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THE TRAVEL MOTIVES OF OUTBOUND CHINESE TOURISTS

Abstract: *Tourism in China remained a mere theory until 1970s when China opened its borders to the world. It is at this stage that tourism was recognized by China's Government as a sector that could bring in foreign exchange and quicken the development process of China. As China opened to the world, even the behavior of Chinese people started changing and they started considering travelling to other places as a hobby. All of this was a base for emerging Chinese outbound tourism. This paper uses literature review method to explore what are the main factors fueling Chinese outbound tourists. Nature, history and cultural similarities are some of the motives singled out by the research, which proved to be only some of the factors motivating Chinese outbound tourists.*

Key words: *travel motives, travel activities, outbound Chinese tourist*

Introduction

Over the past decade China has become one of the greatest tourism markets in the world, and it is growing every minute. This has attracted the attention of many countries and marketing boards to start eyeing and looking for the ways on how to tap into this ever growing lucrative market. In 2018, about 149 million Chinese travelled out of China. This number followed a sharp in-

crease from 2017 when about 131 million Chinese travelled across the world. This saw China maintain its first position as the leading tourist generating country and spender in the world (CNTA 2018). Also the number of tourists going to the Belt and Road increased from 15.49 million in 2013 to 27.41 million in 2017, an increase of 77% in five years. The same report indicates that despite the economic fluctuations, China is experiencing significant growth of middle class. According to US Commercial Service (2018), China's middle income class is now estimated at 300 million people. This group is putting their wealth to use through buying estates, big ticket consumer items and international travels. The adult population of China's middle class accounted for 20.1% of the adult population in 2017. The China's middle class adults have an average wealth of around US\$139,000 hence their high marginal propensity to spend on travel. In total, 5.12 million Chinese tourists travelled from Beijing, 5.45 million from Shanghai and 10.21 million from Guangdong province (75% of Guangdong residents) (WTTC, 2018). With such great highlights, everyone desires to penetrate this market.

Different factors have been responsible for the growth of this tourism market for example policies regarding international travel have been eased, economy has been fast growing, and rapid urbanization and increased incomes. Catering to the needs



of Chinese tourists and exploring their motives for traveling has become imperative in tourism industry all over the world, due to the large tourism market China has. A record of US\$ 115.29 billion has been spent on international tourism in 2017 by Chinese tourists which makes a 5% jump from 2016 when it was US\$ 109.8 billion. On top of this, Chinese travelers are good at spending with an average expenditure of US\$ 1086 all coupled with high levels of triple down effect and multiplier effect which is healthy for the host communities (Skivalou & Filippidi, 2017).

From 2012, China has consistently dominated the first position in terms of tourism spending surpassing the former big spenders Germany and USA. For example, in 2012 China spent a whopping US\$ 84 billion which made it occupy the first position for the big tourism spenders a position China has held up to today (UNWTO, 2013).

In most cases, tourism of the main countries especially in Africa is nature based with attractions like lakes, mountains, rivers all facilitating activities such as boat rides, nature walks, forest trails, zip lining and the famous 3S (Sun, Sand and Sea) all making nature a leading component of tourism (Osmond, 2017). This makes us look for the ways of ensuring sustainability of such valuable resources for future use (Miththapala et al., 2013). Chinese outbound tourists like engaging in activities that are dependent on nature or those enhanced by nature (Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013). Destinations with attributes such as good climate, authentic cultural activities, eco-tourism activities and facilities have fertile grounds in attracting Chinese outbound tourists (Jaafar et al., 2013).

The above factors are only some of the many factors that attract Chinese tourists to different destinations. Exploring other factors that motivate Chinese outbound tourists to travel is the core of this paper and

is the base for understanding Chinese outbound tourism market which international destinations can use in tailoring their offers towards attracting Chinese tourists.

However, further research and understanding of travel motivations and travel activities would help develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. It is from this background therefore that this review was done on the aforementioned subject.

Literature review

A lot of literature on Chinese outbound tourism exists. Generally, this literature presents Chinese outbound tourism in two waves. The first wave is generally about the early stages of outbound tourism in China while the second wave about the present day outbound tourism in China. The second wave roughly commences with the introduction of economic reforms introduced by Deng Xiao-Ping (Christine Lim & Wang, 2008) but a big overlap exists.

