

**Exploring the Destination Image of China through
International Urban Tourism**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Literature within the tourism discipline emphasized the importance of destination image due to its effect on both supply and demand sides of marketing. Gunn's seven-stage model illustrated the process and evolution of image formation of a destination has been used as a guiding model in the study. The purpose of this study is to explore the coherence and the difference between pre-conceived images and post-images of China holding by the North American tourists.

Purposive sampling was adapted to reach the target participants who fit the study criteria. Qualitative data were collected from eight interviews with participants from Canada and America. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted during October and November 2011.

Essences were developed from the analysis of the interview data by conducting initial coding and focused coding. Findings of the study were concluded into three parts: before visiting China; actual travel experiences; and after visiting China. Consistent with Gunn (1972)'s seven-stage theory, findings of the study showed a clear change between pre-conceived images and post-images holding by participants. Images involved from simple, vague, mythical, and stereotypical to comprehensive, realistic, and holistic. Moreover, advantages and problems of the international tourism in China emerged with the progress of data analysis.

The findings reflected the perceptions of China in the eyes of North American tourists; consequently, it could contribute to the future tourism practitioners who aim to promote China to be a desirable international tourism destination.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 International Tourism Development of China

China is a latecomer in the area of world international tourism development. China did set up some special institutions in the early 1950s to handle business travel arrangements but, until the end of the 1970s, this business was only a part of foreign affairs and had nothing to do with commercial operations. Therefore, in the early 1980s, China was a mere “nobody” on the world tourism stage, China ranked lower than 40th among the major world destination countries. Since the beginning of the 1990s, China's position on the world destination list has been climbing, and it has been in the top ten since 1994. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) China ranked sixth with 24 million international arrivals for overnight stays, accounting for 3.85% of the world total in 1998. In terms of international revenue from tourism in the same year, China ranked seventh, with over US \$12.5 billion, accounting for 2.8% of the world total. The success of Chinese international tourism has drawn attention from around the world (Zhang & Pine, 2000). Yu and Smith (2007) reported that tourism in the country is growing extensively in inbound, domestic, and outbound markets, bringing extensive investments to China's tourism and hospitality sectors.

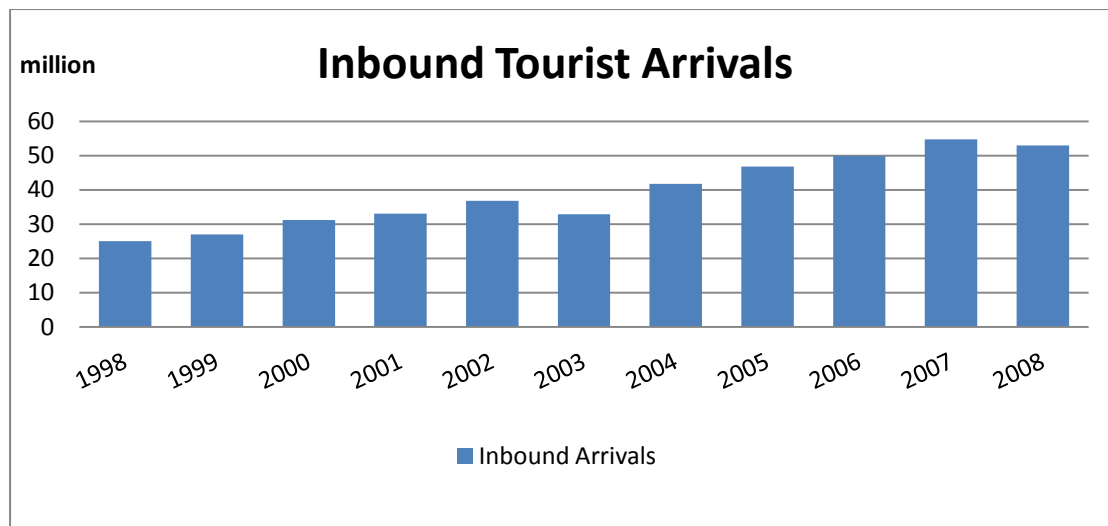


Figure 1

International tourist arrivals to China have increased from 27.5 million visitors in 1990 to 124 million visitors in 2006, resulting in employment for over 5.6 million people in the tourism and hospitality industries in 2005 (Wang, 2008). According to UNWTO, as of 2006, China was ranked fourth globally in terms of tourist arrivals and fifth in terms of tourist receipts. In the 2010 ranking of top destinations by international tourist arrivals, China has reinforced its position again. China has overtaken Spain and now ranks third after France and the USA, ("International tourism: first," 2011).



Figure 2. SOURCE: UNWTO, 2010

Despite its emergence as a prominent tourist destination, China is still struggling with a problematic national image that might prevent its tourism industry from developing to its full potential. Wang (2003) found that despite China's increasing openness and co-operation with the international community over the past twenty-five years, the perceptions of China held by people in Western countries are still primarily negative. On one hand, people have limited or no knowledge about developing countries. On the other hand, the economic, political and social problems associated with developing countries always provoke unfavorable or negative images (Grosspietsch, 2006). For example, Americans see China as militant, aggressive, and authoritarian. The association of China with ideologies that are unpopular in the West, such as communism and socialism, as well as with contentious issues such as human rights and the political status of Taiwan, has also had a crucial influence on the coverage of China in the US media (Yan, 1998; Fan, 2006).

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

This study is designed to compare the destination image of China held by North American travelers before and after visiting China, and to provide information and implications for tourism marketers who aim at promoting China to be a desirable international tourism destination.

Two research objectives and several research questions were developed to fulfill the research goal:

1. To examine the coherence and differences between destination images perceived by travelers before and after visiting China.
 - What are the pre-images of China in the eyes of North American travelers?
What are the negative and the positive images of China?
 - How are their actual travel experiences at China?
 - What are their images of China after visiting?
 - How do the pre- and post-trip images differ?
2. To explore applications for promoting China as a desirable international tourism destination.
 - What are the negative and positive images of China after visiting?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Destination image is commonly accepted as an important aspect in successful tourism development and destination marketing due to its impact on both supply- and demand side of marketing. Most of the image studies in tourism have focused on developed countries and destination, while developing and less-developed counties have received much less research attention (Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). A review of 142 destination image papers, published in the literature during the period 1973-2000 conducted by Steve Pike (2002) produced the same evidence. Among 142 studies of

destination image; only three of them measured the image of China as a tourism destination; none of the studies discussed the views of actual visitors. A study by Xiao and Mair (2006) explored how images of China as a tourism destination were portrayed in 35 articles from 20 major English newspapers issued from 1999 to 2003. The researchers employed a qualitative content analysis to identify image patterns and categories. They found that the images of China projected by the chosen newspapers showed a paradox in representational patterns, with contrasting imageries (*e.g.*, development vs. human rights) covering a wide range of aspects regarding Chinese life and society. Moreover, there have been very few studies dealing with urban tourism in East Asia at the international level.

