

# TOURISTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEA TOURISM: A CASE STUDY IN XINYANG, CHINA

**ABSTRACT:** Tea tourism as a new niche market has become more and more popular. Through a case study in Xinyang, China, this research explores tourists' attitudes and perceptions towards tea and tea tourism, identifies who the potential tea tourists are and compares their attitudes with others. 179 questionnaires were administered; One Way ANOVA and Chi-Square test were used based on their willingness of tea tourism. The results suggest that tea tourists and non tea tourists have significant differences in terms of their attitudes towards tea drinking and their willingness of buying tea as souvenir. Tea tourists are mainly tea lovers driven by their high interest in tea and tea culture; they tend to be both males and females (yet females show a significant higher percentage than males), between age 31-40, who have a positive attitude towards tea drinking, and who often drink tea. This research also provides some marketing suggestions for this niche market.

**KEY WORDS:** tea tourism, tea tourist, attitudes, China

## 1. Introduction

Tea, coffee and cola are three major beverages widely consumed in the world (Yang, 2007). And tea is an integral part of food service (Jolliffe, 2007). As widely accepted, China is the homeland of tea, the Chinese started to use tea as medicine and food 4,000 years ago (Emperor Shennong's Herbal Classics cited in Li, 1993). In Han Dynasty, tea has become the special beverage among the royal families. Since Tang Dynasty, tea drinking became a daily social vogue and enjoyed from the royal family and courtiers on down to ordinary people. Ancient Chinese intellectuals left behind a great volume of poems, chanted verses, songs, paintings and ballads about tea. Tea drinking was regarded as the high fashion, from which derived tea rituals and tea arts (Yang, 2007). Tea related tourism has parallels with food related tourism such as wine tourism, which has been investigated by many researchers (Dembarde, 2003; Williams and Dossa 2003; Brown et al 2007). As pointed out by Jolliffe (2007) that tea tourism has a lot in common with wine tourism in terms of its history and the connections with travel. In the industry, it has already become a niche tourism programme in many regions in China, such as Hangzhou, Wuyi Mountain area, Wuyuan and Xinyang etc (Shen, 2005; Huang and Wang, 2005; Shen, 2007).

World wide, tea related tourism develops well in many countries such as Thailand and Sri Lanka (UNWTO, 2005; Kolkata, 2005; Gursahani, 2007; Jolliffe, 2003). However, the academic research of tea tourism falls behind the industry, and it is an under-researched area. Very little research on tea tourism could be found both in the Chinese or English language, particularly those research questions on: who are the tea tourists? What are their attitudes towards tea and tea drinking, what are their perceptions of tea tourism? Are the tea tourists and non tea tourists differ in their attitudes towards tea, in their travelling behaviour? This research tries to answer the above questions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Tea Culture

Baldwin et al (2006) divided all culture definitions into two types: broad sense and narrow sense. The former includes both material culture and intangible culture (also see UNESCO, 2002), and the latter is in a narrow sense of intangible culture. Following the definition of culture, tea culture could also be defined in a broad and narrow sense (Wu, 2006). Broadly it means the total of tea related material and spiritual wealth during the process of tea development, which combines tangible and intangible products including ethic demonstration, etiquette norm, esthetic, religion, arts and tea-growing, tea-processing techniques and materials (Song, 2004; Li, 2007); and narrowly it only means the spiritual wealth (Wang,1992; Ning and Liu, 2005). A broad sense of tea culture will be discussed in this paper.

Xu (1999) and Yang et al(2001) define tea culture as the derivative of tea, and a series of phenomenon of material, spirit, customs, psychology and behavior with tea at the core, which, without any exception, demonstrate the natural property and social and cultural property of tea. Generally speaking, tea culture is regarded as ‘all the inheritable, continual, sustainable and excellent material and spiritual creations on tea during human being’s social practice’ and ‘material and spiritual wealth of the sum during the development and growing of tea’(Yu, 1998, p239).

