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Chinese Perceptions of Overseas Cultural Heritage: Emotive Existential Authenticity, Exoticism and Experiential Tourism

Abstract

This paper draws upon an extensive evidence base to analyse Chinese perceptions of Western cultural heritage and capture dominant reflections on an overseas destination as portrayed through selected images and artefacts. The dataset derives from an integrated methodological approach utilised to interpret visitor perceptions of an exhibition—hosted by Nanjing Museum, China—that focused on Scotland's cultural heritage. The analysis of the data revealed insight into the importance of the experiential qualities of heritage tourism—specifically those aligned to the natural environment—and a desire to achieve an emotive and sensual engagement with key signifiers of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage through potential leisure experiences. The results provide detailed insights into the contemporary values motivating Chinese outbound tourists to visit and experience overseas heritage, the importance and potential of innovative 'experience research methodologies' and practical guidance for destination organizations that seek to position and promote Western cultural heritage to a Chinese audience.

Introduction

Exhibitions and expositions have always been of great historical importance, occurring in every period of the history of modern nations and serving as a medium for the promotion of 'selected' versions of national (re)presentation (Smits & Jansen, 2012). Indeed, be they contained within museums, at expositions, world fairs, cultural Olympiads and numerous other forms, exhibitions provide an important window into the multiple topics that constitute—coalesce around, or inform—leisure as a subject field; the arts, tourism, cultural activities, visitor studies, heritage studies, destination branding, formal and informal activities and so on. Acting as vessels for the portrayal of specific (tourism) destinations, exhibitions act as key influencers in shaping potential visitor perceptions of a nation, city or tourist site, and can contribute towards the successful execution of urban and rural destination marketing strategies (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Thus, exhibitions that focus on positioning destinations through an array of cultural artefacts provide a useful space through which to elicit potential tourist reflections and inform strategies that will attract outbound tourists from areas of strong market growth. One area of significant growth in tourism expenditure has consistently been associated with China's outbound tourism market (Arlt, 2013). Following market reforms instigated by Deng Xiaoping in the post-Mao era, China has witnessed an unparalleled acceleration in economic growth that has led to a shift and diversification in sociocultural values, a growing middle class, and, for some of the nation's citizens, an improved income and living standard (Cai et al., 2008). With China's government relaxing restrictions on foreign travel—and increasingly promoting public access to culture—a growing number of Chinese travellers are considering outbound tourism and heritage destination sites as part of their education and leisure (Xiao, 2003).

Recent scholarship examining China's outbound tourism sector have highlighted the common methods of enquiry and key focal points of interest pursued by academics within the

field (see Bao et al., 2018; Jørgensen et al., 2017; Tse, 2015). Within this review, destination-specific studies—and outbound Chinese tourists' perceptions of place—have primarily focused upon Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the United States; with limited attention towards destinations beyond this remit. Similarly, heritage tourism has been identified as being relatively absent when examining destination positioning and Chinese outbound tourists, with a need to deploy more diverse and creative methodologies to capture individual perceptions, experiences and leisure preferences (Jørgensen et al., 2017). Finally, research examining perceptions of overseas destinations—and the broader field of Chinese outbound tourism—has often adopted a quantitative or conventional approach to research design and data collection (Jin & Wang, 2016).

Upon considering the current methodological trends and knowledge gaps surrounding Chinese outbound tourists' perceptions of place, this article seeks to act somewhat as a corrective. Through focusing on Chinese museum visitors who attended an exhibition at Nanjing Museum (南京博物院: Nanjing Bowuyuan), and by utilising a number of complimentary integrative research methodologies, this study sought to gather the reactions of, and meanings derived from, Chinese visitor perceptions of Western cultural heritage and overseas destination image. Such an approach provided insight into the embodied and affective response to key signifiers of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage from a wide audience, placing particular emphasis upon the feelings, sensations, personalized and subjective engagements with particular, selected, depictions of overseas heritage. By gathering a contemporary depiction of the values motivating China's potential tourists to visit and engage with overseas heritage, we also aim to inform management practices, leisure provision, and destination marketing relevant to destinations where cultural heritage is a prominent pull factor for China's outbound tourists.

Literature Review

Prior to exploring Chinese perceptions of Western cultural heritage, we discuss the literature base surrounding events, exhibitions and the creation of destination image. A critical deconstruction of Scotland's positioning as a heritage destination is also provided to demonstrate the dominant ideological messages perpetuated to align with the nation's drive for tourism. Finally, a review of literature surrounding China's outbound tourism—incorporating visitor perceptions of Chinese cultural heritage—is included to identify the prominent values and motivations that guide Chinese tourists to visit overseas destinations and frame their interpretations of heritage as a tourism product.

Exhibitions, Events and Destination Image

Prefigured on the operations of multi-, trans- and supra-national entities, exhibitions and events are often deemed marketable and profitable elements of capital accumulation in support of the visitor economy. Indeed, once the arbiters of the state (in various forms), the locus of control in influencing the way in which a nation and its image are represented has become exteriorized through, and internalized within, the promotional strategies of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and an array of other (quasi-)autonomous actors (Pike, 2004). Inevitably, this has altered the ways in which a national brand is constructed and promoted at exhibitions; and there has been a notable shift from the display of commodities, through carnivalesque spectacle, to the modern construction of experiential narratives (often digitised) into which viewers, visitors and consumers are invited to insert themselves (Smits & Jansen, 2012).