First wave of China's outbound tourism (1949-1998)

The current boom of outbound tourism in China is as a result of efforts that started as early as 1949. Although these crawling periods are least appreciated, it can be argued that a clear understanding of this history will help keep China's tourism market on top. Generally in the last 50 years of the 20th century, China's tourism development had four major episodes (Zhanget al., (2000)). In the first episode 1949 to 1966, tourism became part of China's international affairs for the first time. In this period, tourism was only available to diplomats, and was regarded as a special political activity. After the new communist government formed

People's Republic of China, travel services started operating in a similar fashion like tour operators and tourism agencies. These travel services were mainly offered to both Chinese and non-Chinese but after seeking a permission from the Chinese government to either visit China or other countries. This was because tourism sector was not yet founded and developed in China by that time. In addition to undeveloped outbound tourism in this period, domestic tourism also was hardly exercised (Zhang et al., 2000).

During the second episode 1966 to 1978, the standstill period coincides with the Cultural Revolution period in the Chinese history that started from early 1966 to 1976. During this period, Chinese economy suffered due to decentralization of the country and its encouragement of local self-sufficiency which was a big transition period. This period not only affected Chinese economy but also all spheres of life, including the then crawling tourism, as tourism activities were mostly suspended (Cohen, 1988). At this time, China was trying to organize itself internally and never wanted any interference from non-Chinese visitors and therefore there was merely nothing like outbound tourism (Sun, 1992). It was not until Deng Xiaoping became the leader in 1978 that he did the stewardship and implemented many of the reforms which saw tourism being considered as one of the key sectors for China's development (Chow, et al., 2018).

In the third episode 1978 to 1985, key sectors necessary for China's development were identified and tourism was one of them. This was a period when the then leadership decided to put much focus on economic development of China and decided to open up China's borders to the rest of the world. At this stage, tourism was seen as an easy way to improve the country's foreign exchange earnings and help in its balance of trade and payments with the rest of the world (Zhang et al., 2000).

The period 1986 to 1998 marks the fourth episode with a transition phase to the current state of tourism in China. At this stage, China had already tasted the fruits of tourism and was yearning for more. Tourism had brought in a lot of foreign exchange at this stage and a lot of tour companies and travel agencies had opened up employing millions of Chinese and the then government was putting new reforms and policies to promote both domestic and international tourism around China (He, 1999),(Qian, 1999).

Second wave of China's outbound tourism (1998- 2018)

Skivalou and Filippidi (2015) and Nasolomampionona (2014) put it that Chinese remained rigid to adjust to other countries customs and behaviors since they were not so well traveled at that time. It's from late 1990s when China started listing some countries which it would advise its citizens to travel to since during this period the number of Chinese in the middle class had risen and they had enough money to spend on travels (Lim & Y, 2008).

Arlt (2013) argues that second wave of China's outbound tourism took place in mainly four phases. The first phase was when China only allowed its citizens to travel to the nearby places like Macao and Hong Kong and other nearby Asian countries for leisure and recreational activities around 1977. This was followed by listing of different countries for Chinese to travel to for example New Zealand and Australia. This was because these countries were considered secure and safe for Chinese citizens and they met the set requirements for Chinese travelers. This lists kept growing and other countries kept being approved to be added on it. By 2005, many Chinese had travelled abroad and had opened up to the rest of the world. From this time, China has seen continuous



growth of both the economy and the middle class, increased consumerism all supported by favorable government policies. Though outbound tourism in China is flourishing, this development is facing several challenges majority of which are agency management related (Andrews & A, 2005).

Travel motivation

Various factors motivate tourists to move to particular destinations. These factors can be at the tourists' places of origin (push factors) or at the toured destinations (pull factors). Travel motivation factors are generally categorized into four factors: physical, cultural, inter personal and prestige motivators (Zhou, King, & Turner, 1998). Motivation for tourism is a set of needs or desires that influence someone to participate in a certain tourist activity like adventure, recreation, visiting friends and relatives among others (Bruch, 2012). This desire might be age, gender, region or religion specific. They are not universal as they may vary among different individuals. Tourist motivation highlights why an individual or a group of individuals has/have acted or is/are about to act in a certain manner (Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013). It is a combination of different factors some which are physical, nonphysical that compel people to do certain decisions all aimed at satisfying their needs and wants (Michael et al., 2017). Motivation normally happens when people want to fulfill certain needs. Motivation might be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is what

originates from within while extrinsic motivation is what is generated from outside (Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013; Ryan, 2011). Individuals needs will always direct them to which destination to choose and what to expect from there. Tourists' needs keep changing from time to time for example most of the Chinese tourists used to travel for shopping but this trend keeps changing as most of the Chinese tourists today travel for ecotourism activities (Guerreiro, 2017). All these changes require tourist marketing agencies to become more dynamic and provide tailor made products for this ever changing industry in order to meet the demand of these consumers.