In China, the first and best tea works is ‘Tea Classic’ written by Yu Lu in Chinese Tang dynasty (AD 760), which has extensive and far-reaching influence at that time and after, and Yu Lu himself has been regarded as the ‘Tea Saint’ too (Yang, 2007). Regarded as the Chinese ‘Tea Bible’, Tea Classic covered tea history, tea science, tea ceremony etc, which was acclaimed extensively to be the symbol of completion of basic outline of tea culture (Song 2004). In ancient China, lots of tea works appeared, for example: ‘Study on Tea’ (‘????’) (in 1107), ‘Study of Tea Utensil’ (‘????’)(1269), and ‘Tea book’ (‘??’)(1440), ‘Sequel to Tea Classic’ (‘???’)(1734), ‘Review tea works in Hui’(‘?????’)(1897), ‘Tea at all times and in all over the world’ (‘????’)(1941) etc (Yuan et al,1999).

The study of tea culture in modern China can be traced back to 1980s. Some tea publications and the first ‘Tea and Chinese Culture’ Week Show (TCCWS)’ held in Beijing in 1989, indicated its revival of tea culture. In 1991, Chinese state Tea Museum was opened in Hangzhou (Yu, 2005). The First International Tea Culture Symposium held in 1990 and the creation of ‘Tea Culture special issue’ in the journal of China’s Agriculture Archaeology meant the beginning of tea culture study. And lots of publications on tea & tea culture appeared after that (e.g. Chen, 1992; Wang and Yao, 2000; Guo, 2003; Liu, 2003 etc). Much of the literature was on tea history, tea planting, tea gastronomy, tea custom in different regions in China. Others descriptively discussed the definition and its cultural, socio-economic meanings of tea culture and the industrialization of tea production and tea culture.

Throughout various studies, it is recognized that China’s tea culture emphasizes ‘Harmony, Respect, Gratitude and Love’, which are closely linked with the traditional Chinese culture and ethics (Yang, 2007). Tea arts performances are also marked with ethnic and regional characteristics involving various aspects of the society-history, religion, ethics, music and dance, painting and calligraphy as well as food and cuisine. It has virtually become an independent, comprehensive system of arts (Yang, 2007). As Jolliffe (2007, p6) summarized the function of tea

in China and some other countries as ‘ceremonies, customs and rituals that have grown up around the practice of tea drinking are an integral part of the life and culture of many societies’.

The study of tea culture is not only popular in China, but also in Japan, Britain, USA, India etc. There are several tea culture works on Japan (e.g Pitelka, 2002; Maetani, 2007). In 1891, India began its tea research with the establishment of the Joint Committee of the India Tea Association (ITA). Harler, the former scientific officer to ITA published his classic tea works of ‘The Culture And Marketing Of Tea’ (1933) to principally introduce the tea production in Eastern Asia. But, Harler meant tea culture as tea growing science & technology. As to the major tea consumption countries of USA and UK, although with not long tea growing history, many tea literature appeared over one century on their native tea culture (e.g Saunders,1879; Shepard, 1899; Sauer,2007). While most of English tea works focused on the introduction of tea culture in China (e.g Heiss et al, 2007), Japan (e.g Pitelka, 2003), India (e.g Bald,1922) etc. Some papers also contributed to the research on tea ceremony and its cultural, social meanings (Kondo, 1985; Mori,1991).

## *2.2 Research on tea tourism*

Tea is a social custom and as such is part of many celebrations that tourist could experience (Jolliffe 2007). However, there is very little literature on tea tourism published in English. Besides the works by Hall et al (2003) and Boniface (2003), the most impressive works on tea tourism in English may be the monograph of ‘Tea and Tourism: Tourists, Traditions and Transformations’ (Jolliffe, 2007), which is a composition of tea-related papers by various authors. In this work, Jolliffe defined tea tourism as ‘tourism that is motivated by an interest in the history, traditions and consumption of tea’ (Jolliffe, 2007 p9). She then defined tea tourists as ‘a tourist experiencing history, culture and traditions related to the consumption of tea’ (Jolliffe, 2007, p10). Jolliffe also commented on the wide range of experiences and opportunities which tea can provide for travellers, including tea shop trails, the partaking of the tea ceremony and visits to tea gardens or museums.

Although there is some literature on tea tourism in China, most academic research on tea tourism focused on the supply side rather than demand side with dominant case studies. And many researchers descriptively focus on the significance and potential of tea tourism in certain areas; both rural and urban settings (see Guo,2001; Cao,2006; Duan,2006; Chen,2005 etc). Thus, a quantitative exploration of Chinese tea tourists, on which this study is focused, provides a contribution to the existing literature.