Although China is emerging as one of the leading tourist destinations worldwide, it is still an understudied destination in the tourism literature (Ryan & Gu, 2007). Investigating the destination image of China has contemporary relevance, as the country has been struggling in recent years to improve its national and tourism images. These attempts reached their peak prior to China's hosting of the Olympic Games in August 2008 with an increasing number of marketing campaigns including hiring international media expertise, and sponsoring cultural events (wang, 2003; Xu, 2006). Several previous studies examined the destination image of special regions of the country such as Hong Kong (Choi, Chan, & Wu, 1999), Macao (McCartney, 2005) and Tibet (Mercille, 2005), yet, they possess distinct characteristics from mainland China and cannot be regarded as representative of the country as a whole. The current study aims at filling these gaps in the literature by exploring the destination image of mainland China in the eyes of Western travelers. In doing so, it will provide marketing strategies with significant information.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Destination Image and Framework

The broad research area of destination image has been studied in tourism literature for more than 30 years (Pike, 2002). An extensive range of definitions for the term image and the concept of destination image have been introduced within academic literature (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Gali & Donaire, 2005). From a review of fifteen studies between 1975 and 1990, Echtner and Ritchie (2003) suggested most definitions were vague, such as impressions of a place or perceptions of an area. San Martin and Del Bosque (2008) have created a table to show the main similarities among definitions (Figure 3). Hunt (1975) first identifies destination image as the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations and emotional thoughts an individual or group hold for a particular place. Crompton (1979) suggested that the image of a tourist destination is the aggregate of beliefs, ideas, impressions, and expectations that a tourist has about a destination. After decades of further research, Ratkai (2004) stated that although the definition of destination image have become more sophisticated over time, destination image still lacks a comprehensive, operative definition. She suggested a simplified, subjective interpretation of the relevant qualities or symbolic elements of a destination which consist of holistic impressions and/or destination attributes which may be of a functional psychological, common or unique nature. However, most of the definitions found in San Martin and Del Bosque (2008) include terms such as impression and perception of tourists to describe the concept of destination image. The repetition of these terms reinforces the idea that the tourists are ultimately the ones who influence the way a destination is viewed by the world.

Table 1
Definitions of destination image

Author/s	Definition
Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977)	An expression of knowledge, impressions, prejudices, imaginations and emotional thoughts an individual has of a specific place
Crompton (1979)	Sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination
Assael (1984)	Total perception of the destination that is formed by processing information from various sources over time
Phelps (1986)	Perceptions or impressions of a place
Gartner and Hunt (1987)	Impressions that persons hold about a state in which they do not reside
Moutinho (1987)	An individual's attitude toward the destination attributes based on their knowledge and feelings
Calantone et al. (1989)	Perceptions of potential tourist destinations
Embacher and Buttle (1989)	Ideas or conceptions held individually or collectively of the destination under investigation
Chon (1990)	Result of the interaction of a person's beliefs, ideas, feelings, expectations and impressions about a destination
Echtner and Ritchie (1991)	The perceptions of individual destination attributes and the holistic impression made by the destination
Dadgostar and Isotalo (1992)	Overall impression or attitude that an individual acquires of a place
Milman and Pizam (1995)	Visual or mental impression of a place, a product, or an experience held by the general public
MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997)	A composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression
Pritchard (1998)	An visual or mental impression of a specific place
Baloglu and McCleary (1999a)	An individual's mental representation of knowledge, feelings, and global impressions about a destination
Coshall (2000)	The individual's perceptions of the characteristics of destinations
Murphy, Pritchard and Smith (2000)	A sum of associations and pieces of information connected to a destination, which would include multiple components of the destination and personal perception
Tapachai and Waryszak (2000)	Perceptions or impressions of a destination held by tourists with respect to the expected benefit or consumption values
Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez (2001)	The subjective interpretation of reality made by the tourist
Kim and Richardson (2003)	Totality of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations, and feelings accumulated towards a place over time

Figure 3- Definitions of Destination Image

Source: San Martin and del Bosque (2008)

Numerous definitions have been proposed illustrating various components, dimensions and formation of the perceived image. Of all the components raised, the cognitive and affective ones proposed by Baloglu and McCleary have been widely

accepted by researchers across different disciplines. According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), destination image has two interrelated components: the cognitive and the affective; the cognitive component refers to an individual's belief or knowledge about destination attributes, these attributes could be weather, landscape, transpiration, food, recreation facilities or attitude of local people; the affective component refers to an individual's feeling towards the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, (1999); Gartner, 1993), Such as relaxed, happy, sleepy or gloomy. The cognitive and affective images are distinct yet interrelated.

To better express and visualize the formation of a destination image, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) created a framework of destination image formation based on the interactive relationship among the destination image, personal factors, and stimulus factors (Figure 4). The personal and stimulus factors acted as forces upon the destination image. The personal factors was comprised of psychological factors, such as consumers' values, motivations, and personality; and the social factors which are the consumers' age, marital status, and others. The stimulus factors referred to information sources, the consumers' previous experience, and the distribution channels. When these two different factors are applied to the destination image, it creates different evaluations of the image. The perceptual/cognitive evaluation is based on the beliefs or knowledge about the destination, while the affective evaluation refers to the consumers' emotions towards a destination image. Further, the perceptual /cognitive evaluation and the affective evaluation create a global image of the destination. Moreover, researchers also found that the affective component is formed based on a function of the cognitive component. The combination of the two components results in an overall image which is related to positive or negative evaluation of a destination (Beerli and Martin, 2004).

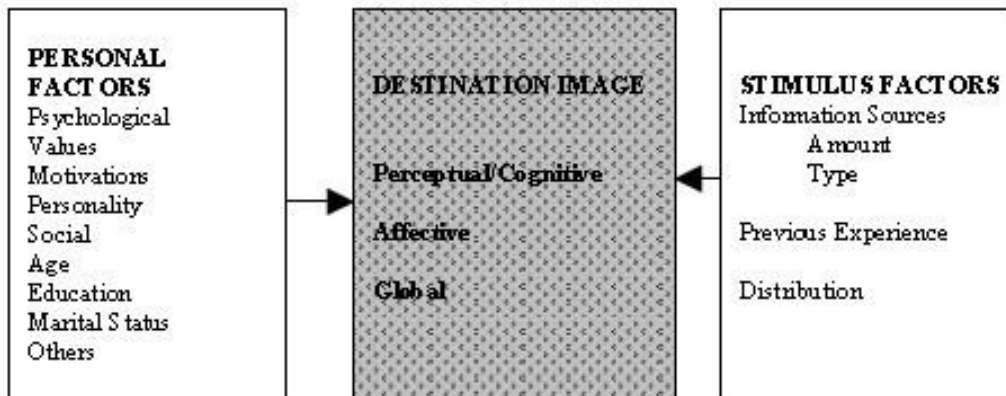


FIGURE 4- A GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF DESTINATION IMAGE FORMATION

Source: Baloglu and McCleary (1999)

A three-continuum conceptual framework (Figure 5) constructed by Echtner and Ritchie (1991) was accepted by the majority of researchers. Their framework has been cited by many researchers (Byon & Zhang, 2009; Jenkins, 1999; Kastenholz, 2010; Pan, 2011; Tasci and Gartner, 2007). The framework consisted of three different set of components required in the destination image formation process: Functional-psychological, Common- unique, Attribute – holistic. The functional characteristics refer to the more observable, measurable attributes like transportation, types of accommodation while the psychological characteristics represent the intangible attributes like reputation, safety and hospitality. The common-unique continuum based on the idea that perceptions about the various characteristics of a destination can range from being considered common or unique and it varies from person to person. Finally, the attribute-holistic continuum suggested that destination image involves specific attributes as well as a bigger picture, the general feeling, and the overall image of the destination.