Drawing from Crompton (1997), destination image can be viewed as, "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" (p. 18). Yet destination image and the positioning of place is a multifaceted construct wherein cognitive, affective

and conative attributes help to inform the techniques of image creation and influence the messages used in promotional strategies (Pike & Ryan, 2004). This is especially pertinent as imagery plays an important function in organising the tourist gaze to generate affective sensations, arouse emotions and stimulate the desires of consumers who seek to attain unique individual tourist experiences (Son & Pearce, 2005). Factors related to individual cultural background (Mackay & Fesenmaier, 2000), pre and post-visit comparison experiences (Önder & Marchiori, 2017), familiarity with the destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993), and individual powers of imagination (Lean et al., 2014) can all contribute towards influencing destination image, perceptions of place and tourists' future behaviour (Lee, 2009). Therefore, the process of consumption is said to be active, where aspects such as socio-cultural background and the imagination of the consumer, or lack thereof, guide individual perceptions of destination image that may differ from the intended manifestation of a brand identity (Pike, 2004). Additionally, the medium through which destination images are positioned also influences travel motivation and perceptions of place.

Research has indicated that exhibitions can work effectively to evoke emotions and influence tourists' motivations to visit or learn more about a specific destination through engaging with distinct artefacts and a guided representation of place (Gil & Ritchie, 2009). As vessels to convey specific cultural discourses surrounding notions of nationalism, identity and heritage, museums—and exhibitions therein—assume a particular symbolism and meaning for the nation (McLean & Cooke, 2003). Thus, exhibitions can act as rich sites in which to examine the production and consumption of national identity and the positioning— or indeed branding—of destinations, leisure experiences, products and expectations (Harvey, 1996). In seeking to acquire Chinese perceptions of a nation, their sense of place and motivations for travel, this study focussed upon the production and consumption of an exhibition to uncover the elements of attraction and emotive responses to s*elected*

representations of cultural heritage. In doing so, it is integral to provide an overview of the dominant narrative that frames Scotland's tourist identity, and illustrate how such values influence the positioning of a destination to a global audience.

Nationhood, heritage and Scotland's tourist identity

The active construction of national identity, or that of 'nationhood', has often been interpreted with reference to Anderson's (1983) notion of an "imagined community". Here, signifiers of nation—manifest in the form of iconography, myths, artefacts, monuments, rituals or cultural practices—are utilised as vessels to convey specific cultural discourses surrounding notions of nationalism, identity and heritage (Anderson, 1983). In constructing a narrative of nationhood, the state—and increasingly corporate actors—may act as producers of "authorized definitions and representations of the national community" (Foster, 1991 p. 248), perpetuating this characterisation in, and through, cultural formulations that seeks to stimulate a sense of belonging and shared heritage (Hardt & Negri, 2000). With regards to tourism, one of the many ways through which nations have sought to create this distinctive national character has been via the appropriation and (re)presentation of cultural heritage (Urry, 1990). More specifically, the distinctive language of heritage tourism has acted as a prevailing force in the creation, promotion and maintenance of particular, and perhaps idealised, versions of national identity (Palmer, 1999).

For Scotland, heritage is considered a prominent element in the development of cultural nationalism and involves an inherent sense of lineage and identity-conferring status (McCrone, 2002). Tourism in Scotland has primarily centred its image upon the nation's heritage, containing explicit reference to the country's natural landscape, the legacy of its built heritage and iconic tartan imagery (Gold & Gold, 1995). The nation's sense of place has long been influenced, and defined by, the values connected to the Romantic movement that

developed from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Bhandari, 2016). Reinforced through the iconography of historical figures such as Robert the Bruce, William Wallace and Bonnie Prince Charlie—and fixed in the consciousness of tourists through popular culture products (e.g. the film *Braveheart* and television series *Outlander*, see Frost, 2006)—Scotland's destination image (however mythical) has become imbued by a somewhat masculine narrative of mysticism, remoteness and an untamed wildness (Edensor, 1998).

Here the focus on tradition, or more accurately, *selected* traditions conducive for a global market, raises important questions related to the role of the past in the present. The representation of heritage often refers to a uniform consumption and interpretation of national culture that supports a clearly defined ideological framework, one that is designed in the interests and ideologies of those who establish such sites or attractions (Hall, 1999). Thus, there is clear interest in the power to control historical knowledge, the power to disseminate such knowledge, the distortion, disappearance, or staging, of the 'authentic' in the name of capital (Chhabra et al., 2003). With reference to Scotland's destination image, this has often been discussed in relation to the absence of a postmodern and post-industrial working-class representation of nationalism (McCrone, 2002). Most notably this depiction is tied to popular film—often with reference to Dannie Boyle's *Trainspotting*—promoting an image of the nation that is far removed from the rural, pre-industrial history of Scotland (Bickett, 1999). Therefore, it would appear that the prevailing national discourse of Scotland is framed through values associated with romanticism—and often serving as a juncture for particular dominant groups to further (re)define the parameters of a 'sanctioned' identity—relying upon heritage as an integral aspect of the nation's tourism offering (Butler, 1998; Scarles, 2004; Yeoman et al., 2005). Both modern and historic representations demonstrate the dynamic and fluid concept of national identity and the manner in which agents' *appropriate* specific elements of culture to form an image, or seek to illustrate an 'authentic' representation of

place that positions, or indeed repositions, the nation to a global marketplace (Durie et al., 2005). Therefore, readings of cultural heritage should be considered polysemic and will be experienced, consumed and performed differently (Wang, 1999).