## **3. *Xinyang and Xinyang Maojian Tea***

Xinyang is located in central China, and the climate here is humid and unique in having four clearly distinct seasons, abundant rainfall and adequate sunshine. The natural environment is perfect for tea plants, and Xinyang ‘Maojian’ Tea is the best-known among the tea bushes, and it has won Golden Awards in the first World Expo in 1915, the Chinese Food Expo in 1988 and the International Horticultural Expo in 1999 (Bi and Yin, 2006). As one of the top ten Chinese green teas, Maojian tea is also well known abroad and exported to over ten countries and regions (Luo,

2006). Tea gardens cover 43,330 hectares in Xinyang in 2005, and the total tea production is about 15 million kilograms with the gross income of about 1 billion Yuan (approximately ?100 million GBP) (Wang,2006).

Xinyang has many outstanding tourism attractions. Jigongshan National Park, Dongzhai National Nature Reserve, Jinggangtai National Geopark and Nanwanhu National Forest Park are the popular ones. A combination of beautiful natural landscape and rich tea culture makes Xinyang a popular tourist destination. Xinyang local government has held 16 annual tea events since 1992. A two-day tea plantations tour production has been provided by local travel agencies. The tourism industry in Xinyang has developed quickly since 2004 with over 20% growth rate. In 2008, 7.89 million tourists visited Xinyang, generating 1.89 billion RMB tourism revenue (approximately ?189 million GBP) (HNTA, 2008).

#### **4. Methodology**

A quantitative survey was used in this study, as questionnaires are appropriate for research on self-reported beliefs or behaviours (Neuman, 2003). Questions were divided into four parts, Part A focused on the visitors' social demographic information, visitors were asked about their gender, age and where do they come from. Part B asked about their general knowledge about tea, their drinking habit. Questions were asked such as how much do they know tea, how often do they drink tea, how long have they been drinking tea, which type of tea do they usually drink, do they agree with drinking tea is healthy to the body, is there any family members in the family drinking tea everyday. These questions were asked to compare the drinking habit and knowledge about tea between the tea tourists and non-tea tourists later. Part C included visitors' attitudes towards tea tourism and their previous tea tourism experiences. Questions were asked would they buy tea as souvenir from this trip, have they participated in any tea related tourism activities before, how far would they travel to buy tea. Part D particularly focused on visitors' attitudes towards Tea tourism in Xinyang and their willingness to participate in the future. Questions include have they heard of Maojian tea before they travel to Xinyang, if tea tourism is developed in Xinyang, which type of activity do they prefer, their willingness to participate tea tourism in the future, and they were also asked to rank the current tourists attractions in Xinyang.

Most questions were close ended, with a few open ended questions asking for their additional comments. 1-5 Likert Scales were used to measure respondents' attitudes of certain items, enabling more detailed analysis and comparison. Questionnaires were administered in Chinese as the questionnaires were targeting domestic Chinese tourists, and both the survey sites are mainly domestic tourist attractions. A pilot questionnaire involving 10 people and followed modifications were conducted to make the questions clearly understood for survey.

A random sample was conducted in Xinyang's Jigong Mountain National Park and Nanwan Lake Scenic Resort between 28 June and 1 July 2007, as these are two popular tourist attractions in Xinyang. Every 3rd visitor who passed the researcher at the exit of the two resorts was given a questionnaire. 380 questionnaires were handed out, however, only 179 valid questionnaires were returned. The questionnaires were then put into SPSS 16 for analysis.

Descriptive Statistics including frequencies and mean value were conducted. Chi square and One-way ANOVA were used to compare the groups (Field, 2009).

