tourists to go back to the same place.

In both cases, respondents were asked to answer freely and produced a rich variety of unprompted responses (Morgan & Xu, 2009). Discourse theory sees all leisure pleasure-seeking activities as expressions of a dominant cultural discourse (Quan & Wang, 2004; Urry, 2002). This discourse, that is the way a particular social group talks about a subject, and in this case travel, provides the language in which people discuss their holiday experiences. Indeed, some argue that the language creates the experience (Philips & Jorgensen, 2002). A close study of the words used to describe holiday experiences, and the meanings given to particular destinations, can therefore give an insight into how individuals in specific cultures construct meaning and attach value to different types of tourism experiences.

### 3.2 Data collection & analysis

Questions were devised in English and translated into Chinese using back translation to check for errors. The Chinese replies were translated into English for analysis, and any nuances of meaning were discussed among the authors to ensure that the right interpretation was made. A convenience sample was distributed in Nanjing University of Finance and Economics, Nanjing, China. Questionnaires were distributed and collected in class, when verbal informed consent was obtained and guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity were made (Creswell, 2008). 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 284 responses were collected. Although it is a self-selected small sample, it represents students who study tourism management. As Jiang and Tribe (2009) stated, there are 252 higher education institutions and 943 vocational schools which provide tourism education programs in China. Students on these courses might be future decision makers in tourism. They may also be expected to have a ‘world-view’ in contrast to other Chinese people of their generation. The majority of respondents were female (79.2%); and ranged in age from 18 to 25, including undergraduate year one to four. The 3706 words generated by respondents in response to the open questions were analyzed through thematic analysis. Responses were first organized and then read repeatedly in order to gain familiarity with the data. Subsequently, coding was used to identify discrete concepts through labeling and categorizing, from which themes were formulated (Clarke & Braun, 2008).

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 What is the most memorable place you have visited?

The destinations identified by students were plotted on a map (see Fig 1), and reasons for their choice were coded.



Figure 1 .Memorable Places Mentioned, by Province

Source of map: <http://www.muztagh.com/map-of-china/> accessed 23-10-2011

Note: the numbers show the number of answers naming places in the particular province. The survey place, Nanjing is the capital of Jiangsu Province. There are 7 replies mentioning places outside China, which are not shown in this map.

#### 4.1.1 Destinations within China

There are 23 provinces, four municipalities, five autonomous regions and two special regions in China. Except eight, all were mentioned by students. The greatest concentration of places named was in Jiangsu (40%), the province in which the respondents' university is situated. It is a well-developed tourist destination with many World Heritage sites. In 2011, Jiangsu attracted 7.37 million international tourists (CNTA, 2012), and an estimated 323 million domestic tourists (People, 2012). The next most popular places mentioned are major cities, such as Beijing (10%) and Shanghai (5%), followed by nearby provinces, such as Shandong (9%) and Zhejiang (7%), located along the eastern coastal provinces of China, and relatively close to the respondents' university. The rest of the destinations mentioned are scattered in other provinces and areas within China, but each place was mentioned by only a few respondents.



The above results show that respondents had travelled to destinations close to their university, indicating the importance of student travel in the study destination, a topic that has been long overlooked by both academics and destination marketers (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008).

#### 4.1.2 Destinations outside China (3%)

Revealing the relative inexperience of Chinese students as tourists, only seven of the 214 places chosen by respondents were foreign. Indeed, this was commented on by four students who noted that their most memorable place could only be in China. This reflects the fact that outbound travel is relatively new in China (Li et al., 2011), being formerly a restricted market, which was only open to politicians, government officials and organized business delegations (Wolfgang, 2006). Official permission for outbound travel for the general public was given after 1997 (Wolfgang, 2006), since 2005, it has shown huge growth (Li et al., 2011)

## 4.2 Why was it memorable?

Table 2 shows the reasons respondents gave for their memorable places.