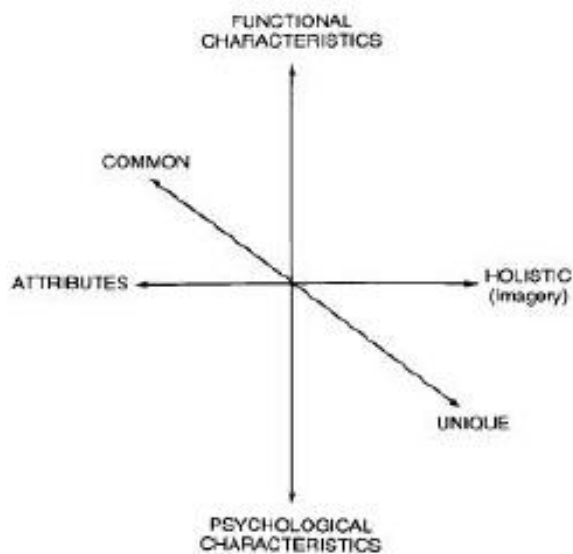


FIGURE 5-THE COMPONENTS OF DESTINATION IMAGE

Source: Echtner and Ritchie (1991)

Attributes of destinations vary with distinctiveness of destinations. Echtner & Ritchie (2003) summarized the attributes of destination image by grouping the attributes used by the various researchers into Categories; the master list of attributes has also been arranged within the functional/ psychological continuum (Figure 6). He found that very few of the research have succeeded in incorporating the majority of these attributes into a measurement instrument. Furthermore, the emphasis in existing research has obviously been on the more functional attributes of destination image. The only psychological attribute measured by the majority of researchers is “friendliness”.

	Number of Studies Measuring the Attribute **
FUNCTIONAL (physical, measurable)	
Scenery/Natural Attractions	13
Costs/Price Levels	9
Climate	8
Tourist Sites/Activities	8
Nightlife and Entertainment	8
Sports Facilities/Activities	8
National Parks/Wilderness Activities	7
Local Infrastructure/Transportation	7
Architecture/Buildings	7
Historic Sites/Museums	6
Beaches	6
Shopping Facilities	5
Accommodation Facilities	5
Cities	4
Fairs, Exhibits, Festivals	2
Facilities for Information and Tours	1
Crowdedness	4
Cleanliness	4
Personal Safety	4
Economic Development/Affluence	3
Accessibility	2
Degree of Urbanisation	1
Extent of Commercialisation	1
Political Stability	1
Hospitality/Friendliness/Receptiveness	11
Different Customs/Culture	7
Different Cuisine/Food and Drink	7
Restful/Relaxing	5
Atmosphere (Familiar versus Exotic)	4
Opportunity for Adventure	3
Opportunity to Increase Knowledge	2
Family or Adult Oriented	1
Quality of Service	1
Fame/Reputation	1
PSYCHOLOGICAL (abstract)	

** Total number of studies referenced is 14

Figure 6- Attributes used by researchers to measure destination image

Source: Echtner & Ritchie (2003)

The perceived image is unique based on travelers own memories, associations or imaginations of a destination (Jenkins, 1999). Tourism images are important because of the role they play in the potential tourists' decision making process. Gunn (1972) established a seven stage theory to reveal the process of tourist forms an image of a destination (Figure 7). Gunn's theory involves a constant building and modification of images that are conceived at a number of levels which are organic, induced, and modified- induced. The organic image is formed through the accumulation of information came from unbiased sources such as school, books, television documentaries, and the experience of friends and family. Induced image is developed through marketing and commercial promotions, such as advertising and brochures form tourists' services. Modified- induced image is formed from the result and evaluations of tourists' actual experiences of the destination. Stage theory implied that the images held by potential visitors, non-visitors and returned visitors differs (Gunn, 1972).

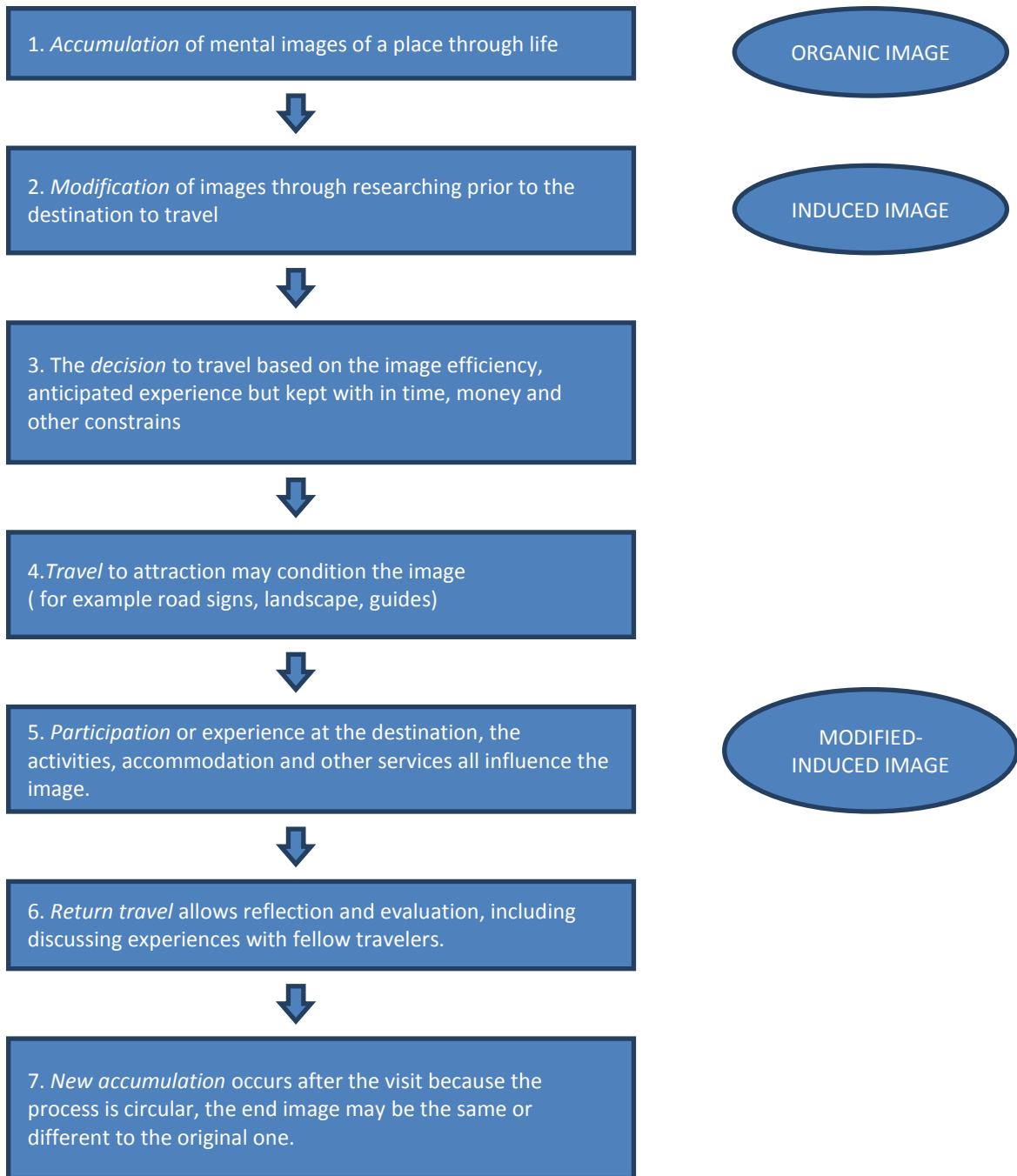


Figure 7- Stage-theories of destination images

Source: Gunn (1972)