Within the study underpinning this paper, Nanjing Museum provided a space for visitors to engage with select versions of Scottish cultural heritage. The interpretive experience of the museum visitor is defined in such a way that considers both the provision of that which exists at the site/within the exhibition, and the thoughts, motives and beliefs that belong to those visiting, an aspect that is heavily influenced by a specific cultural background (McLean & Cooke 2003). Thus, individual presumptions, and perhaps prejudices, may shape the nature and perceptions of visitor interpretations as they seek to manage their readings of heritage in an active way (Macdonald, 1997). In essence, to understand how Chinese visitors consume specific images of place, there exists a need to explicate the manner in which China's cultural values guide and frame the motives, beliefs and interpretations of overseas destinations and heritage tourism.

Chinese outbound tourism

Prior to China's economic reforms the mobility of a vast majority of the population was heavily restricted, due, in part, to the political infrastructure and poverty imposed upon many of the nation's citizens (Zhang et al., 2003). The initiation of Mainland Chinese outbound tourism began in 1983, whereby citizens were permitted to visit Hong Kong and Macau. This was followed by further reforms in between 1990 and 1995 that extended travel permission to countries possessing Approved Destination Status for Mainland Chinese tourists (e.g. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Russia, Mongolia and the Philippines). Additional legislation—in the form of 'the Provisional Regulation on Self-supported Outbound Travel'—was enacted in 1997 by the China National Tourism Association and the Ministry

of Public Security, paving the way for self-supported outbound leisure travel beyond pre-determined destinations (Guo et al., 2007).

Typically, this initial development of Chinese outbound tourism has been referred to as the 'first wave', with research suggesting that knowledge, prestige and the enhancement of human relationships were identified as the most significant influencers of Chinese residents' outbound travel behaviour (Hanqin & Lam, 1999). However, with China's rapid economic growth, rise in urbanization, increase in personal wealth and shift in attitude surrounding consumer behaviour, attention is turning towards a 'second wave' of Chinese outbound tourism (Arlt, 2013). Here an emerging number of Chinese travellers are increasingly looking to outbound tourist destinations that meet the demands of a lifestyle based upon self-fulfilment, leisure experiences, experimentation and a strong desire to experience a freedom of international travel that can enable a sense of self-development (Ong & du Cros, 2011). Initially this shift in travel behaviour and leisure preferences has been most pronounced in tier one cities—for example Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen—where residents have access to higher levels of wealth and an increased desire to escape their urban surroundings (Yu, 2014). Here, travel and leisure is viewed amongst Chinese tourists as an avenue to achieving peace, tranquillity and the ability to remove oneself from the everyday anxieties associated with intensive daily workloads and the pursuit for prestige; aspects of everyday life that are often considered leisure constraints among Chinese residents (Dong & Chick, 2012). Furthermore, this emergent second wave of Chinese outbound tourism is witnessing a growth in the number of young independent travellers who possess a desire to enact control over their own itineraries and pace of travel (Xiang, 2013). Possessing good language skills and a high level of education, these tourists are depicted as self-challengers and place greater emphasis upon acquiring experiences (Wu & Pearce, 2014). Despite this, package tours and travelling in small groups remain popular amongst a large majority of Chinese outbound

tourists (Wong & McKercher, 2012). Moreover, luxury tourism centred on travel for the primary purpose of acquiring expensive goods and residing in luxurious accommodation also remains a strong motivation for Chinese travellers who possess the capital to indulge in such practices (Zhu et al., 2016).

Additional investigations into Confucianism, Taoism and Chinese tourists' motivation to travel highlight the importance of self-cultivation, collectivism, spiritual fulfilment and the importance of embracing the natural world to achieve a sense of harmony (Fu et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2008). Taoism reinforces the importance of minimising disruption towards the process of natural development, the relationship between nature and humanity, and the ecological values that encourage development in accordance *with* natural forces (Yan, 2017). Research has indicated that human-environment relationships are also considered integral to Chinese visitors' interpretation of heritage sites and destinations, further emphasizing the significance of traditional philosophical values and beliefs that underpin tourists' perceptions of place (Fu et al., 2017). Therefore, heritage interpretation amongst Chinese visitors is guided by a desire to better understand human relations with heritage landscapes, and the manner through which man-made structures may contribute towards enhancing the tourist experience (Sofield & Li, 2007). The concept of 'authenticity' is also considered a key influencer of Chinese perceptions of heritage. Although such a concept is perceived to be integral to the tourist experience, the Chinese view of authenticity dwells within the physical, spiritual, aesthetic and even social qualities associated to a particular site or cultural landscape (Xu et al., 2008). Thus, it is the place, or perhaps even literary works connected to the heritage site, that give credence to its 'authentic' status (Xu et al., 2008). Despite this, contemporary cultural values emergent in China—such as individualism, materialism and conspicuous consumption—have begun to present something of a challenge to the traditional

Chinese way of life and are influencing a generation in relation to travel motivation, destination choice and the meaning of leisure (Yu, 2014).

Method

Research setting

This article draws upon data obtained from a research project conducted in collaboration with Nanjing Museum in Jiangsu Province, People's Republic of China. A key aim of the research was to gather the reactions of Chinese audiences to an exhibition entitled '*Romantic Scotland'*, and understand how this selected representation of nation influenced perceptions of Western cultural heritage. The exhibition was conceived by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and the Scottish-based company *Nomad Exhibitions*, and brought together 21 oil paintings and 10 works on paper from the National Galleries of Scotland, 48 historic photographs from the HES archive and 15 objects (including three oil paintings) from the HES collection. In addition to the historic material, there was a slideshow of present-day aerial photography of Scotland in each section of the exhibition, as well as a promotional film created by *VisitScotland*. The exhibition focused upon Scotland's built heritage, cultural landscapes and historical figures, with artwork and artefacts organised around the loose themes of 'Castles', 'Land' and 'Sea'. All interpretive text accompanying the exhibition— including the exhibition title, introduction, and exhibition panels—were displayed in both English and Mandarin Chinese (simplified). In April 2017 the exhibition opened at Nanjing Museum for a three-month period (28 April – 28 July 2017) and welcomed 101,188 visitors.

