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## **Outdoor tourism in China**

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The Chinese Dream, along with its counterparts in other countries, is an evocative, socially compelling but academically imprecise concept. Analyses advanced by Western commentators are not necessarily congruent with Chinese perspectives, especially at the broader political levels. There seems to be consensus, however, that at the individual level, Chinese aspirations commonly include prosperity, harmony, and the opportunity to pursue distinctly Chinese philosophies, lifestyles, and ways of doing things, not necessarily the same as in other countries and cultures.

Practical manifestations of this include increasing individual wealth, leisure time, freedom to travel, concern over personal health and wellbeing, and interests in Chinese tradition, culture and nature. All of these are expressed in very large-scale growth in domestic and outbound Chinese tourism, including nature-based and adventure activities. Here we argue that this growth has taken place, and continues, along paths which are distinctly Chinese. We also argue that as outbound tourism from China increases, the expectations of Chinese tourists, influenced by factors broadly referred to as the Chinese Dream, will affect tourism in destination countries.

In support of our contentions, we summarise seven separate studies on domestic outdoor nature and adventure tourism in China, supplemented by our own personal experience in the development of outdoor tourism in China over the past three decades.

1. The Chinese concept of shengtai luyou, ecology tourism, is different in small but significant ways from the western concept of ecotourism. In particular, (a) it includes large scale operations which fit Weaver's concept of enlightened mass tourism; (b) it includes human modifications to natural environments which are perceived as improving on nature; and (c) it includes a strong human health component, particularly for city dwellers seeking clean and invigorating air and water in forests and mountains.

2. The Chinese tourism ecocertification system differs from Western systems in four key aspects. (a) It certifies destinations rather than enterprises, products or individuals. (b) It specifies a maximum total number of certified destinations, so that destinations must compete to become certified. (c) It is operated by the Chinese National Tourism Administration, a central government body, rather than by private third-party enterprises. (d) It contains very detailed and comprehensive technical specifications, matched only by very few of the Western systems.

3. Marketing of outdoor tourism products and destinations in China, for both domestic and international inbound tourists, links natural and cultural components much more strongly than most Western counterparts. In some cases such links are perceived by western tourists as authentic, as for example in the cultural landscapes of Qinghai or Inner Mongolia. In others

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they appear to Western visitors as staged, as for example in many minority villages, festivals and performances, or copies of buildings from other parts of the world. Historically, this does not seem to be of concern to Chinese domestic tourists. Currently, however, the new Chinese Tourism Law does include a greater focus on destination authenticity.

4. Domestic adventure tourism within China has evolved along different cultural pathways from international counterparts, yielding a number of characteristic products which exist only in mainland China. One example is piaoliu luyou or piaoliu ziyou, river drifting, which is a form of mass adventure tourism involving short unguided float trips in small paddle-less whitewater rafts, on heavily modified watercourses with low volume of water but high volume of clients. This is very different from the international model of white water rafting with small client numbers on high-volume unmodified rivers, which does also exist in western China.

5. China has ~8000 protected areas in at least six different categories, which may be managed either by national, provincial or local governments. A detailed analysis of environmental and visitor management in over 1100 of these parks shows a broad continuum between larger, longer-established, more heavily visited parks with larger budgets and larger-scale visitor infrastructure; and smaller, more recently established, less heavily visited parks with smaller budgets and more limited infrastructure. On top of this broad division there are a number of less widespread patterns related to different geographic regions.

6. Some of China's protected areas are amongst the world's most heavily visited, with over 100,000 visitors per day during peak season in some cases. This has necessitated the development of new infrastructure and management approaches capable of allowing 100,000 people through a single entrance in a short period at opening time, transporting them safely and with low impacts throughout the park, feeding them all adequately at lunchtime, providing mobile pump-out toilet facilities at numerous key scenic stopping points, monitoring visitor movements in real time, and allowing everyone to exit rapidly and safely when the park closes. A number of Chinese parks also incorporate large-scale cableways, cliff-face walkways (some of them made of glass), and in one case, an elevator travelling over 300m vertically up and down a cliff face.

7. Overall wealth in China has increased greatly during recent decades, and there are now numerous Chinese entrepreneurs and corporations which can and do invest tens of billions of Yuan in tourism assets and developments. This was demonstrated dramatically, for example, by successful sales of development opportunities for upmarket coastal tourism resorts, at an event in Ninghai during 2012.

Overall, we may anticipate that future outbound Chinese tourists will be more wealthy and sophisticated than in the past, and more interested in nature and adventure tourism products; but that they will approach these experiences from a Chinese cultural perspective, framed and derived from their domestic tourism experiences within China; and tourism providers in other countries will need to adapt to these expectations.