In contrast, Phelps (1986) and Narayana (1976) found that images of a destination may fade or revert over time, especially if intervening visits to other similar places

confuse the memory. In Phelps' study, first-time and returning tourists to two new Menorcan resorts were asked whether they expected their resort to be close to or part of a traditional Menorcan town or village. The two resorts are described in nearly all of the tourist brochures as traditional or traditionally-styled, whereas, in reality, all were constructed recently. Both first-time and repeat tourists were found to be more likely to expect a traditional settlement, indicating that for repeat tourists the public image of a destination may actually be more persuasive than personal observation (Phelps, 1986).

2.2 Image Formation Agents

Destination image is generally recognized as an important factor in the decision-making process for prospective and first time travelers (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; San Martin & Bosque, 2008). Tourists make their choices of where to spend their vacation and money based on the destination image portrayed by the destination marketers but also based on their own images that come from many different sources.

Tourists acquire destination image in many ways, including advertising and promotion, news accounts, magazine stories, conversation with acquaintances, and past visits (Gartner and Hunt, 1987). Based on previous literature, Tasci and Gartner (2007) categorized sources of image formation agents as (1) supply-side or destination, (2) independent or autonomous, (3) demand-side or image receivers. Perceivers can also form images through personal experience. Researchers agree that project image which built by destination marketers is not always consistent with perceive image from actual tourists (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). In addition, information transmission between suppliers, intermediaries and receivers has become more complicated since the arrival of the Internet (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007).

Gunn (1988) noted that a consumer's destination image depends largely on external stimuli, which are also called image formation agents by Gartner (1993). Based on his destination image theory, Gunn (1988) divided the information a consumer obtains on a destination into organic and induced categories. Organic images are those come from unbiased sources such as newspapers, periodicals, and books, while induced images are based on marketing and promotional material such as advertising literature, magazine articles, guidebooks, television promotion, and travel tour page by travel businesses overtly provide induced information for consumers. Gartner (1993) stated that the difference between induced and organic images is the amount of control destinations have over what is being presented. To better understand where these images originate from, Gartner (1993) presented a systematic classification of image- change agents, a list of eight different image formation agents were included.

1. Overt Induced I - agent refers to the traditional forms of advertising through television, radio, brochure, billboards, and print media advertising by destination area promoters with direct attempts to push a particular destination image to perspective visitors. Advertising, traditionally, faces the challenge of low credibility perceived by consumers.
2. Overt Induced II - agent refers to the information received or requested from tour operators, wholesalers, and organizations that have a vested interest in the travel decision process but not directly associated with a particular destination. Tour operators and wholesalers may portray and delivery unrealistic images to the consumer because of their business interest in profit; destination promoters should be aware of the potential risk and be caution in order to successfully promote a

- realistic destination image.
3. Convert induced I - agent refers to the use of a recognizable spoke person; this agent is intended to overcome the credibility problem inherent in Over Induced I agent. Using a Celebrity spokesperson increase message recall especially when the celebrity is identified and brand name is mentioned early in the advertisement. An endorsement from a satisfied customer is another form of this agent if choosing a celebrity is not possible.
 4. Covert Induced II - agent refers to articles, reports, or stories where the consumer is unaware of the promotional effort behind these pieces. One example is articles published by travel writers who were invited and funded by the DMO or tourism enterprises in a destination.
 5. Autonomous - agents consist of independently produced reports, documentaries, movies, and news articles; all above sources are either belong to news or popular culture category. The study of tourism image changes for the People's Republic of China resulting from media coverage of the Tiananmen Square Event (Gartner & Shen, 1992), illustrate the importance of news on consumer perception.
 6. Unsolicited Organic - agent is the unrequested information received from individuals who have been to the destination or who believe they have the knowledge of the destination. A person without a fully developed image of a destination may be heavily influenced by this kind of information.
 7. Solicited organic - agent refers to information requested by the consumer from other individuals, particularly respected sources such as family, friends, and opinion leaders. This type of agent will influence the holiday decision of the

- consumer more than unsolicited organic agents.
8. Organic agent - simply refers to information acquired during a trip to the destination by the consumer, thus the organic image formation has the highest credibility.

2.3 Factors Influencing Image Formation

Chen and Tsai (2006) noted that the evaluation of a destination is based on the perceived quality, value and overall satisfaction with a destination. Destination image can influence tourists' future intentions to visit and their willingness to recommend the destination to others. Thus, destination image is a concept which tourism managers and destination marketing organization recognize as one of the most important factors in destination marketing. Understanding the factors that influencing image formation is the key to identify potential markets and to formulate targeted promotional strategies (Goodall, 1990).

Socio-demographic characteristics have been considered as a common factor integrated into image studies (Beerli & Martin, 2004). A number of researchers have found that socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, occupation, household status, place of origin, distance, income, and social class affect individuals' image formation to different extents (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Brown, 2001; Zhang, Lu, & Zhang, 2006). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) studied the perceptions of Turkey, Greece, Italy and Egypt by Americans who intended to travel to these countries and found that age and education levels significantly influenced both cognitive and affective images of the respondents. Stern and Krakover

(1993) discovered that education, age and gender had an effect on the British travelers' perceptions of Spain.

Some researchers have reached contradictory findings about the impacts of certain social-demographic characteristics on perceived images. For example, Baloglu's (1997) study of West German travelers' image variation of the United States found no significant differences in the influence of education, gender and income on destination images. Smith and MacKay (2001) reported that no age-related differences were found among participants in their memory of pictures of tourism destinations.

Motivation is another factor which is considered to be important in any attempt to understand tourists' behavior and travel choices (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). The role of motivations in travel is of primary importance and should be taken into consideration when marketing a destination (Fodness, 1994). According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2004), motivations are socio-psychological forces that originate from a need not satisfied and that stimulate an individual to participate in a specific need-fulfilling activity. Buhalis (1999) noted that each destination can match only certain types of demand and hence tourism marketers need to appreciate travel motivations in order to develop appropriate offerings and brand destinations for the right target markets. Due to the push role that motivations play in prompting actions, they are included in destination choice and image formation models as major influential factors (McWilliams & Crompton, 1997). Some researchers have claimed that the affective image is to a great extent influenced by individual's motivations resulting from their travel experience (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Gartner, 1993). According to Baloglu and Brinberg (1997), the affective image is the value attached to the destination based on travel benefits sought

by individuals. Individuals 'images of the degree to which the destination provides the desired benefits (*e.g.*, an adventure experience) influence how those individuals feel about or value the destination (the affective image) (Baloglu, 1997). Furthermore, Hsu, Tsai, and Wu (2009) have noted —personal preferences, like motivations, may be both intrinsic, reflecting individual likes and dislikes, and extrinsic, or socially conditioned. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) dictated —countries seeking to increase their tourism share should consider the characteristics of their target markets and tailor their image development and positioning efforts to specific socio-demographic and motivation segments.