Data collection

The exhibition incorporated a range of methods to capture and analyse the Chinese visitors' experiences, attitudes and interpretations of cultural heritage. Participant responses were

gathered using a graffiti wall installed in the audience engagement area near the exit of the exhibition [see figure 1]. The wall invited visitors to depict their thoughts on Scotland and/or elements that they felt best represented its culture by writing messages or posting pictures. Over the duration of the exhibition a total of 2,647 graffiti notes were collected, of which 557 (21%) were considered relevant, that is data related to the exhibition, destination and aspects of cultural heritage. Likewise, postcards featuring Scottish buildings and landscapes were placed on a table, inviting visitors to write about their desires to visit Scotland and reflect upon the cultural heritage as (re)presented through the exhibition. These were then posted through an imitation Royal Mail pillar box [see figure 2]. A total of 725 postcards were collected from the post box, of which 457 (63%) responses were considered relevant to the research's aims.

[Please place Figures 1 & 2 here]

Additionally, a quintessential imitation British red telephone box [see figure 3] was incorporated into the design of the exhibition. This methodological approach invited visitors to provide their general perceptions following engagement with the exhibition by leaving a 20-second video message on a large digital tablet installed within the telephone box. A total of 5,972 'video diary' messages were collected, of which 787 (13%) were considered relevant to the aims of the research. The low valid sample rate mainly stemmed from the unfamiliarity of visitors with the device or repeated attempts to make a satisfactory recording.

[Please place Figure 3 here]

Attempts to gather individuals' subjective perceptions and consumption of cultural heritage—specifically using qualitative 'experience research methodologies'—is often underdeveloped and requiring attention (Gouthro, 2011). By adopting these methods, we sought to provide a means through which visitors could reflect on the introspective dimensions of their experience (Pekarik et al., 1999), eliciting the personal and emotional

responses attached to perceptions of cultural heritage and tourist aspirations. The use of participant-generated methodologies within this study—such as the graffiti notes, written texts and audio-visual recordings—also fostered a sense of inclusion, particularly for groups who may be considered reluctant to participate in research, such as young people (Guillemin and Drew, 2010). This aspect of inclusion was most evident upon analysing the 'video diary' data where a broad range of participants provided individual perceptions, and thus a rich dataset across differing generations. Therefore, the study was effective in capturing the personal meanings and sense of connectedness that visitors assigned to the cultural heritage on display; highlighting the emotive qualities attached to desired destination and leisure experiences (Poria et al., 2003).

Prior to any data collection, consent to conduct the research project was given by the Director and Curator of Nanjing Museum. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of both the Chinese and UK universities involved with the research project. Signage in Mandarin Chinese (simplified) was placed within the exhibition that detailed the intent of the research, the methods of data capture and the manner in which the data would be used. Visitors were instructed to approach a member of museum staff if they felt uncomfortable participating in the study or having their data used in future outputs.

Data analysis

Prior to analysis, all data were translated from Mandarin Chinese (simplified) to English with the benefit of a bilingual research team that could ensure key subtleties in the data were not overlooked. Once translated, data were sifted and sorted through a process of familiarisation that involved an initial immersion in the data to list key ideas and identify overarching themes, placing attention towards commonalities that came to signify the participants' shared ideas across the accounts gathered (Bryman & Burgess, 2002). Once

sorted and reviewed, the selected data were analysed using Johnson et al's (2004) four

moments of interpretation/reading texts for dominance. Such an approach demanded that

cultural meanings and perceptions attached to the exhibition were considered with reference

to the production, circulation and consumption of the artefacts and exhibition in its entirety.

This process of interpretation prompted a broader consideration of the conditions surrounding

the production of the exhibition, the reading of the exhibition as a cultural product, and a

deeper understanding of the conditions of consumption as related to the visitors' own existing

social milieu (Johnson, 1986).

Adopting this approach to analysis required the use of close reading or 'meaning

condensation' and a conceptual mapping of the data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). During

this phase of the analysis a reading and re-reading of the dataset was conducted. Here,

emphasis was placed upon further categorising themes and analysing their significance in

relation to the aims of the research project and cultural subjectivity attached to the visitors'

interpretation of the heritage on display. Such an approach is consistent with this form of

cultural analysis to ensure that a process of deep analysis or meaning interpretation is

conducted, searching for patterns of meaning or structures of feeling rather than simple

keywords (Johnson et al., 2004). Several commonalities emerged that came to signify the

visitors' shared ideas across the accounts gathered; wherein a connection with nature, cultural

landscapes, notions of exoticism, a perceived authenticity and the desire to achieve an

immersive tourist experience occurred as consistent in a variety of semblances. By cross-

checking datasets and identifying patterns, the most common reoccurring threads in the

visitors' accounts could be verified and the key overarching themes determined (see Miles

and Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, a sensitivity towards certain oddities occurring across

the dataset was also required upon extrapolating patterns of meaning, ensuring that visitor

perceptions were located amidst a process of comparison and contextualization (Johnson et

al., 2004). By adopting this mode of cultural analysis consideration was given to the intentions of the producers of the exhibition, the diverse nature of the consumer readings and the way in which meaning was made from the visitors' engagement with the cultural heritage and select representations of national identity (McLean, 1998). Throughout the analysis phase data were coded by two members of the research team. By introducing additional perspectives from different researchers, a dialogue could be established that fostered reflexivity, added rigor to the coding process and moved analysis beyond the imagination of one single individual (Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Results

The data presented within this article bring together reflections on a diverse range of perceptions attached to participant experiences of the exhibition, examining Chinese interpretations of an overseas destination, its cultural heritage and destination image. In the discussion that follows, these perceptions have been categorised in line with three central themes that collectively represent the experiential landscape across which participants' views were aired. These headings comprise the following: connecting with cultural landscapes and nature; exoticism and a quest for the 'local'; and experiential tourism.

