

The Taiwanese Perception of Mainland Chinese Tourists

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Abstract

Ever since the Cross-Strait Relationship Agreement was signed between Mainland China and Taiwan in mid 2008, tourism to Taiwan has been in high demand for mainlanders. However, a portion of the local Taiwanese have a strong feeling about Chinese tourists. The reasons include pressure on carrying capacity, political beliefs, culture, and social ethics. The rapid increase of Chinese tourists has contributed to Taiwan's economy through trade and infrastructural development, as it has in other countries, yet it has caused damage to Taiwan's society and environment in some cases. This paper examines the perceived image of Mainland China as a destination from the perspective of the Taiwanese, and attempts to understand how Taiwanese concerns over Taiwan as a destination for the Mainland Chinese impacts upon this image, and on their desire to visit the mainland. The results provide insights into: (1) the elements in the formation of the perceived image of Mainland China and of Taiwan, (2) the motivational factors for travel to Mainland China, and (3) the Taiwanese expectation of the layout of an ideal destination as their motivation for travel.

Introduction

The politics and history of the relationship between the People's Republic of China (PRC, Mainland China) and the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan) has been a sensitive subject for decades (Bush, 2013). Only recently has Taiwan become a tourist destination for Mainland Chinese under the Cross-Strait Relation Agreement established in 2008. Prior to that there was 60 years of travel restrictions since the Chinese Civil War in 1949 (Cheng, 2009). Initially, Mainland tourists were limited to package tours to Taiwan, but as promotion for bilateral travel increased due to travel demand, mainland tourists were granted independent travel as of June 21, 2011 (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2015). By March 2012, Mainland Chinese had replaced Japanese tourists in terms of the highest travel frequency to Taiwan, with a record of 2.6 million trips (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2012). In 2015, this reached its highest peak of 4.1 million trips, making up 40.08 percent of Taiwan's foreign visitors (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2015). Though Taiwan's economic growth increased, maintaining the positive relationship between carrying capacity and such mass

tourism has been difficult, with social disputes and environmental damage the outcome.

Tourism development inevitably will induce changes in the social aspects of a destination, and the magnitude of this change is dependent upon its carrying capacity (Saveriades, 2000). Carrying capacity has been the or izedas the cause of possible dispute best visitors and a host community, therefore maximum level of use should be measured before deterioration occurs (McIntyre, 1993; In skeep, 1991; McCool and Lime, 2001).The point often overlooked about mass tourism is that it often only takes a small amount of unacceptable tourist behavior within the host's territory to trigger negative image and conflicts. From a local resident's point of view then, tourists are seen as representatives of their home country. For this reason, the local's perceived image of the foreigner's country may cause changes to their own travel motivations, or in other cases prejudice and bias. Therefore, while tourism does not necessarily create direct prejudice or improvement to social relations within host-guest relations, it can create the opportunity for adverse social contact (Anastasopoulous, 1992).Thus, this paper seeks to explore the perceived image of Mainland China from the perspective of the Taiwanese. This is followed by a discussion of the relationships between tourist image, tourist motivation, and tourist expectations of a destination.

Tourist destination Image

Destination image is the tourist's impression, beliefs, and knowledge of a destination (Crompton,1979). Several studies have suggested that destination image could alter tourist choice of traveling behaviors (Pearce, 1982; Echtner and Ritche, 1991; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Due to it's impact on supply and demand (Tasci and Gartner 2007; Baloglu and Brinberg 1997; Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Walmsley and Young 1998), the role of destination image helps us to understand tourist behavior to effectively design a marketing strategy that could influence their decision (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Pipike, Lee, and Cooper, 2017 (forthcoming)). With the development of modern technology, people can have easier access to destination images generated by the private and public sectors. These images could also be altered by sharing personal experience online, where it is easy for suppliers to spread information to a large audience (Dwivedi, 2009). Social media has become popular tool for potential tourists due to its interactive comment exchanges. Overtime, tourists grew more reliable on online reviews written from previous travelers than travel agencies (Pipike, Lee, and Cooper, 2017). But even so, Govers and Gos' (2004) study showed that there are significant differences between reality and online image. This is partially, because the source of this image change consists of bias opinion, where dissatisfaction could be