Discussion

Travel motives of Chinese outbound tourists have been catching the eyes of the researchers for some time now, and all of the researchers have different approaches when tackling this area. Some of them focus only on certain types of tourism, e.g., safari tours, whereas others focus only on particular groups of tourists, such as Chinese female outbound tourists and their motivation for one destination or even comparing the motivations for different destinations. However, the need to understand Chinese outbound tourists is common to all of them. Authors have put great effort into finding out what are the top motivators for Chinese outbound tourists and Table 1 below shows part of the research that has been done in this area.

Table 1 Review of outbound Chinese tourism

| Year | Authors | Title | Location | Findings |
|------|--------------------------------|---|------------------|--|
| 2019 | Suntikul, Pratt, Wing, & Chong | Factors that Influence Chinese Outbound Tourists' Intention to Consume Local Food | Hong Kong, China | Prestige, good food in a nice ambiance are some of the ways through which Chinese outbound tourists acquire knowledge about the cultures of the host communities through interacting with the local people with the Indigenous Knowledge(IK) |

| | | | | |
|------|---------------------------|---|--|--|
| 2018 | Liu, Li, & Li | A panel data-based analysis of factors influencing market demand for Chinese outbound tourism | The top 50 destination countries for Chinese outbound tourism from 2002–2013 | Income of Chinese outbound tourists, the price at the host destination and general exchange rates are some of the economic factors that influence the number of Chinese tourists in a given destination. This is because Chinese tourists will prefer destinations that are affordable economically and cost effective. |
| 2016 | Suntikul, Tang, & Pratt | An Exploratory Study of Chinese Tourists on Kenya Safari Tours | Kenya | The beauty of the scenery at the host destination, different cultures are some of the factors that Chinese tourists keep a keen eye on. Also, these should be coupled with value for money for all the products rendered at that given destination. |
| 2015 | Tse | A Review of Chinese Outbound Tourism Research and the Way Forward | China | This study emphasizes the need for further research to be done with a greater consideration on the tourist generating country to find out more of the push factors of Chinese outbound tourists. |
| 2014 | Andreu, Claver, & Quer | Destination Attributes and Chinese Outbound Tourism to Europe | European countries | Easy accessibility to and from China, distinctive culture from that of Chinese, many heritage sites, many Chinese at the host destination have a positive correlation with the number of Chinese outbound tourists to some of the European countries. |
| 2012 | Sausmarez, Tao, & McGrath | Chinese Outbound Tourism to the United Kingdom | China and UK | Hardships like getting a UK visa, not enough appropriate accommodation facilities for Chinese tourists, high costs of obtaining UK visa, shortage of Chinese food in UK make the Chinese tourism market hard to be penetrated by the UK tour operators even when UK is on the Approved Destination Status (ADS). This is because there are low returns on investment(ROI) from this big market. |
| 2011 | Li, Wen, & Leung | An Exploratory Study of the Travel Motivation of Chinese Female Outbound Tourists | Hong Kong | Improvement of social life, relaxation and rewinding, finding new places for adventure and pleasure, acquiring new knowledge about other cultures and general life of other people are some of the factors that arose the Chinese outbound tourists desire to travel. Destination image of a place, tourist attractions like mountains, lakes and rivers, the general healthy conditions of a place like the cleanliness, security at the destination and shopping facilities do attract the Chinese tourists to certain destinations. |