Table 2. Reasons for Memorable Places and Dreams

	Memories No.	Memories %	Dreams No.	Dreams %
Social: family and friends	11	6.0	1	0.5
Discovering cultural History	40	21.9	57	26.8
Nature and scenery	22	12	27	12.7
Adventure and achievement	59	32.2	52	24.4
Hedonic: Sun, sea and relaxation	14	7.7	12	5.6
General atmosphere	19	10.4	10	4.7
Place attachment/Patriotism	8	4.4	46	21.6
Total	10	5.5	8	3.8
	183	100	213	100

#### 4.2.1 Nature and scenery, linking to the spiritual function of nature (32.2%)

Physical attributes were deemed to be important pull factors for respondents at 32.2%, with this usually linked to nature and scenery. Respondents remembered lakes, gardens, forests, hills and snow-covered peaks. These were associated with cleanness, fresh air, a fresher climate away from the heat of the summer in the city. These places were described as beautiful, picturesque, peaceful and close to nature. This is reflected in the following responses:

*‘Wuyi Mountain: a combination of mountain and water, a beautiful natural environment. You can feel nature, and relax’*

*'Xishuangbanna: it's natural, beautiful, and makes me feel close to nature'.*

These destinations were linked to traditional folk customs and a quieter, simpler way of life. Some responses had a quasi-spiritual property:

*'...it is like being in heaven, I feel out of this world. Unforgettable moment'.*

*'Lin'an Mountain, Suzhou: ...the temple helps your thinking, it is so quiet'.*

These findings point to the spiritual function of nature, and its influence on emotional, cognitive, aesthetic and even spiritual development (Kellert, 1993). A few went further in their criticism of the natural environment, stating that there were no memorable places:

*'too many tourists (in China), the environment is not good. It is too crowded'.*

Policies for economic development in China since 1978 have given priority to modernization over environmental considerations. However, in the past decade, under pressure from climate change lobbyists, the government has tried to keep a balance between its modernization agenda and environmental concerns (Sofield & Li, 2011). Respondent comments clearly reflect a popular concern for environmental issues in contemporary China and the extension of such thinking to 'ideal' tourist destinations.

#### *4.2.2A holistic image of the destination (4.4%)*

A small group of students remembered places because of the holistic impression of the destination:

*'Shishuangbanna: It was so different, so amazing. I liked everything there, the warm hearted minority people, hot and spicy local snacks, big rainforest jungles, just so amazing!'*

*'Wuzhen: I liked the small village of South Yangtze River, the atmosphere, everyone in the village was relaxed, enjoying the sunshine, and it was very quiet as well.'*

These comments show the respondents' total impressions, a holistic conceptualization of the destination image (Echtner & Ritchie 2003).

#### *4.2.3 Personal benefits and self-achievements of travel (7.7%)*

The personal benefits of travel and feelings of self-achievement cited by 7.7% of respondents can be described as push factors, referring to an individual's needs and desires (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977). Places were memorable because they represented the first time respondents had travelled alone, been abroad or seen the sea:

*'Baidaihe, the place where I first saw the sea, fresh, exciting moment for me'.*

*'Suzhou, it was the first time that I travelled alone as a tourist'.*

Respondents had limited travel experience, yet they valued the trips they had made; they saw the importance of tourism. Hedonic factors were also important to respondents (10.4%), and included relaxing on the beach, entertainment and shopping:

*'Beautiful beach, I felt very relaxed, just what I needed after a long day'.*

#### *4.2.4 Social interaction with family, friends and local people (6%)*

Social interaction refers to relationships between the tourist and the host community and within the tourist's own social group (Kapferer 1998). In this study, places were linked with the person respondents travelled with, and memories were of social occasions with a best friend, a companion, and / or the first family holiday:

*'(I) met a travel partner, and he was quite humorous and made the trip so laughing and fun. We now become good friends.'*

*'Guilin, the only place I have ever been with my family. It was nice to have some time together with Mum and Dad as they were so busy with work. That was the only time they did not talk about work but listened to me talking'*

Social interaction has been reported as an important factor in the study of tourist experience. As Tung and Ritchie (2011) observe it is the outcome of the interaction which is important to a memorable experience such as the development of a new friendship and improved family relationships as reflected in the above statements.

#### *4.2.5 Learning culture and history (21.9%)*

Intellectual development represents the acquisition of new knowledge of the destination (Tung & Ritchie 2012), and was usually linked with history, traditional and modern local cultures in the data generated in this study. Although the traditional cultural objects to be found in places like Beijing or Tibet were important to respondents, also attractive was the prospect of experiencing the modern, busy and clean urban settings of Shanghai, Hong Kong and Shenzhen:

*'It is a modern, busy city (Shenzhen), clean. People are busy, walking quickly on the street, past tall buildings. The modern, busy mega city culture is different from my city. It surprised me'*

*'(Shanghai): ...Prosperous and modern city flavor, an atmosphere of an international mega city. Very fresh'*

These comments probably reflect the Chinese value attached to modernization. In the past 30 years, the Chinese government has put great emphasis on modernization as their national policy (Sofield & Li, 2011). It is likely that this has influenced respondents' attraction to urban tourism. Ryan and Huang's (2013) statement about the Chinese view of tourists as a symbol of the modern world is also reflected here by respondents' admiration of busy, vibrant cities.