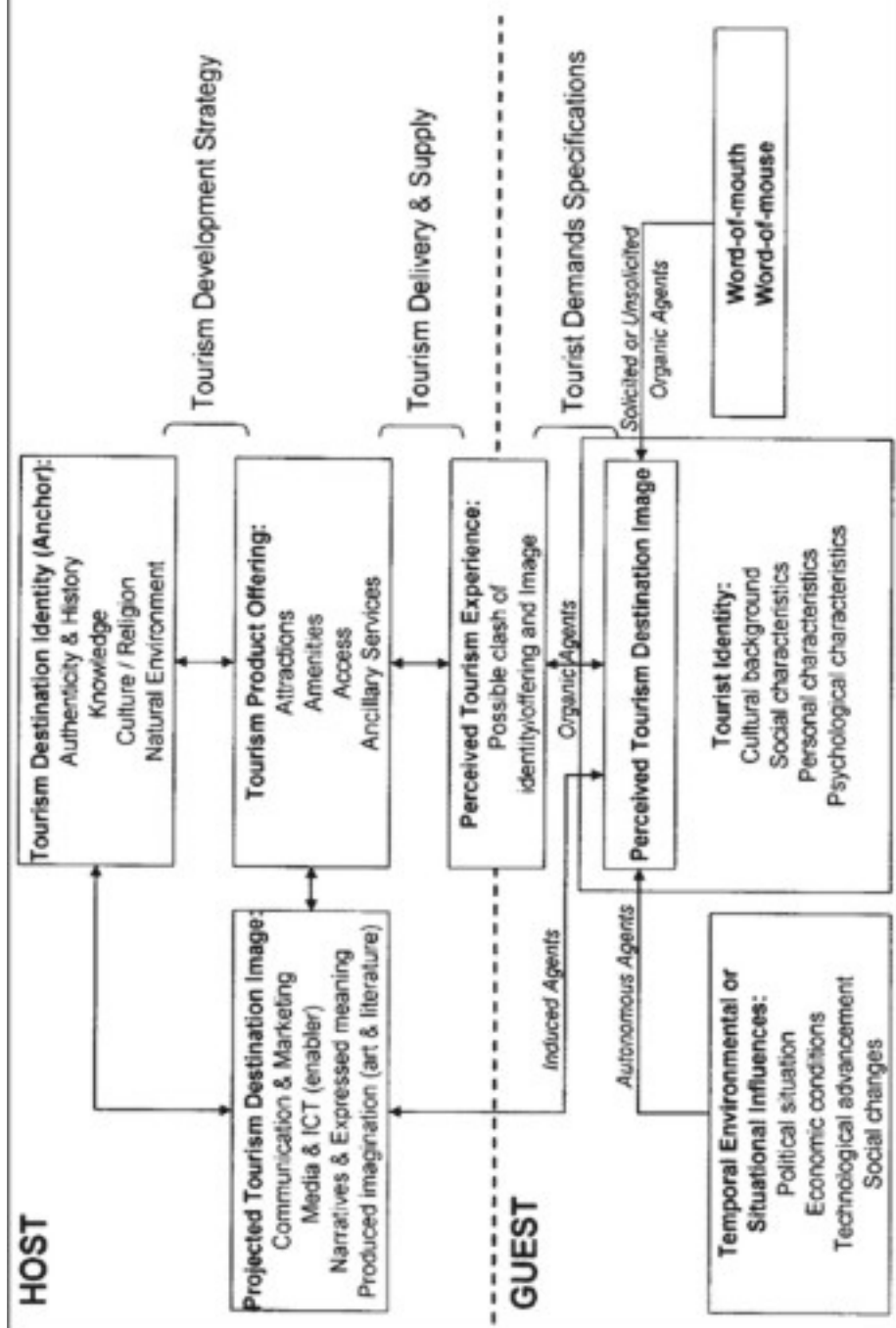
magnified, or used in misleading promotion by marketers seeking intensified sales.

Furthermore, from a macro scale, when two nations are in political tension, either group of tourists may develop negative attitudes toward the host nation (Pizam et al., 1991), Anastasopoulous (1992) mentioned that when travelling to a country perceived as unfriendly, tourists will experience an 'unfavorable group psychology', these feelings of unease include hostility, fear, and mistrust for either both host or guest (Uriely et al., 2009) There have been studies as to how to improve the guest's negative behavior toward the host in this situation through cross-cultural methods that require an extended period of time (Riordan, 1978; Brewer, 1984; Milman et al., 1990; Pizam et al., 1991; Anastasopoulous, 1992; Nyaupane, et al., 2008; Vafadari and Cooper, 2010). One of the methods relies on the fact that face to face communication practice tends to improve relations (Brewer 1984). Others have discovered that communication between host and guest does not always improve the attitude between two parties, because the two sides do not see each other eye to eye or have equal status (Amir, 1969; Riordan, 1978; Pizam et al., 1991; Cooper 2015). In a study of Israeli guests and Egyptian hosts, Uriely et al. (2009) developed a model of the 'Bubble of Serenity,' an interaction practiced between host and guest to prevent conflict, and comprised of: 1) detachment from the reality of conflict in a region; 2) the avoidance of political conversation; 3) emphasis on cultural similarities; 4) friendship announcements; and 5) the practice of placatory behavior by praising each other as 'good' people as distinguished from 'bad.'

