

University of Massachusetts Amherst  
**ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst**

---

Travel and Tourism Research Association:  
Advancing Tourism Research Globally

2016 ttra International Conference

---

# A study of Chinese single children's family vacation and wellbeing

Mingjie Gao  
*University of Waterloo*

Mark Havitz  
*University of Waterloo*

Luke Potwarka  
*University of Waterloo*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra>

---

Gao, Mingjie; Havitz, Mark; and Potwarka, Luke, "A study of Chinese single children's family vacation and wellbeing" (2016). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally. 2.*  
[https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra/2016/Grad\\_Student\\_Workshop/2](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra/2016/Grad_Student_Workshop/2)

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@library.umass.edu](mailto:scholarworks@library.umass.edu).

## **A study of Chinese single children's family vacation and wellbeing**

### **Introduction**

In 1980, China's central government published a National Population Planning policy which stated that every new married couple could have only one child (Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, 1980). After 35 years' implementation of the National Population Planning policy, the family structure of Chinese families has been transformed dramatically. First, three member families are dominant in current nuclear families. In the sixth National Census of People's Republic of China, it has been reported that as of November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 the average family includes 3.10 members (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). Second, as most families have only one child, the second Chinese single children generation (children of first single children generation) will experience the absence of uncles, aunts and cousins. Third, the relationship between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren are changing. The only child receives most of the attention and resources of both parents as well as two sets of grandparents, which is what Cutler (1988) described as the 4-2-1 indulgence factor.

Recently, China's central government announced the relaxation on one-child policy which allows each couple to have two children (China's central Government, 2015). The implication and renewal of the national population planning have made Chinese single children as a unique generation in Chinese history. This research has been developed to examine Chinese family vacations in the single child policy context.

As documented, family vacations can be beneficial to family members' health and quality of life (Durko & Petrick, 2013; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). However, due to the specific family structure and societal challenges Chinese single child families face, it is appropriate to revisit the validity and applicability of extant research findings of family vacations and understand whether and how family vacations influence Chinese single children and their family. Therefore, this study intends to explore descriptive representations of Chinese single children's family vacations; to evaluate single children's perceptions of the quality of their family vacation experiences; and to examine the influence of family vacations on Chinese single children's subjective wellbeing (SWB).

### **Literature Review**

Amid fluid family dynamics and influential factors out of families, family vacations have been recognized as an effective means for family members to spend quality time together to help improve communications within a relationship and strengthen family functioning (Chesworth, 2003; Hill, 2000; Lehto, Choi, & Lin, 2009; Lehto, Lin, Chen & Choi, 2012). Additionally, through leisure activity participation during family vacations, family members are able to get away from daily routines and learn new things in a supportive environment, which can be an important builder and maintainer of individual wellbeing (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Caldwell, 2005).

By critically reviewing the literature, it can be found that there are two research gaps. First, understandings of family vacation experiences outside a western perspective are limited. It has been suggested that family values and representations of vacations varies across cultures (Carr, 2011). Thus, research within family vacations should consider both cultural diversity and

familial characteristics. The increased diversity and fluidity of family forms will drive us to understand specific travel behaviors in different contexts. However, the extant research on family vacations are mostly conducted in a Western context, which tends to privilege traditional familial structures (e.g., Lehto et al., 2009; Larsen, 2013; Shaw et al. 2008; Schanzel, 2008).

Second, children's voices in family vacation research are fairly weak. According to Greene and Hogan (2005), children were repositioned as subjects rather than objects. As a result, there are increasing studies that have realized children as active agents and included children's perspectives in family vacation marketing research (Gram, 2007; Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001; Thornton, Shaw & Williams, 1997). Yet, little attention has been paid on the influences of family vacations taking from children's perspectives (Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2008). There are studies argued that those children's experiences and expectations on family vacations may differ from their parents' (Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, & Havitz, 2008; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Therefore, further research is needed to better understand children's perspectives that how family vacations influence their lives.