A number of researchers have confirmed that individuals 'motivations influence their affective images towards a destination, although in varying degrees (Baloglu, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and Gartner (1993) claimed that motivations may influence the overall image in a direct or indirect way, as the affective image influences that image. Baloglu (1999) also provided evidence that motivations influenced cognitive rather than affective images in his study of the relationship between information sources, motivations, perceived images and visitation intention.

Consumer and tourist behavior studies indicated that personal travel experience plays a role in future decision making in the form of a passive or internal information search (Crompton, Fakeye, & Lue, 1992; Evans & Berman, 1993). This information from previous travel is compared to the present experience to form repeat visitors' images (Schreyer et al., 1984). In some cases, past experiences may have more influence than external sources on image formation because individuals tend to place more value

on their experiences (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Past experience has been investigated and described as a factor influencing image modification by many researchers. Gunn states that potential visitors hold both organic and induced images of a destination until they visit the place. After their travel, a modified induced image, a complex image, is formed.

To investigate this modified image resulting from previous experience, most researchers (*e.g.*, Chon, 1991; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Milman & Pizan, 1995) evaluate the image difference between first-time and repeat visitors. Fakeye and Crompton (1991), for example, studied the images perceived by prospective, first-time and repeat visitors to the Lower Rio Grande Valley and found that the images held by non-visitors, the first-timers and repeaters were significantly different. The researchers pointed out that the actual visitation to the destination set the criteria for the visitors' future evaluation of destination alternatives. Tasci (2007) used a longitudinal approach to analyze the images of first-time and non-visitors to Michigan through a secondary dataset provided by the Michigan Regional Travel Market Survey. The results indicated that people who had visited Michigan had a better overall image than people who had not. Some researchers (Kaplanidou, 2007; Hu & Ritchie, 1993) have investigated the role of past travel experience in destination image formation using familiarity as an intermediate factor. They argued that past travel experience increased individuals' familiarity with a place, while familiarity positively affected individuals' images of a place (Baloglu, 2001). Therefore, travel experience influences individuals' images of the destination.

Numbers of researchers have confirmed the role of previous travel experience in influencing perceived images; however, some have different findings as to what

component of the perceived image is influenced by previous travel (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). For example, Hu and Ritchie (1993) reported that individuals' previous visits positively affected specific attributes of the cognitive image such as destination attractiveness, while Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) discovered that prior visitation can lead to more affective images. Still other researchers (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Hunt, 1975; Young, 1999) reached the conclusion that previous visitation had no significant influence on destination image.

Although the effect of image on post-visit behavior has been recognized, this is one of the most overlooked aspects of destination image theory since only a few researchers have examined this effect empirically. Ross (1993) found correlations between some destination dimensions and respondents' evaluative variables. In particular, he found that if visitors have a positive image of a destination in terms of the receptiveness dimension, they are more likely to want to revisit the destination. Milman and Pizam (1995) implied that once tourists were satisfied with their experience they might like to revisit a destination. Joppe, Martin, and Waalen (2001), referring to another study on the dimensions affecting destination loyalty, stated that different cultural experiences and convenient transportation were significantly related to destination loyalty.

Destination image is strongly believed to influence a tourist's choice of destination. Some researchers have linked destination choice to a positive overall image. Chen and Kerstetter (1999) argued that tourists choose one destination over another only when its positive image aspects exceed its negative image aspects. Some researchers stated that destination image must be not only positive but also strong to be chosen by travelers (Alhemoud & Armstrong 1996; Ross 1993). Yet another proposition is that destinations

should have distinctive images which are different from tourists' everyday life experiences in order to be chosen as a travel destination (Bramwell & Rawding 1996). Hunt implied that destinations with extremely exotic images may not be chosen since such qualities might pose discomfort for potential travelers. Hunt's proposition is supported by MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997), who found that visuals depicting the unique features of a destination caused anxiety in some subjects. The original travel destination preference model developed by Plog (1974) is designed to explain how tourists' personality characteristics determine their travel patterns and preferences (Figure 8). In his model, individual travelers are categorised along the psychocentric /allocentric continuum based upon a constellation of personality characteristics. The continuum was divided into five segments: (1) psychocentric, (2) near-psychocentric, (3) mid-centric, (4) near-allocentric, (5) allocentric the tourists along the continuum were normally distributed. At one extreme of the continuum are psychocentric travelers, who were described as "self-inhibited, nervous, and non-adventuresome, preferring well-developed destination and travelling with groups". At the other end of the continuum are allocentrics, who is described as outgoing and self-confident, tend to do new things, and to explore the world, prefer independent vacation experience at destinations that have not yet been developed. This work was historically important in providing one organizing theory of travel motivation. This model has been widely cited in the tourism literature, allocentric and psychocentric have become standard lingo in the field.

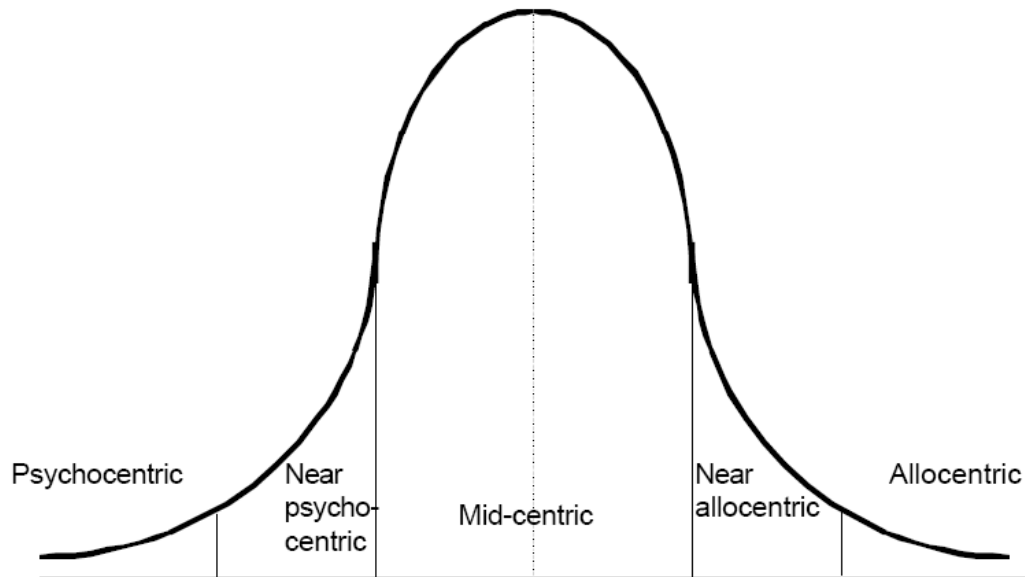


Figure 8- Travel Destination Preference Model
 Source: Stanley Plog, (1972)

At the same time, it has been scrutinized by a host of critics who questioned aspects of the model's applicability and validity (Griffith & Albanese, 1996). Perhaps the most fascinating discussion was initiated by Smith (1990). Smith (1990) investigated actual travel behavior within a multinational sample frame. The result of the test showed that Plog's model failed to support the hypothesized relationship between personality characteristics and destination preference. Plog (1990) contends that his model was not conducted since Smith (1990) used the "wrong variables," the "wrong Classification system," and the "wrong sample." The conflicting nature of the empirical results of Smith (1990) leads to questioning of Plog's model. However, it may not be a question of the validity of the model, but rather the conditions under which the model was tested (Griffith & Albanese, 1996). Some other researchers based destination choice on tourists' needs and wants (Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001) and benefits that the destination is believed to offer (Gartner & Shen, 1992). Specifically, Gartner (1993)

stressed that destination choice depends on a “benefit package, unique to the destination, expected to provide the greatest intrinsic reward to the traveler,” which is derived from destination image.