Formation of a tourist destination image

Overtime, tourism industries change their image overtime as a marketing strategy. Social distance, as stated by Poole (1927), is the cultural difference between two groups. Image change can be time consuming and costly when pre-existing stereotyped images are still widely recognized (Chen et al., 2016; Fakeeye and Crompton, 1991; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). Destination image formation is formed through: 1) 'personal factors' of psychological and social aspects, and 2) 'stimulus factors' of information sources, previous experience, and distribution (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Cooper 2015). Today, social networking is one of the main source for obtaining real time information of a destination. Through quantitative analysis on time-series, and text-mining analyses, tourist industries are revealed to be competitive with each other through engagements with social networking (Hung, Claster, Cooper and Caughron, 2012; Pipike, Lee, and Cooper, 2017). In turn, potential tourists are given valuable knowledge, concerns, and sentiment toward the information providers.

Figure 1 is based on Gover and Go's (2004) detailed formulation of destination image and the interrelationships between cultural identity, projected image, commercialization, tourism experience, and perceived image (Cooper and Asplet, 2003).



Tourists' Motivation and the Expectation of a Destination

The same motive factor does not necessarily generate the same result, but may trigger different reactions as each person has their individuality (Allport 1937; Gnoth, 1997). As mentioned by Pearce and Lee (2005), Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) dissects the tourist's motivation into five levels of needs from the lowest to highest: physiological, safety, relationship, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Information on these needs in a tourist destination tends to make it more receptive to people (Tasci and Gartner, 2007). Expectation is defined as the determined 'performance perceptions of products and services as well as perceptions of experiences' (Gnoth, 1997). The interaction between host and guest creates a sense of expectation and perceived performance for both parties (Parasuraman et al., 1994; Kim et al., 2014). As seen in Figure 2, expectation is driven by the accumulation of a series of pull and push factors of the perceived service quality they will receive. While customer's satisfaction depends on whether the service quality given from the practitioner can meet or exceed the customer's standards (Tsaour et al., 2005).

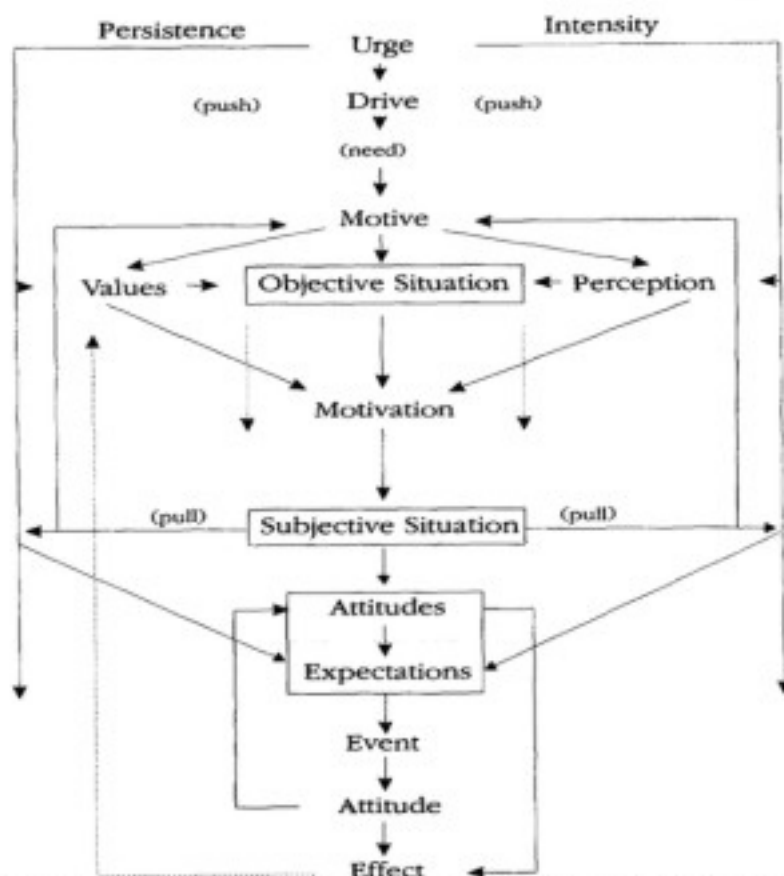


Figure 2. The Process of Motivation and Expectation Formation. (Adapted)