Heritage and history were also important, linked by respondents with historical cities and towns such as Beijing, Suzhou, Tongli, Shaoxing, Yangzhou and the heritage tourism attractions of the Forbidden City, Grand Canal, ruins and temples:

*'(Grand Canal): ....You can feel and imagine its history, such as the Emperor Qian Long's journey to South Yantze'*

*'Fenghuang ancient town, a good combination of history, culture, nature and custom'*

*'Nanjing: Historical city, cultural remains, cultural background, the atmosphere of culture, I like it.'*

Such comments reflect the inextricable link for the Chinese between history, culture and tourism.

#### 4.2.6 Local place attachment (5.5%)

Ten respondents cited their hometown as their most memorable place: of these, two admitted that their hometown was the only place they had ever been. Another one commented:

*'Nanjing: it's the place where I studied for 4 years. I travelled a lot in this area. I feel at home, I like it a lot.'* Responses could be seen to be driven by a sense of place attachment. As one student said, *'it is my hometown, I remember every flower and every blade of grass, and I feel really attached to it'*.

Jorgensen and Stedman (2006) recognize sense of place is a multidimensional construct representing beliefs, emotions and behavioural commitments concerning a particular geographic setting. In this case, respondents clearly showed their attachment to their home town or the place where they studied.

A summary of the above themes has been included in a diagram based on Kapferer's (1998) experience prism (See Figure 2). Morgan and Xu (2009) suggest 'the meaningful experiences' should be placed at the center of the diagram, as it is being co-created together with the individual and the destination. The Chinese student emphasis on the physical attributes of the destination, the nature and landscape of the destination, often linked to the emotional feeling of nature, showing a contrast to their living environment. The cultural and historical interactions are often linked with a learning motive showing a desire for intellectual development, confirming other research on memorable tourist experiences (Tung & Ritchie 2011; Kim et al 2012).

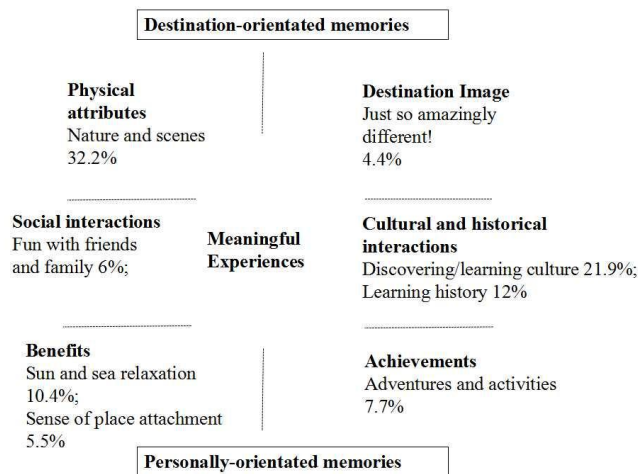


Figure 2. Student memorable experiences

Note: % of total respondents n=183 who explained the reason; There are 101 students unable/unwilling to give a reason. Total survey n=284

### 4.3 What is your dream country for a holiday?

Respondents were asked their dream destination to explore a possible link between past experiences and future aspirations.

Table 3. Places Mentioned as Dream Country for a Holiday

	Countries mentioned (number of times)
Europe in total: (N=166)	France (64); UK(17); Italy(14); Switzerland(13);Netherlands(9); Greece(6); Spain(5); Norway(19);Sweden(4); Iceland(3); Finland(2); Denmark(1); other European countries(9)
Asia in total: (N=51)	China(17); Singapore(11); Japan(9); Korea(5); Indonesia(3);India(2); other Asian countries (4)
Others in total: (N=54)	Egypt(5);Australia(13);USA(11); Maldives(9); Hawaii(8);New Zealand(5); Canada(3)

#### 4.3.1 Europe

Europe was mentioned by 161 students (59.8%, N=269), accounting for the largest group (See Table 3). France, and in particular Paris, was the most popular choice, with 64 respondents naming it as their dream country. This reflects the popularity of France as the top tourist destination in the world (UNWTO, 2010). The result is also consistent with France being China's top outbound tourism destination in Europe (Intel, 2007). The word used to explain the choice was usually 'romantic', though other comments included; culture, arts, food and hospitality. Other destinations named included Italy for its history and architecture, Greece, for its mystery; Spain because of its Olympic culture, and the UK, for its traditional culture and beautiful landscape. Other European countries were chosen for their scenery, notably Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland. This result is consistent with the Intel report (2007) that among Chinese outbound tourists, Paris attracts most interest and carries the most prestige among Chinese travelers, followed by Rome, Venice and Vienna. UNWTO (2013) also confirmed that Europe is the most desired destination for Chinese overseas travelers.