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Respondents' profile

Among the 179 valid respondents, 47.5% of them are males, and 52.5% are females, showing a good distribution of gender. Respondents are covered by all age groups. Most of the visitors are coming from Henan Province (48%), some of them come from Xinyang (25.1%) and other parts of China (23.5%). Details could be found in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of respondents**

Item:	%
Gender:	
Male	47.5%
Female	52.5%
Age:	
<20	24.0%
21-30	10.1%
31-40	25.7%
41-50	20.1%
51 and above	20.1%
Where do you come from:	
From Xinyang area	25.1%
From Henan Province but not Xinyang	48%
From China but not Henan	23.5%
From other areas*	3.4%

\*Other areas means areas outside mainland China

### 5.2 Visitors' attitude towards tea and tea drinking

The results suggest that visitors to Xinyang show great interest in tea, particularly the green tea. Among 179 respondents, 159 drink tea (89%), showing the popularity of tea drinking. 69.8% prefer to drinking green tea rather than any other kind of tea, which is consistent with the popularity of green tea in China. 96% of the respondents have at least one family member who drink tea everyday.

Most respondents support drinking tea is healthy (mean=1.642, SD=0.884, 1= strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree). Respondents think they know something about tea (mean= 3.36, SD=0.922, 1=very much, 5=not at all). 34.1% (N=61) of respondents have being drinking tea for 2-5 years, 29.1% (N=52) of respondents drink tea once every several days. Details could be found in Table 2.

**Table 2. Visitors' attitude towards tea and tea drinking habit**

Questions/items	Number (%)	Mean value
Do you drink tea:		
Yes	159 (89%)	
No	20 (11%)	
Which type of tea do you usually drink:		
Green tea	125 (69.8%)	
Blake tea	24 (13.4%)	
Wulong tea	24 (13.4%)	
Flower tea	5 (2.8%)	
Others	1 (0.6%)	
Is there at least one family members drinks tea every day:		
	172 (96%)	
Yes	7 (4%)	
No		
How well do you think you		3.36, SD=0.922

know tea		(1=very much, 5=not at all)
Do you agree drinking tea is healthy:		1.642, SD=0.884
		(1= strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree)
How often do you drink tea:		
Several times a day	44 (24.6%)	
Once everyday	29 (16.2%)	
Once several days	52 (29.1%)	
Once every month	34 (19%)	
Not at all	20 (11.2%)	
How long have you been drinking tea:		
Over 10 years	21 (11.7%)	
5-10 years	47 (26.3%)	
2-5 years	61 (34.1%)	
<2 years	40 (22.3%)	
Never	10 (5.6%)	

The above results suggest that tea drinking is popular among respondents, they think they have some knowledge about tea, and they agree drinking tea is healthy.

### 5.3 Visitors' attitude towards tea tourism in general and tea tourism in Xinyang

Positive attitudes towards tea tourism can be found from the research. 68.7% (N= 123) of the respondents have tea tourism experiences before, and 85.5% (N=153) positively respond to the question on their willingness to make a tea tourism trip in the future.

About tea tourism in Xinyang, respondents are asked to choose the most attractive tourism attraction in Xinyang, the natural beauty (52%) is recognized by most respondents, followed by tea culture (28.5%) and the local food (13.4%), showing an acceptance of tea culture as tourism products here.

Respondents are asked to give preference of suggested tea tourism activities, the results show that activities such as visiting tea gardens and enjoying tea culture are particularly welcome by respondents (49.2%), followed by tea serving ceremony (22.9%) and tea leaves picking (14.0%). This result confirms Shen (2005) and Luo (2006)'s finding that tea tourism could be a combination of natural attractions and tea culture activities.

Results show that Maojian Tea is well known among the respondents, 97.2% (N=174) of them knew about Maojian Tea before their trip; and 92.8% (N=166) would like to buy Maojian Tea during this trip as souvenir, showing a potential for developing tea souvenirs and tea shops.

### 5.4 who are the potential tea tourists?

Next, the researchers tried to explore who the potential tourists are. Based on their willingness to travel for tea tourism in the future, respondents were divided into 3 groups, tea tourists, possible tea tourists, and non-tea tourists.

A quick look at the tea tourists profile shows that tea tourists are mainly between 31-40, both male and female, but female(53.5% N=61) have a slightly higher percentage than male(46.5%, N=53). The non tea tourists are less than 20 and between 21-30, tend to be females (69.4%, N=18).