Research Hypotheses

From the geographical point of view, Mainland China is the closest country to Taiwan. As the Cross-Strait Relations Agreement progresses, both nations are opening direct flight routes and increasing frequency from secondary airports, as well as providing low cost carrier capacity. With this in mind, traveling to the mainland should be fast and affordable, so time and money should not be a problem. So, hypothetically, if a Taiwanese tourist travels but never to Mainland China, then this tourist would be pouring more time and money into travel than they need to. Why then do they do this (apart from the desire to go to different destinations) if the choice exists? Following the discussion on image in previous sections, it is possible to construct the following hypotheses about this behavior:

H1. The decision of many Taiwanese never to travel to Mainland China is correlated with the destination lacking physiological quality in terms of high level air, water, food, shelter, warmth, sleep, and safety (personal safety, security, law, health, stability) quality, as expressed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

H2. Taiwanese non-visitors' travel motivation decreases, if the perceived qualities of Mainland China as a tourism destination are lower than the expected standards.

Methodology

Research Design

Destination image can be seen as the positive and negative impact on the formation of attachment value to a place, while understanding tourist satisfaction (Veasna et al., 2013). Previous studies conducted by Lin et al. (2012) and Song and Hsu (2013) have pointed out the Mainland Chinese tourists' perceived image and destination image of Taiwan. From Lin et al. these were split into four categories: 1) Holistic Image of Taiwan- Sun Moon Lake; 2) Psychological image of Taiwan- Pleasant; 3) Unique Image of Taiwan- Sun Moon Lake and the Taroko Gorge; and 4) Negative Descriptions of Taiwan- lack of uniqueness. Song and Hsu (2013) focused on the cognitive image, affected image, and the comparison between both image on two different timelines, pre-2007 before travel restriction were lifted, and post 2008 after the Cross-strait agreement. Although both Lin et al. (2012) and Song and Hsu (2013) serve the purpose of exploring the Mainland Tourist's perceived and destination image on Taiwan, we have little information about the reverse flow, in the view of travelers and non-travelers alike. As bilateral travel

continues to promote potential tourists, it will become more difficult to get the opinion of non-travelers, therefore during the data collection for this study, participants were approached and asked if they were Taiwanese and if they had never been to Mainland China before proceeding to answer the questionnaire. Finally, of the 113 surveys collected in Taipei, Taiwan, only 100 were complete. Table 1 gives detail on the respondents to the survey that was undertaken at random in Taipei's 101 square in 2015 using face to face interviews.

The Measurement of variables

Motivation: Motivation is measured based on length of stay (see Table 4), reason of visit (Table 5), and a seven-point, 3-item questionnaire (Table 9);

Perceived image: Perceived image was measured with an open question for respondents to write their major concerns (Table 2). A seven-point Likert scale, 32-item questionnaire was used to compare both respondents' personal standards and the perceived expectations Mainland China has met (Table 6);

Source of Image Formation Respondents were asked to select multiple answers from 7 choices, to identify where their perceived image source comes from (Table 2);

Experience of vacation travel: Used to measure the expected experience if needed to travel to Mainland China, a seven-point Likert scale, 23-item was developed (Table 7). A five-point scaled question was used to sum up overall expected experience (Table 10);

Social demographics: These variables refer to gender and age distribution and screen out visitors from non-visitors.

Results and Discussion

The demographics of the respondents are given in Table 1. The remainder of this section refers to the results of the survey.

Sex	Frequency	Percentage	Age	Frequency	Percentage
Male	41	41	18-25	35	35
Female	59	59	31-35	31	31
			36-45	15	15
			45-55	14	14
			>56	5	5
Total	100	100	Total	100	100

Table 1. Distribution of the Sample

As transportation to Mainland China has become more frequent and cheaper, it is becoming more of a challenge to find respondents who have not traveled there and do not want to. Nevertheless, there are a significant number of Taiwanese who fall into this category, and this research attempts to understand why. In Question 5, their perceived image source was tested, and is seen to be constructed from the internet (30%), 'friends and relatives' (23.5%), and 'travel agency' (18.8%). These three sources are at the core of developing the respondents' mental image of China as a tourism destination (Table 2).