Source: Authors' findings



Table 1 provides the summary of previously done research dealing with motivation of outbound Chinese tourists. Chinese outbound tourists have been a hot topic for some time and in the years to come it will be imperative to understand Chinese tourists even more than ever. Suntikul et al. (2019) in their research deal with food preferences of Chinese outbound tourists, which is a very important factor influencing the motivation of Chinese outbound tourists. Besides interest in trying local foods, they prefer sharing food like in most of Asian cuisines and they show a high demand in eating Chinese food even when they are abroad. Food is a major factor influencing outbound Chinese tourists' motivation, which is not surprising, as, on the one hand, food is a crucial element in tourism industry, and, on the other, in Chinese culture food holds a special position. However, the impact of food varieties on Chinese outbound tourists has not been explored enough and it should be considered more in future research. In this regard, Suntikul et al. (2019) have shown to the proper direction. Besides food preferences Suntikul et al. (2016) researched Chinese tourists' views on Kenyan safari, which is actually also focusing on nature-based tourism in general, the type of tourism that is very attractive to Chinese outbound tourists. Lots of researchers agree that nature is one of the most important motivators not only to Chinese tourists, but worldwide tourists in general, showing that we should dig deeper into what makes the exact kind of nature-based tourism that Chinese tourists are interested in.

Liu et al. (2018) for example used a large scale data in order to analyze which of the factors are influencing market demand for Chinese outbound tourism, but it did not go deeply into reasoning behind those factors; it just simply lays down the statistical part, which is a great base for doing an in-depth

research into this issue. The results show that economic variables such as income, tourism prices, and exchange rates all have a significant influence on outbound tourism volume. All of the above mentioned variables influence the outbound tourism by either increasing or decreasing the tourism volume and are very significant factors that motivate outbound Chinese tourists.

Sausmarez et al. (2012) and Andreu et al. (2014) are only some of the few studies dealing with Chinese outbound tourists to European countries, which have been a very interesting destination to Chinese tourists because of greater cultural distance from China, a large number of World Heritage Sites, and a large ethnic Chinese population. All of these result in a high number of flights to the mentioned destinations, which both directly and indirectly affects the increase in the number of visits to these destinations. Chinese outbound tourists, as it has already been said, are the largest spenders in the world. Their number is increasing every moment, which has been recognized by the researchers and all tourism related businesses and industries. In this regard, the needs of Chinese tourists should be met and by no means overlooked, as might have been the case in the previous century caused by the fact that they did not travel much; however, this has drastically changed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the more China opens up to the world, the more its outbound tourism grows. China's outbound tourism has undergone a paradigm shift ever since China opened up its borders in 1978. This has seen China come from the bottom to top the world as a leading tourist generating country. Chinese travel outside for many factors such as education in Western countries like USA,

UK, Canada, and other developed countries. In Africa, Chinese mainly go for business and wildlife viewing like in South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia. Many factors have pushed Chinese to travel like the designation of golden weeks, improved bilateral relations between China and other countries like those with Approved Destination Status (ADS), improved standard of living and high per capita income among the Chinese, growing middle class of Chinese with high marginal propensity to travel (MPT) and ability to purchase expensive tickets to travel around the world, and many other factors as discussed above. On the other hand, different cultures with differences in dishes, dancing, dressing attract Chinese outbound tourists. Attractive history of some countries like Greece, smiling and welcoming people at the host destination, general cleanliness of destination hospitality sector like hotels are other factors that motivate Chinese outbound tourists to travel to such destinations. Beautiful scenery at the host destination as some Chinese prefer relaxing from the sea, in the sand and under the sun (3S) also pulls Chinese tourists to destinations with such qualities. These are only some of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators for Chinese outbound tourists. Destinations with people who can speak Chinese like Hong Kong and Taiwan stand out with an added advantage in tapping into the Chinese outbound market.

This study identifies key highlights in the Chinese outbound tourism market:

- The habits of Chinese travelers are changing gradually. There are now more eco tourists than before.
- They give special attention to cultural diversity of other destinations and are willing to mingle with the local people in order to acquire more knowledge about other cultures.
- Chinese tourists are proving to the world that they are “moving wallets”. This is because they prefer staying in a destination

for a long period hence spending more at the host destination.

- There is a growing number of millennials who are versatile and adventurous willing to try out new things including non-Chinese dishes when they visit a certain place.

However, this study has got some limitations such as a small sample size of the literature, which hindered us from getting a clear understanding of this topic wholly. For example, because of this, we could not extract key activities that motivate special groups of Chinese outbound tourists like women and men, young and the old, educated and non-educated among others of which such information would be helpful for different industry players and practitioners. Based on this, further research may address other aspects of macro factors relevant to Chinese outbound tourist flows, such as the promotion campaigns of the destinations and more representative sample size should be ensured to get more outstanding results and cover different demographic factors, since motivation might be for example age or gender specific.

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