#### 4.3.2 Asia and the rest of the world

Outside Europe, Asia was the next most popular choice (51 respondents), with China the most popular country (17 out of 51). Others included Singapore for its clean, beautiful environment, Korea which respondents had seen on TV, and Japan for its 'similar' and 'interesting' culture. Answers reflected the general trend for outbound travel in China, as 70% of Chinese outbound tourists take holidays in nearby Asian countries (ETC, 2011). Australia and New Zealand were named for their vast open spaces and beautiful environment, and welcoming atmosphere to Chinese students. This reflects Australia and New Zealand as popular outbound destinations for the Chinese (Fountain, Espiner, & Xie, 2011). The US was chosen for a variety of reasons including sports, the environment, and its modernity – 'It is 100 years ahead of China,' said one respondent. Hawaii (eight respondents) and the Maldives (nine respondents) were mentioned for their beaches and beautiful scenery. Egypt, the only African country named, was mentioned for its cultural significance.

## 4.4 Why do you dream of visiting?

4.4.1 Discovering and learning about culture: a holiday becomes a learning opportunity

As Table 1 shows similar themes run through respondents' dreams as through their memories. The most significant theme is learning about a different culture, most commonly linked with history. This was the most important attraction for respondents (27.4%) as the comments below reflect:

*'Greece: (I) would like to know the culture and history...the land of legends, I want to experience (it) myself'*

*'France: want to know about French culture, its elegance, romance...so different, very attractive'*

*'Egypt: 'want to see the pyramids, to experience the old civilization'*

Chinese students appear to be culture-seekers. This has been interpreted by Xu et al. (2009) as a desire to please their parents who funded their travel. It is possible that the desire to consume cultural tourist attractions is also a reflection of the Confucian tradition of the scholar travel (Mok & Defranco, 2000). To the young Chinese, learning about other cultures is an important motivation: a holiday becomes a learning opportunity (Wang & Davidson, 2008)

4.4.2 Exploring the natural environment: a Chinese cultural view of nature

Also of high importance to respondents (at 24.9%) was the beauty of the natural environment, often interlinked with way of life:

*'Switzerland: the mountains are covered in snow, (it is) so beautiful. Life is simple and quiet there. This is where we can achieve nature and human beings in harmony'*

*'New Zealand; very natural, you can be totally relaxed and think about life quietly'*

*'Sweden: beautiful environment, simple customs, social harmony, an ideal democratic country for holiday and living'*

As noted earlier, responses point to a marked desire to escape the crowded cities in which respondents live. A deeper influence revealed by the replies is the Chinese cultural view of nature, which is probably the most significant difference between the Eastern and Western people. Whereas the British see the natural world as a setting for activities and adventures (Morgan & Xu, 2009), the Chinese see it as a place to escape to, to find harmony and peace. This reflects the cultural values of Confucianism and Taoism, which cast man and nature in a relationship of harmony. Sofield & Li (2011) and Han (2006) agree that both traditional and contemporary values have influenced the Chinese view of nature, reflecting the cultural value that people and nature are in harmony.

4.4.3 A holistic and emotional feeling of the destination, vague, stereotyped and media formed

Another theme of importance to respondents (at 22%) related to the holistic atmosphere associated with the destination, such as the romance of Paris, the mystery of Greece and Egypt.

*'(Paris) you can feel the atmosphere of freedom and romance. I remembered seeing it somewhere on TV to say that Paris is the capital of Romance. I can imagine myself getting immersed in a romantic place.'*

Such comments showed a desire for emotional experiences, 'the feeling of old Rome'; 'the true Italy', 'the ancient civilization of Egypt', 'the gentlemanly atmosphere' of the UK etc. When discussing experiences, this theme occupied a low rate of mention at (4.4%), while when discussing aspirations, it was often mentioned (22%). This suggests that memories are specific, while aspirations are vaguer, based on general impressions, and respondents' own interpretation of a destination and linked to their 'ideal world'. Tung and Ritchie (2012) suggest that the vagueness of expectations is because tourists want to preserve the spontaneity or uniqueness of experiences and may be motivated to imagine what their trip will be like in a general sense. Those aspirations were often influenced by the information from a third party such as friends and family, tour operators and media, as expressed by one respondent '...Friends showed me pictures of there, it was a lovely Christmas atmosphere'.