Built on the discussions above, this study represents on an attempt to fill in part of those research gaps with the aim to understand whether and how family vacations can play a beneficial role to enhance single children's SWB. Letho, Fu, Li and Zhou (2013) pointed out that different from western society having family vacations as a tradition; vacations had been involved into modern family life in China in recent decades. In addition, due to the unique family structure, the representations within Chinese single child family vacation can be different from western countries. First, as single children receive more attention compared to children from more than one child families, it is important to explore single children's experiences and role during the process of family vacation, which may add insights to extant family vacation studies. Second, since the family size is getting smaller, the interactions within single child families during vacations may also be different from families with several children. Third, visiting families and friends has been a major form of family travel in the past, however single children families, especially the next generation of single children, will experience the absence of most relatives (uncles, aunts, cousins). Consequently, family travel patterns might be influenced as an inevitable result. Due to the unique structure and cultural dynamics of Chinese single children families, their family vacation experiences deserve explicit attention. Besides providing descriptive representations of Chinese single children's family vacations, this study will also explore the relationship between quality of experience, family interaction and SWB. Informed by the bottom-up spillover theory of subjective wellbeing (Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007; Kruger, 2012) and the family system theory in family leisure setting (Orthner & Mancini, 1991), this study proposes that a) quality of family vacation experience and b) family interaction will positively and directly predict the increase of SWB, and c) quality of family vacation experience will mediate the relationship between family interaction and the increase of SWB.

## **Methodology**

**Sample.** To achieve the objectives of this study, empirical study will be conducted based on a post-positivist orientation. To be specific, a regional-scale survey will be conducted in the urban area of three big-size cities located in the North, East, South part of Mainland China. Target participants of this study will be middle school students aged between 12 to 15 years old (grade 7 to 9). In China's education system, middle school is the period that connects preliminary school and high school, thus consider as a transitional period in young people's life. One middle school

from each city will be recruited as a case in this study. The amount of students varies from 900 to 1700 among the three case schools. In this study, 600 students from each school (200 students from each grade) will be randomly sampled.

**Data collection.** Data collection will take place at three time points. The first phase starts one week before participants go on family vacations to gain a baseline of participants' SWB. The second phase will be the time that participants go on vacations. The third phase will be the following week when participants come back to school.

This study will use a self-reported questionnaire to collect data including both close-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire consists of five parts: demographic information, travel information, assessment of SWB, quality of experiences, and family interactions. In terms of measuring SWB, global life satisfaction, satisfaction with different life domains and the balance of affect will be assessed. The quality of experiences during family vacations will be measured with the scale in Neal et al.'s (2007) study. Participants will evaluate their family vacation experience quality from six aspects: perceived freedom from control, perceived freedom from study, involvement, arousal, mastery, and spontaneity. Last, the scale of family function and leisure travel designed by Lehto et al. (2009) will be used to assess family interactions. Respondents' sociodemographic information (i.e., gender, family economic status, year of study) will be used to examine the differences within group. Moreover, the examined results in three cities will be compared to examine if there are differences in terms of geographic location. Except the measures of SWB, the measurements of family interaction and quality of vacation experience have been developed with adult samples. To increase the effectiveness of applying existing scales to this study, the items in original scales will be modified to make sense for middle school students. Additionally, a pilot study will be employed with middle school students before conducting the formal survey. Since the potential participants are minors, an information letter will be sent to participants' parents or guardians for their consent before the researcher starts to recruit participants.

**Data analysis.** SPSS and AMOS will be used to manage the data, and both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics will be employed to analyze the data. Descriptive analysis will be applied to represent the characteristics of participants' family vacation. Paired sample t-test will be run to compare participants' SWB before and after vacation. Factor analysis will be used to deduct dimensionality of activity participation and family interactions. Structural equation model will be used to test the structural relationships among SWB, family interaction, and quality of family vacation experience.

### **Expected outcomes**

We hope this study could generate theory about the nature of Chinese single children's family vacation. To explore descriptive representations of typical Chinese family vacations, this study is expected to describe the changing dynamics of family vacations from children's perspectives by describing activity participations and children's interactions with their family members. To evaluate single children's perceived quality of their family vacation experiences, this study will report children's trip reflections. To examine the influence of family vacations on Chinese single children's SWB, this study is expected to demonstrate that taking family vacations has positive SWB impacts for Chinese single children. Finally, this study will reveal relationships of family interactions, quality of vacation experience and children's SWB.