Some researchers argue that familiarity with a destination through tourist information plays an important role in tourists’ destination preferences (Baloglu, 2001). Court and Lupton (1997) recognize the importance of well-formulated and targeted marketing communication because, they argue, tourist information influences destination choice by generating both awareness and interest, which then stimulate desire and lead to action. Nevertheless, Milman and Pizam (1995) argued that awareness by itself may not generate interest and, ultimately, a purchase decision. However, when choice is possible it is reasonable to assume that a decision process including the cognitive and affective image components does take place. One of the most important aspects of image formation for a tourist destination is to determine the most important variables tourists consider when evaluating a destination (Govers & Go, 2003). The preferred position for a destination, with regard to a particular target market, can be determined by looking at the preferences of visitors relative to these variables and then matching them with their perception of the destination.

2.4 Destination Branding

While destination image is influenced by a variety of factors, the branding of a destination will significantly alter tourist perception if the brand is developed and marketed effectively. A variety of definitions have been suggested for destination branding due to a lack of agreement among researchers (Pike, 2008). With regards to an image of a destination rather than a tangible product, Williams and Palmer (1999) defined

the destination brand as a combination of the images projected by the organization and received by the consumer, which are ultimately shaped by the consumer's previous attitude, knowledge, and experiences. After summarizing the evolution of destination branding definition, Blain, Levy, and Ritchie (2005) developed a revised definition that incorporated earlier efforts, they defined destination branding as:

the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitors and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice.

The American Marketing Association (2010) defined brand image as the perception of a brand in the mind of persons. The brand image is a mirror reflection of the brand personality or product being. It is what people believe about a brand, their thoughts, feelings, expectations. Therefore an emotional connection between the consumer and the projected product image is apparent and influence purchase behavior. The brand image possessed by the consumer can be positive or negative in nature; however, this fundamental perception is acquired from personal beliefs and thus varies in person.

Pike (2008) noted the three core positioning elements for destinations include the place name, the symbol, and the positioning slogan. These elements are critical to market the destination as they act as an immediate representation of the place and help to diversify the available product against competitors. The capability of a destination to market itself through positive image building will help to distinguish itself among similar destinations (Cai, 2002).

Sevier (2005) indicated that the two essential components of an effective brand are the awareness and the relevance. Thus, a simplified measurement on the destination

brand performance can be created. An effective branding will have to make a consumer first notice the brand, differentiate the brand from others, and finally acknowledge the method of reaching or searching for the brand product. Therefore, in order to assess the awareness component, the rate of consumers noticing the brand, the rate of consumers able to clearly differentiate the brand, and the rate of consumers actually searching for further information can all reflect the awareness component of the brand performance.

One of the most recognized brand assessment methods in the marketing field is Young & Rubicam's Brand Asset Valuator created by the global advertising agency Young & Rubicam (Aaker, 1996). The valuator is consisted of four sets of measurements on energized differentiation, relevance, esteem, and knowledge to assess the successfulness of the brand. Energized differentiation is about innovation ability to stand out in the market place and pricing power. It reflects a brand's potential to create sustainable competitive advantage. It is the most important brand component in growing intangible value. Energized differentiation is the engine of the brand train; relevance corresponds to a brand's ability to be personally meaningful, it leads to serious consideration and trial and is highly correlated to household penetration; esteem, measures the extent to which consumers like and respect a brand, it captures loyalty and how well a brand fulfills its promise; knowledge measures the level of intimacy a consumer has with the brand, knowledge is highly correlated with top of mind awareness and brand saliency. In addition, brand strength is calculated by multiplying differentiation and relevance based on the logic that a brand can only be strong with strong differentiation and relevance components. Multiplying the esteem and knowledge, brand stature is created.

BrandAsset® Valuator

Brand contributes to both future and current enterprise value of a company.



Figure 9 Source: YOUNG & RUBICAM BRANDS (2010)

Four Pillars: The Sequence of Brand Development

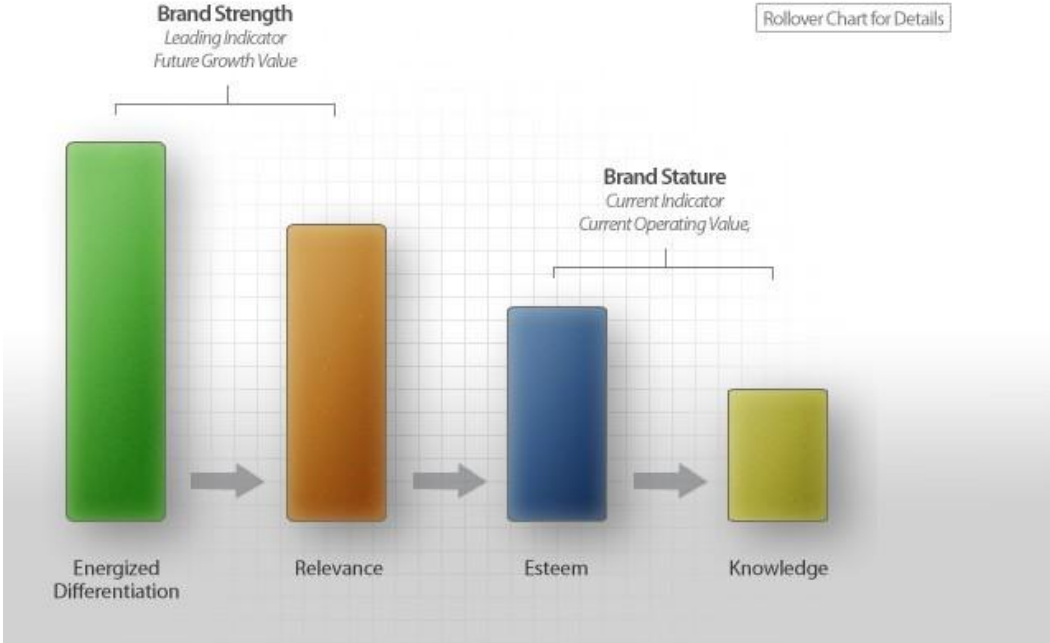


Figure 10 Source: YOUNG & RUBICAM BRANDS (2010)

Aaker (1996) suggested a measurement system of ten components in the brand equity titled as the Brand Equity Ten. These ten measurements are divided into five categories as:

1. Loyalty Measure- Price Premium; Satisfaction/ Loyalty.
2. Perceived Quality/ Leadership Measures- Perceived Quality; Leadership Popularity.
3. Associations/Differentiation Measures- Perceived Value; Brand Personality; Organizational Associations.
4. Awareness Measure- Brand Awareness.
5. Market Behavior Measures- Market Share; Market Price and Distribution Coverage.