#### *4.4.4 Patriotism—identify drives holiday consumption*

Patriotism (3.8%) was an interesting and unexpected theme. Out of 209 students who reasoned the dream destination, 17 respondents (8.1%) chose China as their dream destination. Among those 17, nine respondents indicated that China is a big country, and there is a lot to see; while eight others cited 'Patriotism'.

*'It is my motherland, I am proud of China';  
'Because I am patriotic'.*

Patriotism here is associated with respondents' identity. As Ward, Bochner & Furnham (2001) state, patriotism involves people's recognition, categorization and self-identification as members of a national group, which induces a sense of affirmation and pride. Orwell defined it as "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world" (1945: p.361). Indeed, Goulbourne (1991) argues that belonging to a national group is intrinsic to an individual's self-definition and self-evaluation, performing powerful psychological functions at both a personal and a group level (Hinshelwood, 2005). Patriotism could also be interpreted as a product of a patriotic education (Beech & Jiang, 2011). Furthermore Barme (2009) identifies evidence of nationalism policy that aims to construct and consolidate China's national identity. A patriotic attitude is reflected in the so called 'red tourism' product, officially sponsored tours to sites connected to the history of the Communist Party (Wolfgang, 2006). Williams (2006) argues that consumers develop a sense of belonging through consumption, but in this case belonging can be said to drive consumption, supporting Hibbert et al's (2013) finding that pre-existing identity will drive holiday choice. Bauman (2000) suggests that group identity offers confirmation of the self, with Branscombe & Wann (1994) arguing that the desire to see the self favorably is powerful.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

### **5.1 conclusions**

This paper discussed socio-cultural and indirect political influences on the tourist experiences and aspirations of Chinese students of tourism. It thus

sheds light on an important and yet under researched area: student tourists, an emerging Chinese tourist market. Chinese students are potential tourists over the next decade, whether they travel as postgraduate students or on holiday (Wang & Davidson, 2008). The findings from this study show that Chinese students offer a big potential market for Europe, accounting for 59.8 % of their 'dream destinations'. Australia and New Zealand also seem to be popular choices, and although the USA is a recently opened potential destination, it is attractive to the Chinese.

## 5.2 Implications

In this study, students showed a consistent motivation in their past experiences and future aspirations, with an emphasis on nature and learning about culture. Although the word 'nature' is usually conceived as a physical attribute of a destination, it is always linked with an emotional and cognitive attitude in this study, reflecting the 'traditional' Eastern cultural view that people and nature are in harmony, although this view is compromised by policies favoring rapid economic development regardless of environmental consequences (Reisinger & Turner 2003). Destination managers targeting young Chinese should emphasize harmonious relationships between people and nature, and combine these to construct an attractive destination image. Marketing messages should also emphasize educational value in response to the Chinese Confucian emphasis on education, a holiday is therefore also a learning opportunity (Mok & Defranco 2000). This study shows that for Chinese youth, past travel experiences (which are limited in extent) do not seem to be linked with a tendency to revisit the same place, but rather encourage interest in wider exploration. The results are consistent with Jang & Fang's (2007) statement that people are looking for novelty in the long term and that previous memorable experiences do not take them to the same place, but lead to new places in their long term motivation. However, this is related to the specific socio-political Chinese context which limited the ability to participate in foreign travel in the past. Indeed, possibly related to limited overseas travel opportunities is the 'patriotic' choice of China as a 'dream destination'. Self-identity, localism and national identity might therefore influence the choice of holiday consumption in the Chinese context (Hibbert et al. 2013).

## 5.3 Future research

This research investigated tourism students at one particular university in China. Future research could target on young Chinese people of different social groups to identify the notion of class and its influence on travel behaviour. Further exploration is needed on attitudes towards 'home' and 'nature' as well as the influence of media and social reference group on the perceptions of other countries and potential destinations. Although, this research explores students' holiday aspirations, it is of course impossible to know whether young people will retain their dreams through adulthood. Life circumstances will of necessity intervene and as consumers, people change their values, lifestyles, and consumption patterns as they move through the life cycle (Mowen & Minor, 1998). Thus it would be worthwhile to target a variety of age groups in future research.



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