Connecting with cultural landscapes and nature

Naturally influenced by the exhibits on display, and the core theme of romanticism underpinning the exhibition, many of the Chinese visitor perceptions placed emphasis upon natural landscapes and built heritage when reflecting upon desirable aspects of the nation. Data extracted from the video diaries captured these perceptions:

> I like Scotland because it's about poems and distant lands. Misty oceans, vast and endless fields, towering castles, eternal history, past and life and the merging of history and nature.

> Flocks of cattle and sheep, deep castles, lively little European villas and little colourful flowers are as beautiful as fairy tales. The Scottish sky is always so blue, its air crisp and clouds low and thick. Sometimes you can see the wind blows the clouds and the clouds...

> The ocean left a deep impression on me with its roaring waves. The Scottish clouds and sunlight are changeable. I like Scotland because it's magnificent.

The Visitors' reflections upon natural scenery and heritage were, at times, rich and evocative, demonstrating an emotive response towards the content of the exhibition and placing emphasis upon an atmospheric description of the nation's coastline and natural landscape. Additional data extracted from visitor comments reinforced this affinity for the scenic landscapes and cultural heritage, highlighting the importance of Scotland's key tourism products—namely its built heritage, history and interconnectedness with nature:

> Scotland, a place I didn't know before. Now I know Scotland not only has the most classic kilts, but also coasts and meadows, they are so refreshing. (Graffiti notes)

> The Scottish beautiful scenery, castle, music, and kilts are all very romantic, I hope I can learn English well so that I can travel there! (Graffiti note)

> The barren and the brutality of the vast Scottish land, the elegant and delicate ancient castle, the dreamlike and glorious oceans, the poetic Scotland. (Postcard)

> I really like the splendid style of these churches, statues and magnificent architecture. In particular, can't wait to see the Enchanted Forest (Pitlochry) and the amazing islands. I really want to go to Scotland's small towns and museums, churches and monasteries (actually they are great places to get wedding photos taken) (Postcard)

> The Bell Rock Lighthouse and Macbeth are powerful! The power of the nature hits my heart strongly. (Graffiti note)

An emphasis upon the quest to experience nature may be indicative of Chinese tourists' desires to seek fresh air and a cleaner environment (Wang et al., 2018), yet also acquire an experience unique to the contours of an unexplored or 'non-home' natural landscape (Terkenli, 2002). Coupled with these dominant reflections on nature and the natural environment was a strong connection to the central curatorial theme of romanticism. This particular theme was dominant amongst visitors across the qualitative data set, evoking

reflections that focused upon the perceptual sensations and emotive qualities attached to nature, often utilising the term 'romantic' to identify with this particular (re)presentation of the nation:

> Actually, I think Scotland has a romantic atmosphere. Its sea and many other things make it a place that I am looking forward to visiting. And I like Scotland, not just its scenery, but also its romance. (Video diary)

> I have always liked Scotland, in my mind it has always been poetic, romantic and strong all together, this exhibition made me realise that Scotland's romanticism can only truly move you when you stand in front of these oil paintings. (Graffiti note)

> My main impression of Scotland is that it's romantic. The style and feelings it gives you make you relaxed. I quite like that kind of atmosphere. Bye bye. (Video diary)

Adhering to sensitivities towards structures of feeling emerging from within the data (Johnson et al., 2004), visitor perceptions prompted reflections connected to a quest for a sense of peace, tranquillity and simplicity; aspects of the visitor experience that shaped reflections surrounding individual desires and the perceptions of the destination image:

> I like Scotland because it's a world of tranquillity and fairy tales. (Video diary)

> Scotland: classical, dreamlike, simple and unsophisticated, I want to go there. Come on, come on, come on! (Graffiti note)

> The beauty of simplicity. The most peaceful and tranquil scenery. (Postcard)

> The castle of Scotland is similar to the idyllic life of Jiangnan (江南), poetic and romantic, yearn for a simple life. (Graffiti note)

> The scenic mountains and rivers of Scotland make people feel relaxed. I hope there will be a chance for me to see Edinburgh with my own eyes. (Graffiti note)

> After seeing the beautiful scenery of Scotland, I feel the glens and lochs there are so beautiful and touching, makes you feel happy and relaxed, hopefully next time I'll go to Scotland and see for myself! (Postcard)

The natural landscape and scenery—particularly the coastline—acted as a key signifier of identity for many of the Chinese visitors, with emphasis upon the sensations of experience conjured through the thought of potential visits. Such emotive responses were

indicative of the philosophical traditions that accompany the consumptive experiences of

Chinese tourists (Fu et al., 2017), yet also demonstrate the manner through which mediated

forms of representation evoke emotions and sensations in response to a particular reading of

that which is encountered (Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Beyond an affective attachment towards the

natural environment, heritage and landscape, the desire to experience 'authentic' local

cultural customs became an additional dominant theme across the data set. What was of key

concern regarding the Chinese visitor interests and desires—and a prominent concept across

the themes uncovered—was the importance of the experience economy and the ability to

connect with an 'exotic' nation in a personal and memorable way (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Exoticism and a quest for the 'local'