## References

- Caldwell, L. L. (2005). "Leisure and health: Why is leisure therapeutic?" *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 33(1): 7-26.
- Carr, N. (2011). "Children's and Families' Holiday Experience." Routledge.
- Chen, Y., X. Y. Lehto, and L. Cai (2013). "Vacation and well-being: a study of Chinese tourists." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 42: 284-310.
- Chesworth, N. (2003). "The family vacation: a double - edged sword." *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 27(4): 346-348.
- China's Central Government. (2015). "Decisions for two children policy." Retrieved from [http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2016/content\\_5033853.htm](http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2016/content_5033853.htm).
- Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and State Council's Resolution Concerning the Strengthening of Birth Control and Strictly Controlling Population Growth. (1980, May 20). *People's Daily*, p.1.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., and R. Larson (1987). "Validity and reliability of the Experience-Sampling Method." *The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 175(9): 526-536.
- Cutler, B. (1988). "China's little emperors." *American Demographics*, 10(3): 58.
- Dolnicar, S., V. Yanamandram, and K. Cliff (2012). "The contribution of vacations to quality of life." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(1): 59-83.
- Durko, A. M., and J. F. Petrick (2013). "Family and relationship benefits of travel experiences: a literature review." *Journal of Travel Research*, 52(6): 720-730.
- Gram, M. (2007). "Children as co-decision makers in the family? The case of family holidays." *Young Consumers: Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers*, 8(1): 19-28.
- Greene, S., and D. Hogan (Eds.). (2005). "Researching children's experience: Approaches and methods." Sage.
- Hilbrecht, M., S. M. Shaw, F. M. Delamere, and M. E. Havitz (2008). "Experiences, perspectives, and meanings of family vacations for children." *Leisure/Loisir*, 32(2): 541-571.
- Hill, B. J. (2000, September). "Trends in family travel." In Paper presented at the 5th Outdoor Recreation & Tourism Trends Symposium.
- Larsen, J. R. K. (2013). "Family Flow: The Pleasures of 'Being Together' in a Holiday Home." *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 13(3): 153-174.
- Lee, B., A. Graefe, and R. Burns (2008). "Family recreation: a study of visitors who travel with children." *World Leisure Journal*, 50(4): 259-267.
- Lehto, X. Y., S. Choi, Y. C. Lin, and S. M. MacDermid (2009). "Vacation and family functioning." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(3): 459-479.
- Lehto, X. Y., X. Fu, H. Li, and L. Zhou (2013). "Vacation benefits and activities: Understanding Chinese family travelers." *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*,

- Lehto, X. Y., Y. C. Lin, Y. Chen, and S. Choi (2012). "Family vacation activities and family cohesion." *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 29(8): 835-850.
- Lou, J., and A. Xu (2008). "A study on the way of traveling and characteristics of the urbanities in Shanghai: Based on the new vacation system." *Tourism Science*, 22(4): 37-42.
- National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2011). "The six National Population Census." Retrieved from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/zgrkpc/dlc/>.
- Neal, J. D., Uysal, M., & Sirgy, M. J. (2007). The effect of tourism services on travelers' quality of life. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46(2), 154-163.
- Nickerson, N. P., and C. Jurowski (2001). "The influence of children on vacation travel patterns." *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 7(1): 19-30.
- Schanzel, H. A. (2008). "The New Zealand family on holiday: Values, realities and fun." In *Proceedings to the New Zealand Tourism and Hospitality Research Conference 2008*.
- Schanzel, H., H. Schänzel, I. Yeoman, and E. Backer (Eds.). (2012). "Family tourism: Multidisciplinary perspectives". Channel View Publications.
- Shaw, S. M., M. E. Havitz, and F. M. Delemere (2008). " 'I Decided to Invest in My Kids' Memories': Family Vacations, Memories, and the Social Construction of the Family." *Tourism Culture & Communication*, 8(1): 13-26.
- Su, L., and L. Wang (2007). "On the characteristics of rural tourism market in the periphery of cities: A case study of Changsha." *Tourism Tribune*, 22(2): 67-71.
- Tedeschi, R. G., and L. G. Calhoun (2004). "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence". *Psychological inquiry*, 15(1): 1-18.
- Thornton, P. R., G. Shaw, and A. M. Williams (1997). "Tourist group holiday decision-making and behaviour: the influence of children." *Tourism Management*, 18(5): 287-297.
- Uysal, M., Sirgy, M. J., Woo, E., & Kim, H. L. (2016). Quality of life (QOL) and well-being research in tourism. *Tourism Management*, 53, 244-261.
- Zabriskie, R. B., and B. P. McCormick (2003). "Parent and child perspectives of family leisure involvement and satisfaction with family life." *Journal of Leisure Research*, 35(2): 163-189.