Next, the participants were asked to write down their multiple major concerns if they needed to visit Mainland China. The data shows that the majority wrote 'hygiene' (23.25%), followed by 'security' 22.48%, and third was 13.95% on 'food security,' as their main concerns. Surprisingly, though Taiwanese media does magnify the political tension between the two nations, 'political issues' were of concern to only 3.1 percent. However, the insecurity of needing protection in terms of physical and mental health well-being may indirectly show that Taiwanese media and experience from other social groups may have

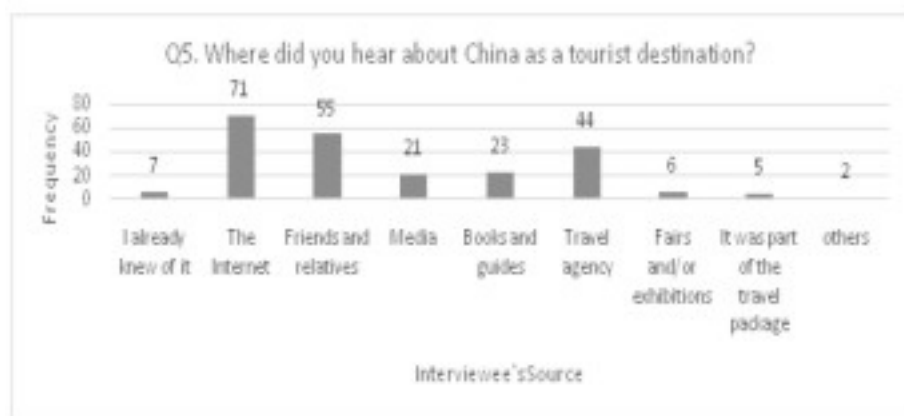


Table 2: Perceived image source of Mainland China as a tourist destination

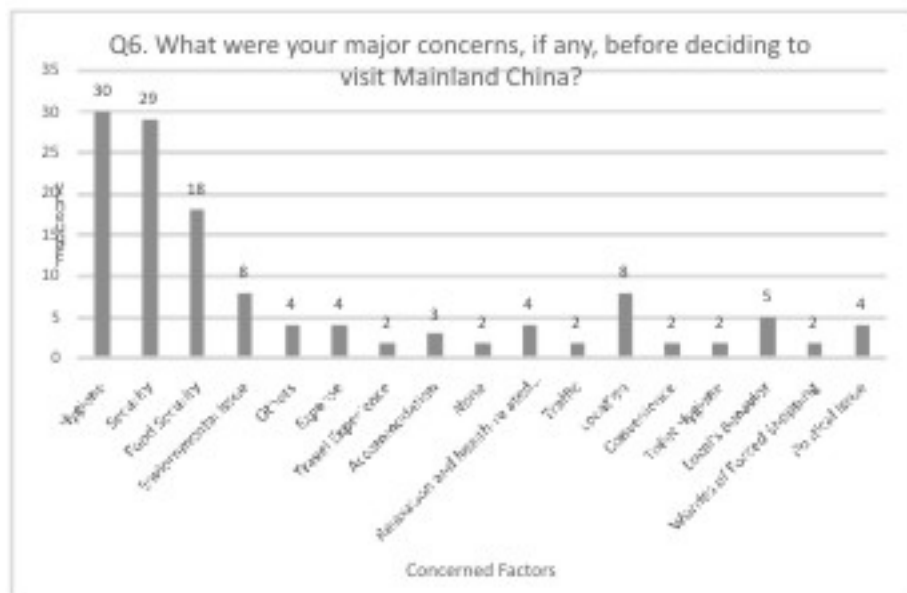


Table 3: Respondents' major concerns before traveling Mainland China

In Question 7, the survey measured the willingness of respondents to stay on the Mainland if necessary (Table 4). One quarter preferred to stay for three nights, another quarter showed four nights. 21% would stay for five nights. This showed that Taiwanese respondents do not actually have a strong rejection feeling toward Mainland China as a tourist destination, instead they are keen to stay for three to five nights for their first trip. Meanwhile in Question 8, participants are keen on visitation for 'recreation and tourism' (41.93%) then 'rest and relaxation' (33.87%) (Table 5).