This set of measures is well recognized in the academic world, especially among marketing researchers, even though the system is complicated with many problems toward each system (Johanson, Martensson, & Skoog, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). The commonality of all the above measurement is that these are designed for the purpose of general business sectors. Their applicability to tourism, especially in destination branding, is limited. Despite the long history of branding and measurement theory development in the marketing field, little has been done on the branding measurement of destination image in the tourism industry. After all, the importance of branding and positioning on a destination only recently started to attract tourism researchers' attention.

During the international travel and tourism research association conference in 1998, a more defined measurement, with a focus of destination branding, is proposed by Ritchie

and Ritchie (1998). They based their approach on the selection and recollection roles of branding and its effect on a consumer's tourism behavior. Ten Measurements were divided into pre- and post – experience categories because destination branding assists in destination selection and enhances recollection. Before a vacation is taken, the overall measurement of the performance is the extent to which the destination is chosen over others. However, through the consumer decision making process, a number of measurements are created:

1. The degree of recognition/association
2. Lack of confusion with other destinations
3. Lack of confusion with other products/services
4. The extent to which brand generates a desire to visit the destination
5. The intensity of the desire to visit that the brand generates
6. The nature and importance of the specific benefits the visitor expects to realize for the destination experiences
7. The extent to which the brand provides a “ cloud of comfort” for the visitor- a feeling that all is, or will going well during the destination visit.

After a vacation has taken place, the emphasis of the destination branding shifts to assisting the consumer to easily recall the tourism experience, creating a warm and friendly memory of the destination and the experiences, and promoting the idea that return to the destination is a sound decision. Thus, a number of measurements are created:

1. The ease, frequency, and strength of the recall of the destination experience
2. The extent to which the brand helps create memories of the destination and the

visitor's experiences

3. The intensity or warmth of memories elicited
4. The degree of conformity provided that the future/current choice was/is a sound one
5. The ability of the brand to serve as a catalyst to tie together the many "bits" of memory of the destination experience
6. The ability of the brand to "cement" the consolidated memory of the destination experiences.

In this system, measurements are associated with the role of destination branding in different stages of a consumer's decision making process which has a strong applicability on destination branding assessment.

Once a destination brand has emerged, and image is established and the destination is now associated with projected image. Regardless of the destination brand being marketed, a destination image is often altered by personal stereotypes, past experiences, word-of-mouth, historical events, and common misconceptions (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). Literature within the tourism discipline has highlighted the difference between emitted image and perceived images. The emitted image is that of which has been constructed for the purpose of being advertised by the marketing campaigns of a destination (Gali & Donaire, 2005); whereas the perceived image is that of which is received individually and is subjective to personal attitudes (Camprubí et al., 2008). It is a challenge for marketers to insure the satisfaction of tourists, although the role of a brand for a destination can help to alter that perception, the final decision is that of the consumer.

Summary of literature review

Literature reviews presented in this chapter summarized the nature of destinations image and destination branding. Destination image is generally recognized as an important factor in the decision making process for prospective and first time traveler (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Tourists make their choices of where to spend their vacation and money based on the destination image portrayed by the destination marketers, but also based on the destination images conceived from many other sources such as advertisement, travel guides, travel journals, books, general media publicity, and word- of- mouth (Um& Crompton, 1992). The cumulative impression from different sources holds by potential visitors is the key elements of a purchase decision. Buhails (2000) defined the term images as the set of expectations and perceptions a prospective traveler has of a destination. Consequently, the formation of such an image is developed prior to arrival at the destination; as a result, destination satisfaction might be determined in part based on the pre-conceived image. O'Leary and Deegan (2005) noted, for tourism development, it is important that actual participation at a destination equal or surpass the pre-image of the destination for the experience to be satisfying. Gunn (1972)'s seven stage theory also revealed the nature of destination image. Gunn's theory involves a constant building and modification of images that are conceived at a number of levels which are organic, induced, and modified- induced. The theory showed that the modifications happen mostly in the last three stages of the process, and it also implied that the images held by potential visitors, non-visitors and returned visitors differ. Therefore, destination image has a significant function as it can influence the tourist prior to travel, throughout travel, and upon return after the travel experience.

Literature within the tourism disciplines has highlighted the different between

projected images and perceived images (Camprub í Guia, & Comas, 2008; Gali & Donaire, 2005). But the tourism image studies have been mainly focused on the perceived image whereas less attention has been put into exploring the relationship between pre-images and perceived image. To fill in research gaps, this study will compare the pre-image and perceived image of China through North America travelers.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Qualitative Research Approach

I have taken a social constructivist stand in conducting this research. Constructivist researchers seek to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants. This means identifying a group with a common culture and studying how it develops shared patterns of behavior over time. Meanings of the phenomenon are varied and multiple; they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are built through a process of human interaction, and through the historical and cultural contexts where individuals live. Thus, constructivist researchers seek to understand these socially-constructed meanings focusing on the specific context or setting of participants (Creswell, 2009). I wanted to explore how China is perceived through the eyes of the research participants from North America. I worked from a constructivist perspective asked questions that probe at the meaning of experience and focus on how people feel and think about their experiences.

Qualitative research approach was chosen for this study. Qualitative researchers use mainly words and images rather than numbers in its data analysis, the main goals of qualitative researchers is to seeing through the eyes of research participants (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). I was born and raised in China; I worked as an international assistant account manager for two years in Shenzhen, China. After the completion of my first master's of education in University of Wisconsin-Platteville, USA, I have been working on my second master's in Recreation and leisure study in University of Waterloo. With those experiences, I became very interested in the cross-culture interaction, especially in the image study of China through foreigners' eyes. The goal of this study is to explore and compare how China is perceived before and after North American tourists'

visit of China. To address the research objectives, qualitative data was collected to answer the research questions.

3.2 Purposive Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive snowball sampling was employed for this study; initial interviewees were chosen from my acquaintances that are originally from North America. Additionally, in order to ensure the data collected from participants were comparable, several selection criteria were set:

1. Participant's trip to China was a leisurely trip, not a business trip or anything else.
2. Participant has visited China just once so far, and the length of time since the trip to China is no more than one year.

Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views. The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as these researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009). To answer research questions of the study, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were developed.

Interview guide:

An interview guide was developed based on Gunn's seven-stage theory. Gunn's seven-stage theory involves a constant building and modification of a destination image at different stages. Organic images are formed through the accumulation of information came from independent, day-to-day sources in people's daily life such as newspapers. Induced image is developed at the stage of trip planning. Modified- induced image is formed from participants' actual experiences when they are traveling in China. New

accumulation of the image occurs after the visit as participants reflect, evaluate, and discuss experiences with others. In order to obtain the related data, the interview guide was divided into five parts.

Part one: Demographic background

1. Sex, age, occupation, educational level, and income will be asked in this section.

This reflects the complexity of the data.

2. When did you visit China? How many times have you visited China? What was the purpose of the visit?

Part Two: Before coming up with the idea of visiting China

1. What are your mental post cards of China?
2. How did you get the images of China? From what kind of information sources did you get those images? For example, television, movies, book, friends, families.