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## **Information search behaviour of Chinese international students—an emerging independent travel market**

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Key words: China tourism, International students travel, Information search behaviour

### Introduction

China is Australia's most important trading partner in both the international education and tourism industries (Keating & Godfrey 2013). In terms of education, Chinese students form the largest international student group in Australia, generating \$4.3 billion in export income for 2012 (Keating & Godfrey 2013). These students are not only significant for the education industry, but also make substantial contribution to local tourism economies. Previous research has found that Chinese international students travel regularly, engage in local tourism activities, and receive visits by family and friends (Pyke, Jiang & Delacy 2013). Therefore, Chinese international students have an influential and ongoing impact on the Australian tourism industry (Babin & Kim 2001; Frost & Shanka 1999). However, little attention has been given to Chinese international students as a travel market for the destination country (Zhang, Burgess & Kerr 2009).

In terms of tourism development, considerable research has examined current Chinese outbound travellers. These studies have indicated that most current Chinese tourists are rather inexperienced, and prefer the safety and comfort of traditional tour group travel (King & Gardiner 2013). However, as their travel experience increase, it is expected that Chinese tourists will increasingly wish to travel independently and seek more meaningful engagements, more local contact, and activities closely suited to their personal interests (King & Gardiner 2013). It is recommended that Chinese international students constitute China's first wave of independent outbound travellers as they have more travel experience and foreign language skills, and are looking for more individual, in-depth experiences related to local culture and special interest (King & Gardiner 2013). With enhanced financial support from their parents, Chinese students studying abroad constitute a potential economic phenomenon (King & Gardiner 2013; Smith & Hill 2009). Therefore, understanding the attitude and behaviour of the Chinese international student market is not only important for attracting and managing the current significant student market, but also critical to predicting future China independent outbound travel which is expected to be the main stream travel market in future China outbound travel.

This research seeks to uncover Chinese tertiary students' attitude and behaviour at the beginning stage of travel—vacation planning and information searching. When students decide to go on a trip, their first step is to search and collect available information. Therefore, information search behaviour forms the basis for their vacation planning (Bieger, Laesser & Gallen 2000). In a highly competitive tourism market, consumers' choices of tourism and hospitality products depend heavily on the information they use (Fodness & Murray 1997). Thus to influence students' travel decisions on destination, accommodation, transportation, and travel activities, tourism and hospitality companies need to understand their information search behaviour to provide relevant information at the right time through appropriate channels (Lo, Cheung & Law 2002).

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Specifically, this study identifies what information sources Chinese international students most prefer when choosing travel services, what factors influence or determine students' information search behaviour, and how Chinese students perceive the value of current information sources.

As the internet becomes the most important channels to connect with affluent consumers all over China, traditional media and events are no longer the best way to reach these consumers (Thraenhart 2012). Moreover, compare to the general consumers in the marketplace, the current young Chinese is a particular product of the "one-child" policy, and have experienced and enjoyed significant attention and resources from their parents. Therefore more young Chinese nowadays have opportunities for international education (King & Gardiner 2013). This market is also shaped by technology and by social attitudes associated with the growing ownership of mobile devices (King & Gardiner 2013; Smith & Hill 2009). When reaching out to them, tourism marketer will benefit from considering the environmental elements and the generational differences including individuality that may be shaping and influencing their attitudes and behaviour. This study seeks to provide empirical evidence of how these factors influence their information search behaviour.

## Methodology

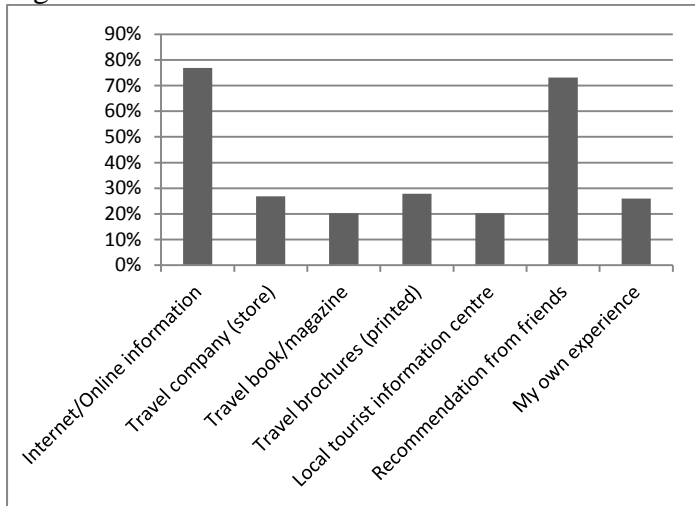
To investigate how international students search for travel information when planning a holiday in Australia, a letter of invitation containing a hyperlink to an online survey was sent to international offices of 38 universities in Australia. The letter addressed the purpose and importance of the research, and including that the results are expected to help travel companies better understand the Chinese student market and therefore to improve their business and the students' holiday experience. The consent and support from international offices was sought to forward the letter of invitation to the Chinese international students who are currently enrolled in the institution.

## Preliminary results

Until now, 4 of the universities have accepted the invitation, and forwarded the email to their Chinese international students. A total of 114 Chinese international students have completed the online survey, and 104 are able to be used for data analysis. A preliminary data analysis of the 104 collected respondents to indicate the merits of patterns of the Chinese student market in regard to information collection and consultation.