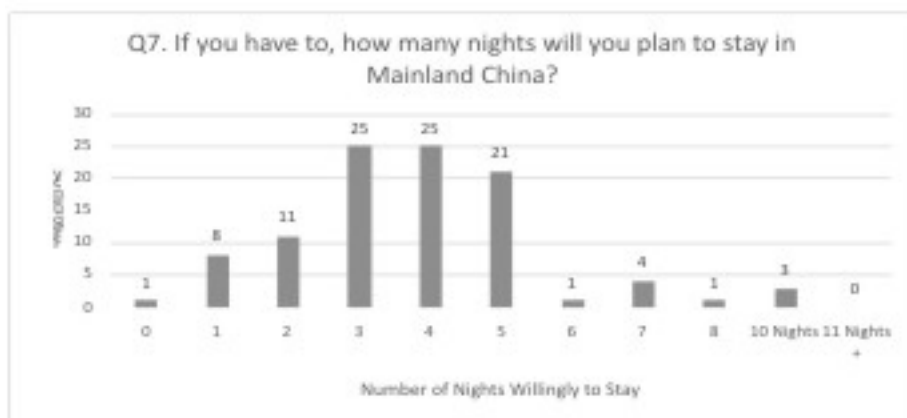


Table 4: Preferred length of stay in Mainland China for tourism

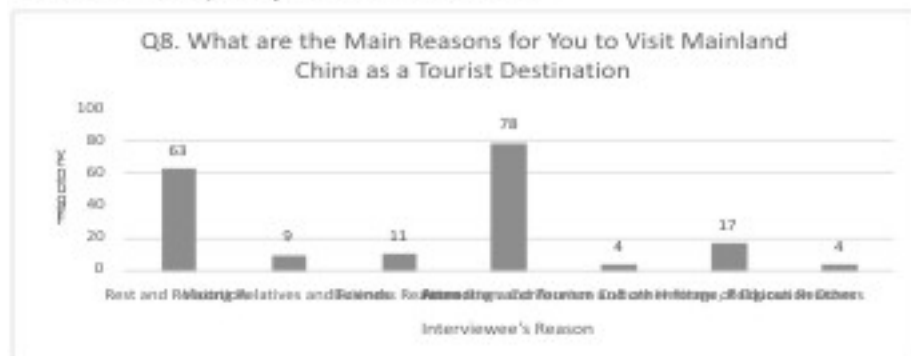


Table 5: Respondents' reasons to travel to Mainland China for tourism

Initially, Taiwanese non-visitor respondents were asked first to set up their personal standards for a tourism destination in general (Column A), followed with the exact list of attributes (Table 6). The respondents were asked to say if their perceived image of Mainland China (Column B), had met their standards or not (Column C). Although most of China's perceived attributes do not meet the standards of Taiwanese non-visitors, most of the gap between standards and perceived qualification on a seven-point Likert scale did not exceed 2 points. The results showed the highest standard factors assigned are: 'Personal Safety' (1.4), 'Overall Cleanliness' (1.68), 'Relaxation' (1.81), followed by 'Food' (2.05), 'Quality of Accommodation' (2.07), all these top factors reflect their emphasized importance of basic needs. In contrast, the widest gap between personal standards and perceived qualities in China were also: 'Overall Cleanliness' (-2.74), 'Personal Safety' (-2.54), 'Relaxation' (-2.18), 'Food' (-1.68), and 'Quality of Accommodation' (-1.63), along with the addition of 'Staff's attitude' (-1.64). This may illustrate that even if Mainland China is perceived as a place that fails to reach the respondent's standards, Taiwanese respondents still mark Mainland China as quite a positive destination for tourism.

Q9. Comparison Between Respondents' Destination Standards and China's Tourism Standards 1= Absolutely Agree 7= Absolutely Disagree		Importance of a Tourist Destination in General	Qualifications Respondents think China has met	Standard and Perceived Gap
		Column A	Column B	Column C
1	Personal safety	1.41	3.95	-2.54
2	The destination can be easily reach	2.27	3.36	-1.09
3	Climate	2.44	3.61	-1.17
4	Relaxation	1.81	3.99	-2.18
5	Food	2.05	3.73	-1.68
6	Overall cleanliness of the destination	1.68	4.42	-2.74
7	Quality of accommodation	2.07	3.7	-1.63
8	Convenient store	3.06	3.55	-0.49
9	Convenience	2.32	3.39	-1.07
10	Possibility for shopping	3.34	3.49	-0.15
11	Fun	2.55	3.46	-0.91
12	Crowd and Livelihood	3.27	3.14	+0.13

13	Old fashion	3.11	3.13	-0.02
14	Nightlife and entertainment	3.78	3.49	+0.29
15	Night view	3.08	3.28	-0.2
16	Nature based attraction	2.49	2.72	-0.23
17	Historical-based attraction	2.72	2.76	-0.04
18	Social culture	2.72	3.58	-0.86
19	Tradition	3.05	3.29	-0.24
20	Communication with local resident	2.95	3.41	-0.46
21	Interaction with local resident	3.18	3.64	-0.46
22	Experiencing cultural events	3.04	3.33	-0.29
23	Experiencing local activities	2.81	3.3	-0.49
24	Passion of local residents	2.79	3.66	-0.87
25	Organization of local transport services	2.39	3.58	-1.19
26	Uniqueness of local destination	2.65	3.25	-0.6
27	Staffs' attitude	2.19	3.83	-1.64
28	Freedom of speech	2.4	3.31	-0.91
29	Accumulating experience	2.7	3.32	-0.62
30	Tourist-friendly of the local destination	2.77	3.42	-0.65
31	Easy to reach the local destination	2.49	3.35	-0.86
32	Easy to bypass immigration	2.17	3.55	-1.38