### 5.5 Difference between tea tourists and non tea tourists

In order to compare the differences on their attitudes towards tea and tea drinking among the above 3 groups, One way ANOVA was then used. The researchers first used non-parametric test Kruskal-Wallis Test to compare the groups, which is equal to ANOVA test, as the questionnaire data is ordinal and non parametric test make limited assumptions about the underlying distributions of the data (Norusis, 1991). Then the researchers used ANOVA test again, as the results of non-parametric and barometric test show similar results, thus the researchers decide to present the barometric test results as it is used and accepted by many research publications (Lam and Tang, 2003; Kim et al 2008).

Results can be found in Table 3. The 3 groups differ significantly in how often they drink tea ( $F=5.089$ ,  $P=0.007$ ), their tea drinking history ( $F=3.641$ ,  $P=0.028$ ) and their agreement on tea drinking is healthy ( $F=4.482$ ,  $P=0.013$ ).

**Table 3. One Way ANOVA TEST Test of Attitude and Knowledge of Tea**

Questions		Sure (Group 1)	Maybe (Group 2)	No (Group 3)	ANOVA
How often do you drink tea	Mean	2.80	2.28	3.31	$F=5.089$
	Difference	N/A	(3)	(2)	$P=0.007$
How well do you know tea	Mean	3.28	3.38	3.69	$F=2.150$
	Difference	N/A	N/A	N/A	$P=0.120$
How far will you travel to buy tea	Mean	3.81	3.72	3.81	$F=0.129$
	Difference	N/A	N/A	N/A	$P=0.879$
Drink tea is healthy	Mean	1.51	1.77	2.04	$F=4.482$
	Difference	(3)	N/A	(1)	$P=0.013$
Tea drinking history	Mean	2.82	2.59	3.31	$F=3.641$
	Difference	N/A	(3)	(2)	$P=0.028$

Note: 1. item 'How often do you drink tea', 1=several times per day, 3=one time per months, 5=not at all;

2. item 'Do you agree that drinking tea is healthy for people', 1=strongly agree; 3=fair; 5=strongly disagree

3. item 'tea drinking history', 1=over 10 years; 3=less than 2 years; 5=never.

The above results suggest that the 'for sure' tea tourists strongly agree that drinking tea is healthy (mean=1.51), while the 'No' group shows a higher mean value (mean= 2.04). This result agrees with Jolliffe (2007) that tea tourists show a higher interest in tea, their attitudes are more positive than others. Other differences are not significantly recorded.

The 'Maybe' group and 'No' group differs in how often do you drinking tea(mean=2.28 for 'Maybe' group, and mean=3.31 for 'No' group) and their drinking history(mean= 2.59 for 'Maybe' group, mean=3.31 for 'No' group)

In order to explore the differences among the 'for sure' tea tourists, 'maybe' tea tourists and 'none' tea tourists, Chi-square is then used to compare the willingness of tea tourists and the gender, age, buying tea as souvenir, previous tea tourism experiences (Table 4-6).

Results (Table 4) suggest that there was a significant association between age and their willingness of tea tourism( $X^2=22.6$ ,  $p=0.004$ ). Except group '31—40', the older groups (41-50; above 50) have a higher percentage of 'for sure' tea tourists than the younger groups (below 20; 21-30). Within '31—40' age group, 80.4% of them are 'for sure' tea tourists, which is the highest among all the groups, this group also has the highest positive standard residual 1.4. The results

suggest this particular age group could be the potential tea tourists market.

**Table 4. Chi-square test of age and willingness of tea tourism**

Age group	Sure (%)	Maybe (%)	No (%)	In Total (%)	Chi-square
<20	21(48.8%)	10 (23.3%)	12(27.9%)	43(100%)	X <sup>2</sup> =22.593
					P=0.004
21-30	8(44.4%)	4(22.2)	6(33.3%)	18(100%)	
31-40	37(80.4%)	6(13.0%)	3(6.5%)	46(100%)	
41-50	25(69.4%)	10(27.7%)	1(2.8%)	36(100%)	
>50	23 (63.9%)	9(25.0%)	4(11.1%)	36(100%)	

Table 5 suggests that male and female show a significant difference in their willingness of tea tourism ( $X^2=6.047$ ,  $p=0.049$ ). 62.4% (N=53) of male sample are 'for sure' tea tourists, while 64.9% (N=51) of females respondents are 'for sure' tea tourists.