A comparison of information sources utilised was undertaken by examining the percentage of respondents who employed each source. Of the seven alternative information sources, "online information" (76.9% of sample) and "recommendation from friend" (73.1% of sample) were utilised by the greatest proportion of respondents in their vacation planning (see Figure 1). "Travel book or magazine" (20.2% of sample) and "tourist information centre" (20.2% of sample) were utilised by a much smaller proportion of respondents.

Figure 1



Regarding the primary source of information that respondents selected for service planning (e.g. travel accommodation, transportation, recreational activities, and entertainment activities), "online information" was used mostly as a primary source of information to plan all four services (Figure 2). Specifically, "hotel or other accommodation websites" were utilised mostly to choose accommodation, "airline or other transportation websites" were utilise most for transportation, and "online travel guide" was utilised mostly as a primarily website to plan recreational activities and entertainment activities (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Primary source of information used for service planning

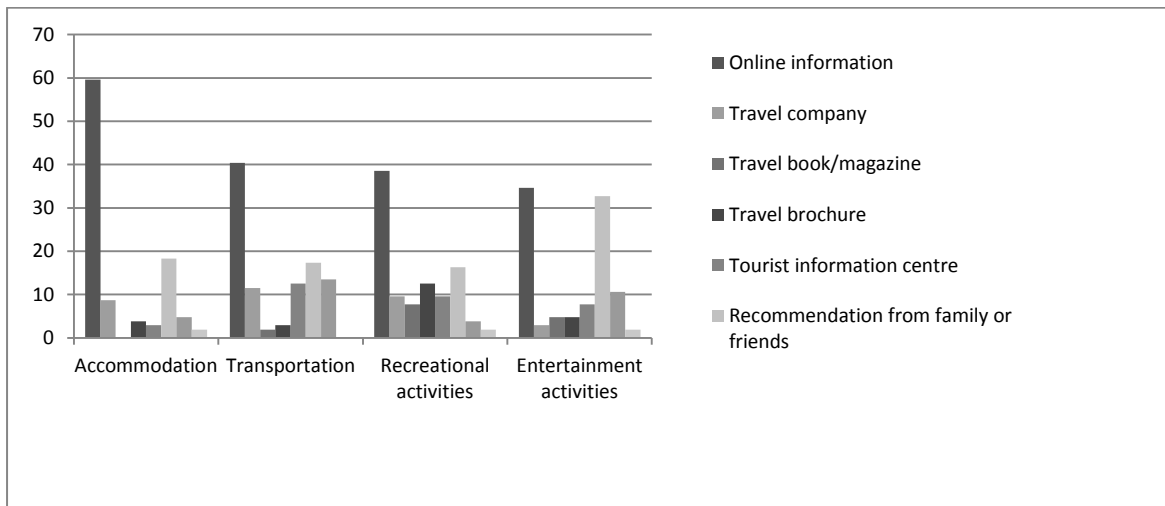
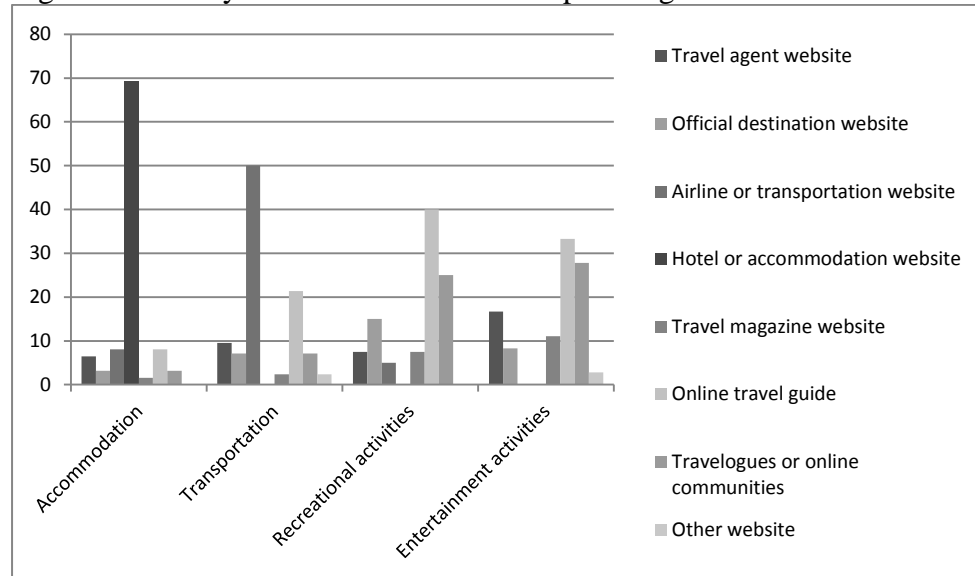


Figure 3. Primary website used for service planning



More data will be gathered between August and October 2014. In the future work, analyses will focus on identifying the importance of each of the information source and website evaluated by the student market, how trip-related variables (e.g. previous travel experience, travel party composition, length of trip, etc.) may influence students' information search and use behaviour, and how student perceive the value of information sources in the current marketplace.

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