Table 6: Comparison between respondents' personal standards and perceived standard in Mainland China

On the other hand, notice that the only two attributes that exceeded respondents' standards are 'Night life and Entertainment' (+0.29), and 'Crowd and Livelihood' (+0.13). At the same time in Column A, these two factors plus 'Possibility for Shopping' (3.34) are the top three attributes that are the least of Taiwanese non-visitor respondents' concerns. Mainland China of course has a very large population and its metropolitan cities such as Shanghai or Beijing do provide vast resources as motivations for travel. Apart from the above-mentioned factors, everything else appears to be more or less the same. This could be because the respondents felt they are not of major concern, or that the respondents are unfamiliar with some attributes in Mainland China, thus causing such close proximity.

	Question 10. 1= Absolutely Agree 7= Absolutely Disagree	Non-Visitors 100 [Expectation]
1	Having a tour in China would be upsetting	4
2	I have no interest in having a tour in China	3.99
3	Having a tour in China would be dangerous	3.5
4	Having a tour in China would cause pressure	3.82
5	Having a tour in China would be tiring	3.57
6	It is difficult to find someone to go to China with	3.91
7	Having a tour in China would be better alone	4.86
8	There is no one close to me that wants to go to China with me	4.05
9	There is no time to go to China for a tour	3.61
10	I do not have enough money to have a tour in China	4.02
11	I have little idea of how to have a tour in China	3.23
12	There are insufficient tourist destinations in China	4.77
13	The hotels in China are inconvenient	3.61
14	The tourist souvenirs in China are simple	3.83
15	The climate in China is not suitable for tourism	4.17
16	There are many contracts and documents needed to have a tour in China	3.68
17	The currency conversion to Renminbi (Chinese currency) is low	4.07
18	It is difficult to have basic communication in China	4.02
19	There is a distance with local citizens	3.76
20	The transportation in China is inconvenient	3.72
21	It is difficult to get permission to enter China for tourism	4.23
22	There are warnings in the media regarding tourism in China	3.32
23	Having a tour in China makes me worried	3.22

Table 7: Respondents' travel expectations to Mainland China

On investigating the Taiwanese non-visitor's expectations as shown by the answers to Question 10, Table 7 indicates there are no bold results; scores range from 3 (mildly agree) to nearly 5 (mildly disagree). The top three agreements with the given statements are: 'Having a tour in China makes me worried' (3.22), 'I have little idea of how to have a tour in China' (3.23), and 'There are warnings in the media regarding tourism in China' (3.32). Thus, even if the respondents' image source is predominantly from the 'internet', they still appear to be slightly worried about their safety and the need for tour planning to Mainland China. The strongest disagreement is 'Having a tour in China would be better alone' (4.82), and 'There are insufficient tourist destinations in China' (4.77). This also supports our earlier comments in relation to safety concerns, regardless of the other attributes of tourist destinations in China.

'Group Tour' contributes two-thirds of the variance. This could suggest that for non-visitors group tours offer safety needs, the other one-third of respondents chose 'individual' for the intention to travel to Mainland China for other purposes as reported in Table 5. The outcome of the respondents' motivation to touring in Mainland China turns out to be positive as shown in Table 8, (26)

nonetheless as shown in Table 9, no one expects their first experience to be 'Very Satisfying', but rather the average score is 'Fair':

$$((1*0)+(2*12)+(3*67)+(4*17)+(5*4)=313/100= 3.13).$$

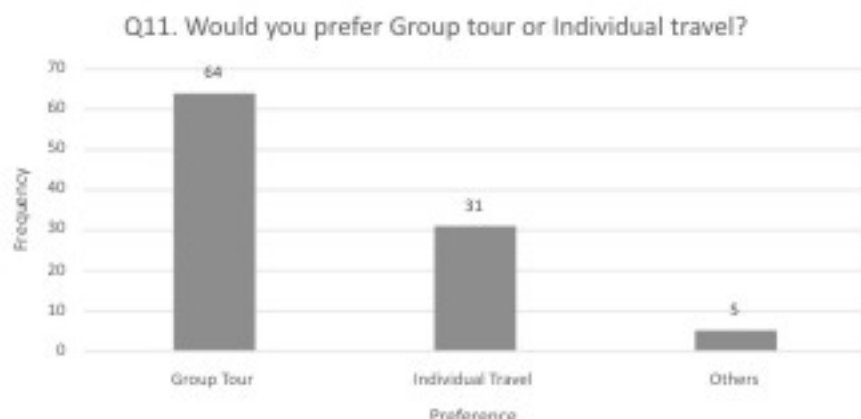


Table 8: Respondents' group tour and individual travel preferences

Q12. Respondents Motivation to have a Tour in Mainland China 1=Absolutely Agree 7= Absolutely Disagree	Non-Visitors
	100
This is the one time I would think of going to China	3.73
Sometimes I would make plans to go to China	3.39
If possible, I want to go to China	3.46