Research has indicated that an emerging number of Chinese visitors to heritage sites and

tourist destinations are searching for a deep excursion into the life of a society they visit to

acquire a sense of 'otherness' and 'authenticity' (Xu et al., 2008). The exhibition provoked

many of the Chinese visitors to reflect upon the 'exotic', reaffirming the emerging interest of

Chinese visitors to seek a touristic leisure experience that was considered new, unique and

possessing a sense of difference (Chow & Murphy, 2008). Comments retrieved from the data

demonstrated this affinity for the 'new', with many utilising the term 'exotic', or even

strange, to describe cultural customs, scenery and traditional Highland dress:

> Scotland impressed me as being an exotic place with men in kilts and its castles and
> so on. I like Scotland because it is humorous and yet serious, aloof and romantic.
> (Video diary)

> I was under the impression that Scotland is very beautiful place. Men there are strange
> as they wear skirts. There are lots of castles, green fields and seaside. (Video diary)

> Scotland is full of exotic charm, I hope in the future, I can travel there with my
> parents and the one who I love. (Postcard)

> It's really different to look at the outside world from my own world. (Graffiti note)

Whilst the translated data demonstrated a prominent use of the term 'exotic' to describe landscapes and cultural heritage, many of the visitors adopted the following Chinese characters 异域 (*yiyu*) to frame their perceptions. Although in combination these characters may refer to the term 'exotic', there are several differing connotations attached to this translation. Standing isolated, the character *yi* (异) conveys the meaning of difference or something as other, unusual and/or strange; whereas *yu* (域) refers to a field, region, area or domain. The deconstruction of these particular characters highlighted the Chinese perceptions of 'otherness' as predominantly reflected through the natural landscapes, further heightening the importance of Scotland's iconic natural scenery as a strong motivating force for overseas tourists to visit. Visitors were also inspired by the exhibition to seek out, 'feel' and *experience* 'authentic' and 'local' cultural customs, an aspect that was integral to shaping desired destination and leisure experiences:

> I dream one day I can go to this romantic city and experience its style and custom. (Graffiti note)

> To feel the local custom and practice, wearing a characteristic Scottish kilt and holding the one I love. (Graffiti note)

> I would like to experience the common local customs even more than seeing the famous sights because what is authentic is always the most beautiful. (Postcard)

> My heart longs for Scotland. [I] want to get lost in the Scottish local customs! (Postcard)

> Very beautiful, if time allows it's worth visiting beautiful landscapes to experience the local customs and practice. (Postcard)

> Chinese and Western oil paintings convey different emotions but are equally beautiful! I hope I will have the chance to visit in person and experience the most authentic Scottish customs. (Postcard)

Many of the Chinese visitors located the quest for 'authenticity' through the achievement of an existential state of *being* actuated by certain experiences and activities

(Wang, 1999). More specifically, authenticity and a genuine 'local' tourist experience was to be attained through a sense of *being* and the resultant intersubjective emotions derived from an immersion within the culture, as opposed to an 'object-related authenticity' acquired through simply *seeing* heritage sites, artefacts and exhibits (Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Additionally, and in adhering to certain oddities, unexpected remarks and strangeness emerging across the data set (Johnson et al., 2004), visitors reflected upon culture, clothing and a way of life that appeared to embody a sense of freedom, escapism and tolerance towards perceived difference that further reinforced notions of 'otherness':

> I think my impression of Scotland is that it's a romantic and passionate country. But how do I put it…I like Scotland because of its passion. For example, the kilts are pretty special. I've always felt that a country, where people like wearing skirts, should be hospitable and open minded. (Video diary)

> I think this exhibition is very good. My impression of Scotland is a brave and hospitable nation dancing in skirts. By showing it next to the Jiangnan (江南) section, this exhibition helps us to understand more about the differences between the two places. (Video diary)

> Dear me: I wish 10 years from now I can still live wildly and just be me. Go to Scotland. Yearn for the free life in Scotland. (Graffiti note)

> Um… Scotland gives me the impression of being a tranquil and beautiful place, where people lived a really simple life. But what I saw here makes me guess that Scotland might have little towns along a riverbank or on the coast? Actually it's not bad to live in such a place. It's worry free and you can live a carefree life. (Video diary)

> To the future self, in 5 years, I want to walk along the Scottish castle with you guys-- my most important people. So, you really need to work hard for now! Pursue the free and romantic life. (Postcard)

Despite China's socio-political shift and infiltration of global cultural values post-Mao, comments concerning Scotland's quality of life and an apparent open-minded, free and accepting culture reflected the heightened levels of censorship that have become synonymous with Chinese society (King et al., 2013). Such reflections further reinforced the visitors' desire to seek out leisure experiences, or even a way of life, that extended beyond the conditions of their own cultural realm; emphasizing the freedom of self-expression and the

embrace of that which is viewed as 'other'. Thus, the Chinese visitors' search for 'authenticity' firmly rested in the intangible and cultural qualities attached to an experiential connection with heritage, landscapes and a perceived way of life. It is to this notion of 'experiential consumption' (Beeho & Prentice, 1997) that we turn to in a bid to frame our understanding of the Chinese visitors' perceptions of an overseas destination and desires to connect with its cultural heritage.