**Table 5. Chi-square test of gender and willingness of tea tourism**

	Sure (%)	Maybe (%)	No (%)	In Total (%)	Chi-square
Male	53(62.4%)	24(28.2%)	8(9.4%)	85(100%)	X <sup>2</sup> =6.047
Female	61(64.9%)	15(16.0%)	18(19.1%)	94(100%)	P=0.049

Table 6 suggests that the majority (N=96, 84.2%) of 'Sure' group will buy tea as a souvenir, while only 46.2% (N=12) of 'No' group will buy tea as souvenir, showing a different interest in tea.

**Table 6. Chi-square test of tea souvenir, previous experiences**

		Sure %	Maybe %	No %	Total	Chi-square
Tea as souvenir	Yes	96 (68.6%)	32(22.9%)	12(8.6%)	140(100%)	X <sup>2</sup> =18.425
	No	18(46.2%)	7(17.9%)	14(35.9%)	39(100%)	P<0.001
Previous tea tourism experience	Yes	86(69.9%)	27(22.0%)	10(12.3%)	123(100%)	X <sup>2</sup> =13.472
	No	28(50.0%)	12(21.4%)	16(28.6%)	56(100%)	P=0.001
Know Maojian before come here	Yes	112(64.4%)	38(21.8%)	24(13.8%)	174(100%)	X <sup>2</sup> =7.489
	No	2(40.0%)	1(20.0%)	2(40.0%)	5(100%)	P=0.112

The majority of 'Sure' group (N=86, 75.4%) have previously participated tea tourism before. While the majority of 'No' group have not any previous tea tourism experiences (N=16, 62%). 69% (N=27) of 'Maybe' group have had tea tourism experiences before. The result suggests that previous tea tourism experiences might be helpful to generate next trip motivation.

## 6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this research explored an under-researched area, tea tourism, particularly from the demand side. The results suggested that the potential tea tourists are those who have high



interest in tea and tea culture, who often drink tea, who have a positive attitude towards drinking tea. These results supported Jolliffe's (2007) definition of tea tourists who are driven by tea interests. The results also showed some differences between males and females. Females showed a higher percentage (53.5%) in the 'for sure' tea tourists group, while males showed a lower percentage (46.5%). Although in China, tea is more favoured by males than females, the research results suggested that for tea tourism, the potential market could be for both genders. However, this research did find out that males and females have significant differences in tea drinking habit and their tea drinking history, males tend to drink tea often and their tea drinking history is longer than females, supporting the phenomena that in China tea is more favoured by males.

Another finding of this research was that tea drinking habits, attitudes towards tea drinking, willingness of travelling as tea tourists were closely associated. To conclude, the more people know about tea, the more positive attitude they have towards tea drinking. The more frequently they drink tea, the more willingness they express to become tea tourists.

The findings are also important to tea tourism marketing in Xinyang. Tea culture and tea tourism have been recognized among the tourists, a combination of visiting beautiful tea gardens, appreciation of tea culture performances and picking tea leaves are highly preferred by the tourists.

Both genders showed their interest in tea tourism, females showed an even higher percentage (53.5%). Therefore, this result suggest that instead of targeting males, which is traditional targeting market, tea tourism operators should also consider females, as they showed a higher interest in this study.

The close relationship of tea drinking habit and the knowledge of tea suggests that when marketing tea tourism, the promotion of tea knowledge is as important as promoting the tourism product itself.

This case study shows that as a new niche tourism market, tea is well recognized in China, tea tourism is welcomed by many tourists, 63.7%(N=114) of total respondents(N=179) show their definite interest of future tea tourism, they particularly indentify the possible tea tourism activities, which might have some implication for tea tourism marketing.

However, this research only used a quantitative method and explored one study area. A qualitative method, such as interviews, could be sued in future research to explore detailed tourists' experiences. A comparison of different study areas could also be useful to see if there are general findings.

A limitation of this research is that it recognizes tea tourists based on their willingness to travel as tea tourist in the future. Some academics argue that there is a difference between people's willingness and their actual activities, however this is the general limitation of many of the questionnaires in getting people's real attitude. All in all, as a new niche market, more academic research need to be done to meet the tea tourists' need and this growing market.

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