Table 9: Respondents' travel motivation

This study shows that the primarily source of China's perceived destination image is formulated in conjunction with the 'internet', 'friends and relatives', and 'travel agency.' Through these sources, the participants assumed Mainland China is a place that will not meet their tourism quality standards. Yet, the presumed overall experience indicates no strong satisfaction nor dissatisfaction, Taiwanese non-visitors would prefer to stay in Mainland China for about three to five nights. Perhaps the reason for this phenomenon is because as the exchange flow of Mainland Chinese tourists and Taiwanese tourist continues, transportation is becoming more affordable and accessible, and beginning to assert a much stronger pull for travelers. Free of language barriers, Mainland Chinese tourists in Taiwan may have also contributed to the resolution of decades of misunderstanding between these two nations. Be that as it may, social differences between host and guest still needs more time for mutual respect and acceptance. Therefore, in the present, Taiwanese non-visitors' unfamiliarity with and personal distress over Mainland China may be the reason why the majority choose to travel in a group tour, if they travel at all.

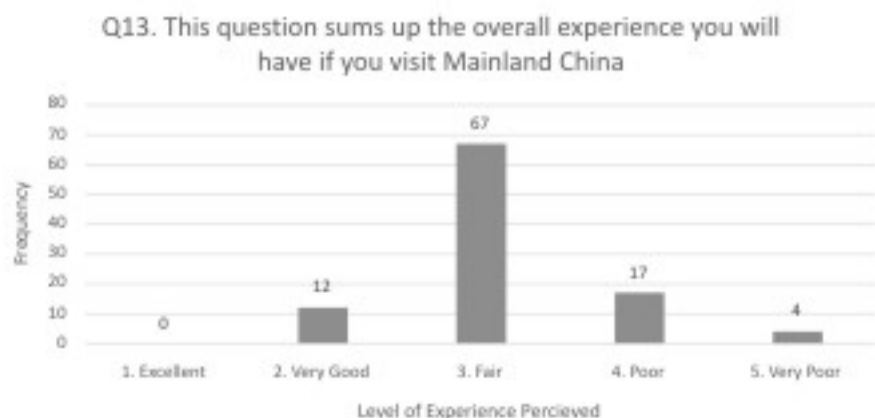


Table 10: Respondents' overall perceived travel experience in Mainland China

Conclusions

Reflecting on hypothesis 1, Taiwanese respondents' do not have a strong concern with physiological needs, but are rather more concerned with their safety needs (as in hygiene, security, and food security as mentioned in this study) in Mainland China, and this shows that a lack of basic needs will indeed discourage travel. Meanwhile, for hypothesis 2, the evidence revealed that the Taiwanese presumed quality of Mainland China does not reach their standards, but even so Taiwanese respondents' motivation to travel to Mainland China did not decrease even if they have already speculated that their overall experience will only be fair, and they are consequently only willing to stay half a week. This study explains the phenomenon of why Taiwanese non-visitors have never visited Mainland China in the first place. It is thus not because of time or money constraints, but rather due to the fact that Mainland China is perceived as a tourist destination that does not have a particular strong capture point to attract Taiwanese tourists, on account of its perceived lower quality in safety factors that Taiwanese non-visitors are to be concerned with.

It is also necessary to mention that the main source of Mainland China's perceived image may be from those who *have* been to Mainland China. Under such circumstances, to improve the perceived image of Mainland China as a tourism destination, it is recommended that concerned tourism industries and their stakeholders strengthen hygienic facilities, tourist security, and food security policies to a noticeable scale. In addition, even though Mainland China has a vast variety of tourism resources, Taiwanese non-visitors do not show strong interest in these. In response to this problem, Taiwan's travel agencies in turn need to promote tour packages with recommended destinations selected

by previously satisfied Taiwanese tourists. Through encouragement and leaving a great first impression, the Chinese tourism sector could then expect a higher return rate from Taiwanese tourists.

Limitations

As the second source of destination image formation, 'Friends and Relatives' may include previous visitors, therefore their actual experience may cause a stronger impact on Taiwanese non-visitors. Hence, a direct comparison between non-visitors and visitors to Mainland China could show more deeply how perceived image could be altered. A wider study that included this variable could provide a possible recommendation to further improve the connections between Taiwan and Mainland China's tourism sectors.

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