Experiential tourism

The consumption and interpretation of the exhibits and artefacts by the Chinese visitors provided a space with which to express the experiential dimensions of the visual and elicit a desire to situate themselves amidst the heritage on display; a response that exposed the nature of experiences that were sought after and revealed information pertaining to an experience of place (Trauer & Ryan, 2005). An overwhelming majority of Chinese visitors voiced a desire to experience the natural elements as depicted through the landscapes, evoking a sense of connection between the visitor emotions, natural environment and atmosphere connected to heritage sites:

> I hope that one day, I can go to the Scottish Highland and see the sunset on the grassland with my own eyes; listen to the bagpipe; and watch Scottish boys wearing Scottish kilt. (Postcard)

> I would like to visit where heroes fought their battle till death -- Stirling castle. Hear "freedom" with a long roaring echo in the wind, watch Scottish men in kilts dancing, read aloud one of Robert Burns' classical poems. Scotland, please wait for me. (Postcard)

> I will go to Edinburgh if I get the chance to visit Scotland, to experience the mysterious and beautiful Castle. I hope my postcard will arrive in Scotland beforehand, and wait for me there. (Postcard)

> Scotland is an atmospheric and picturesque country. My dream is to go to Scotland and experience their cultural landscapes. Thank you (Video diary)

Depictions of the cultural landscapes provided a connection with nature and key heritage sites that was imparted through thoughts, feelings and beliefs in relation to desired experiences. In this sense, the importance of connecting with cultural heritage by attaining feeling through activities—relational to the natural world, built environment and local customs—was integral to seeking meaningful destination and leisure experiences and demonstrated the notion that heritage sites, landscapes and cultural rituals may take the form of imagined engagements (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999). In conjunction with the desire to experience aspects of local cultural customs—and achieve an experiential connection with the destination through self-discovery and a search for the exotic (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006) — many of the visitors reinforced the affective qualities attached to their tourist aspirations:

> The romance of Scotland runs over with the melodious bagpipe. I just hope to stand upon the isolated lighthouse, watching your boats sail towards me from afar. (Postcard)

> Wish I could live the relaxed life depicted in the paintings, climb high peaks and watch the weather change, must be so beautiful! (Postcard)

> Each of the Scottish castles is having its own distinctive characters, grandeur, beauty, and a little bit of hidden sadness. Hope I can visit this land some day in the future and experience the enthusiasm and mystery of Scotland. I will graduate soon and find my way in the society, I hope this visit to Nanjing is a goodbye visit to my student life. Hope I will have the courage to face the society, happy graduation to me! (Postcard)

> The colourful oil paintings lead us to step into the romantic Scottish culture. Edinburgh combines modern and classical features perfectly, the great ancient walls of the monastery take me to a journey through time to have experienced the history and beliefs. The mountains, grassland, blue oceans and sky of Scotland all deliver and express the romance of Scottish people. I hope one day I can have a romantic trip to Scotland. (Postcard)

> I hope I can visit Loch Katrine in the future, sitting there quietly and meditating! Superb exhibition, enabled me to experience the ancient Scottish culture and inspired me with infinite daydreams. Thanks! (Postcard)

> I want to bring my single-lens reflex camera to go to romantic Scottish castles, watching the sunrise in the morning and watching the sunset in the evening. (Graffiti note)

The visitors' reflections revealed insight into the intrapersonal and subjective connections with place and space, often incorporating a reference to the emotions and sensations associated with specific tourist ambitions. These experiential desires were infused with reference to the affective qualities attached to an experience of place, and demonstrated the manner in which visitors' constructed and consumed an imagined and idealised version of a tourist destination. Such reflections denote the importance of affectual connections with place and the embodied and sensual practices that work towards shaping the tourist experience (Scarles, 2010). Thus, the participants' emotive and affective responses captured the myriad ways in which differing people and cultures come to consume places and add meaning to experiences—or indeed even perceived experiences—of particular heritage sites, cultural customs and destinations (Rakić & Chambers, 2012).

Discussion and Conclusions

In seeking to decipher the Chinese visitor perceptions of place, it is important to acknowledge that the visitor experiences will have been guided by the provision of information, signifiers of place and cultural value embodying the exhibits on display. Yet this process of heritage production, certainly with respect to positioning destinations, is a common product of the machinations of modern heritage tourism (Urry & Larsen, 2011). To understand the consumption/interpretation of iconic markers of destination image, there is a need to consider the consumer as an active agent capable of extrapolating various meanings relational to their own positionality. Moreover, to understand the nuances and complexities of making sense of cultural heritage, an approach is required that can understand visitors' interests and the "type of emotional involvement they seek" (Poria et al., 2009 p. 103).

Within this study, the visitor reflections demonstrated a strong desire to *experience* local and 'authentic' cultural customs and engage with the heritage landscape through

perceived tourist activities and the *emotional,* sensory and *embodied* connection to the natural environment. Not dissimilar to recent studies examining authenticity and Chinese domestic tourists (see Yang, 2011), a desire for leisure experiences that centred on 'exoticism', difference and 'otherness' were also reflected through visitor comments. Whilst the staging of exhibitions may operate effectively as cultural products to reify a sense of 'otherness', the Chinese visitors' emphasis was placed upon the intangible qualities attached to pastoral landscapes, an 'open' and accepting way of life, and the nation's distinctive traditional dress. These specific representations of assumed national culture posed as seductive tourist experiences that were able to satisfy the desire for an engagement with aspects of mysticism, enchantment and the exotic 'other' (Picard & Di Giovine, 2014).

By drawing out the 'experiential value' of heritage in the data, we have seen an emphasis on the importance of feelings, sensations and consumer thoughts attached to a deep immersion with the visitor experience, a desire by individuals to achieve a personalized, subjective and intangible engagement with certain aspects of cultural heritage (Wilson & McIntosh, 2007). The exhibition was able to prompt affective responses from the Chinese visitors, an aspect of the consumer experience that evoked aspirations to seek out access to— and a lived experience of—tourist activities that could be authenticated through the visitors' emotional and sensuous relatedness (Zhu, 2012). In addition, visitors voiced a strong desire to experience many of the qualities associated with the intra-personal dimensions, both sensual and symbolic, that were attached to the heritage landscapes as portrayed through the destination image. In this instance, a connection to the natural world manifested through expressions and desires closely aligned to the quest for feelings and embodied emotions that could be derived from perceived/imagined leisure experiences. Thereby, results from the study reinforced the importance of traditional Chinese philosophies—specifically values underpinning Taoism—in shaping perceptions of the natural world and the predominance of

nature in guiding tourists' desired experiences. Such findings further reinforce the importance of China's cultural and philosophical heritage in shaping the 'Chinese tourist gaze' and an anthropomorphic engagement with leisure experiences predicated on landscapes and nature (Li et al., 2019).

These reflections are particularly pertinent for defining future markets and tourist products given results from the survey and on-site observations demonstrated that a vast majority of visitors to the exhibition—and thus participants in this research—were relatively young[i]. Typically, it is believed that this generational cohort is most likely to adopt a secular orientation and engage with modern values infiltrating Chinese culture—such as materialism and individualism—and least likely to demonstrate an attachment to core values underpinned by traditional Chinese philosophy (Yu, 2014). This aspect of consumption holds great relevance for stakeholders that constitute leisure as a subject field and whom are seeking to capitalize on the process of planned placemaking, heritage tourism and the (re)positioning of a destination's image (Prentice, 1993). In conjunction with a desire to integrate themselves into the atmosphere through which one experiences differing heritage settings and acquire the affective qualities of place, Chinese perceptions placed added attention upon the notion of difference and a yearning to capture an 'authentic' experience of the local culture. The concept of authenticity for Chinese tourists traditionally incorporates the integration of place and space with a spiritual, artistic or literary connection, aspects that are said to make the tourist site *real* (Xu et al., 2008). Thus, and in accordance with the visitors' reflections, the intangible cultural capital attached to heritage sites and the accumulation of experiences are becoming increasingly important, specifically in relation to a style of tourism that is driven by a yearning for understanding as insight as opposed to understanding as formal learning (MacCannell, 1976; Prentice, 2001; Shen et al., 2019).

Whilst we acknowledge that China's consumer market is becoming increasing heterogeneous (see Huang and Lu, 2017), the data in this study provide practical insight for the creative economy sector, tourism agencies and destination management organizations that seek to position Western cultural heritage to a Chinese audience. The data suggest that a heightened desire for the unique, authentic, immersed and (slow) experiential tourism offering—influenced by personal impulses—could potentially be shaping a 'third wave' of Chinese outbound tourism (Bao et al., 2019). Therefore, and as is best practice in the industry, it would seem apparent that destination offerings for the Chinese market around which experiences are built will hold the most appeal. More specifically, overseas heritage destinations should emphasize their natural wildness, emotional and experiential tourist offerings, qualities that were dominant across the dataset and expressed amongst a young generational cohort.

Exhibitions such as *Romantic Scotland* were clearly able to play an important learning function. As such, and especially in markets where perhaps little is known about any given destination (in this exhibition, there was on average a basic understanding of Scotland), exhibitions should continue to be utilized as an effective tool in the development of, and quest for, knowledge of certain preferred or directed understandings of destination image. In this sense, multi-agency collaboration between tourism stakeholders and the museum/exhibition sector can be beneficial for tourism promotion and growth among overseas heritage destinations. Finally, we point to the importance, and potential, of innovative social science methodologies that we consider appropriate and best-suited to capturing the complexities of leisure, tourism, tourist perceptions, and visitor preferences. Although research has sought to examine Chinese perceptions of heritage that focus on visitor attitudes, cultural differences and motivation (Yan, 2017), few studies have sought to uncover the manner in which cultural ethos, affective and emotive qualities contribute

towards framing and enhancing the perception of overseas heritage sites and destinations (Jin & Wang, 2016). Indeed, it is common to note that 'experience research methodologies' are often neglected when researching the complex relations connected to interpretive experiences and cultural representations (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). By employing a mixture of traditional, visual and innovative research methodologies we were able to provide the opportunity for visitors to voice their intrapersonal and subjective reactions to a specific overseas destination, yielding a large and robust data set for comparison across the differing methodological approaches adopted. In doing so, our contribution to the extant literature focused on the need to adopt an emic approach to gathering Chinese perceptions of Western cultural heritage and destination image, one that could capture phenomena as opposed to relying on researcher-imposed categories, and thus elicit the embodied, sensual and emotional responses attached to the visitor perceptions. In relation to China's outbound tourism market, it is clear that a more nuanced understanding of how Chinese visitors perceive the interface between the past and present is required; adopting diverse and innovative methodologies will no doubt aid in gathering these interpretive experiences that can cater for the nation's diverse cultural influences.

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[i] Visitors were also asked to take part in a self-completion survey (n=1,174 usable responses) on-site at the exhibition in a bid to gather opinions surrounding the exhibition content and perceptions of Scotland. Of the total number of visitors who were surveyed, 76% fell within

the age range of under 18 to 30 years of age, indicating a relatively young visitor profile. In addition, visitor observations were carried out through a mobile tracking software application which monitored visitor behaviour. Of those tracked through the mobile tracking app (n=792 completed observations), 69% fell within the age range of 16 to 30 years of age further indicating a young visitor profile to the exhibition.