Part Three: Trip Planning

1. What kind of information sources have you encountered or used in knowing China better? For example, internet, tour guide books.
2. What were your motivations? What were your expectations of the trip to China?

Part Four: Traveling in China

1. How long did you stay in China? How many cities did you visit? Tell me about your favorite cities or places.
 2. Tell me about your favorite experiences and unpleasant experiences in China.
- ❖ Follow up or probing questions not included in the interview guide may be asked as I may pick up on things according to participant's replies.

Part Five: After the visit

1. What is your image of China? Can you use few words or sentences to sum up China? Is the perceived image differs from your expectations? What are the differences?
2. Have you shared your experience with others? Would you recommend China as a travel destination to others? What do you recommend to future travelers?
3. Are you satisfied with the trip at China? Would you revisit China?

Initial interviewees were reached by e-mail. A list of potential participants was developed based on the recommendation of the target interviewees. Documents with a brief introduction of the study and consent form were sent to the confirmed participant. A total of eight qualified participants took part in the study.

The researcher should be alert to the risk of narrative fallacy and confirmation error of subjective data collection. Narrative fallacy refers to the tendency of people to impose a story on a series of observations to make sense out of them. The story need not be true nor do the facts need to be related to each other. Confirmation error is the tendency for a researcher to see only evidence that confirms his or her beliefs, preconceived idea, or models, and to ignore evidence that disproves them. It also refers to the belief that the absence of contrary evidence proves the conclusions. To minimize the potential problems, researcher should keep an open-mind during the interview; avoid pre-forming conclusions that may bias the result of the research and should actively look for counter-examples to the findings (Smith, 2010).

The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and comfortable environment. Privacy, good lighting, a comfortable temperature and some space would help set the stage for a good interview. Most of the interviews were arranged at early evening.

Interviews lasted from thirty to sixty minutes. Interviews were conducted in interviewee's first language-English. All the interviews began with a brief review of the nature of the project. Potential benefit from the study that is relevant to the interviewees was delivered; this helped the interviewees identify the importance of the facts which researcher really needs to learn from him/her (Smith, 2010). To prevent the data loss, I prepared two recording devices, the first one is IPHONE 4, and the other one is digital camera. Interviews were audio recorded with interviewee's permit. No one refused to be audio recorded, and some of them gave the permission to use their real name in the findings. One-on-one interviews were conducted through audio conferences by Skype. During the interview, probing questions were asked according to participants' responses. I also kept a research journal after each interview. The journal captured:

- How the interview went
- When and where the interview took place
- The interviewer's personal assessment of the interview

It was truly a great experience, talking with participants, listening to each individual experience, seeing China through participants' eyes. I was surprised by some of the experiences and opinions that participants shared with her. Lots of essences and insights were gained through the interviews.

3.3 Data Analysis

Grounded theory was adopted in the data analysis. It is by far the most widely used framework for analyzing qualitative data (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). It looks at what occurs in the research setting, and what research participants' lives are like. It aims at studying how they explain people's statements and actions, and ask what analytic sense

can be made of them. Grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and method for developing theories to understand them. In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss (1967) talked about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, Charmaz (2006) assumed that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices.

Grounded theory is not ‘theory’ in the conventional scientific sense, but a systematic method designed to lead a researcher into concluding some general patterns based on the collection and systematic coding of subjective data (Smith, 2010). The basic idea behind grounded theory method is that the researcher systematically collects data, primarily but not necessarily through interviews. Observations are compared and coded as the researcher collects more and more data, eventually ‘revealing’ patterns that make sense to the researcher. These patterns are ultimately stated as ‘theory’, which may be either a general statement of patterns and processes, or a statement specific to the situation being studied (Smith, 2010). Theoretical saturation, constant comparison, and coding are the tools of grounded theory. The key process in grounded theory is coding (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009).

Coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data. The codes show how you select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytic accounting of them. Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data.

Though coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means Charmaz (2006). Grounded theory coding consists of at least two main phases: 1) initial coding, it involves naming each word, line, or segment of data ; 2) focused coding, it uses the most significant and/or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data. During initial coding, the goal is to remain open to all possible theoretical possibilities indicated by the data. Initial coding should stick closely to the data. The approach is to see actions in each segment of data rather than applying preexisting categories to the data. A guideline for initial coding was developed by Charmaz (2006):

- Remain open
- Stay close to the data
- Keep your codes simple and precise
- Construct short codes
- Preserve actions
- Compare data with data
- Move quickly through the data

I transcribed the audio data into a Word document; it took three to fourth times of the recording time to transcribe. Transcriptions were sent back to participants for confirmation. Some limited modifications were made according to participant's feedback. After that, I began with initial coding. Each interview transcript was printed with a left margin on each page prepared for initial coding. Line by line coding were adopted at this step, I read and re-read each line of the transcript with the intent of being able to generalize what was said. This involves looking into respondent's words, search for

hidden themes. Initial coding is a tedious process, you need to consider every sentence or even individual phrases, attempting to note meaning or themes in each (Smith, 2010).

The same content was coded more than once to ensure the reproduction of same codes as suggested by Shields (2001). A total of 301 initial codes were developed.

After initial coding, I began the focused coding to pinpoint and develop the most salient categories in large batches of data. Focused coding is more directed, selective, and conceptual than initial coding (Glaser, 1978). It requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data precisely and completely Charmaz (2006). It involves more intuition and critical thinking than initial coding (Smith, 2010). It is a set of procedures whereby data are put together in new ways after initial coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by linking codes to contexts, consequences, patterns of interaction, and apparent causes (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). First, all the codes were reviewed and redundancies were eliminated. Then, all the codes were transcribed into Word documents. This was followed by the categorization of similar codes into categories; some of the codes reflecting two or more theme were categorized into more than one group. Memos were created while looking for focused codes; memos reflected my observation and thoughts as I moved through coding, it helped to crystallize ideas and to not lose track of thoughts on various topics. With the progress of data analysis, themes became more and more clear; I kept looking back into original data checking for supporting data; this ensured the reliability of the analysis. Finally, essences of the data emerged, the outcome was indentified. Findings of the study were presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Participant overview

The overview provides a brief profile outlining the participants' pseudonym, sex, age, occupation, educational level and nationality.

Name	Sex	Age	Educational level	Nationality
Will	Male	23	College student	America
Kyle	Male	22	Bachelor's degree	America
Fisher	Female	51	Master's degree	Canada
Jason	Male	28	Master's degree	America
Evelyn	Female	61	Bachelor's degree	America
Jon	Male	30	Master's degree	Canada
Janice	Female	35	Bachelor's degree	Canada
Camel	Female	28	Master's degree	Canada

Figure 11.

All the participants in this study were first-time travelers to a developing country. Participants have visited China during year 2010; most of them chose to travel during the summer time, only Jon visited China during the winter. Their duration of stay varied from two weeks to a month.

4.2 Holding pre-conceived images of China

4.2.1 Consulting different sources

The participants' responses provided detailed information on images of China prior to their travel to the destination. However, their mental postcards of China before visiting were limited, some of the participants mentioned that they had very limited knowledge about developing countries; their mental post card of China was primarily the Great wall and poverty. Those mental post cards were formed gradually through their daily lives.

For instance, Evelyn described:

My pre-conceived image of what might be best described as rural or primitive China. The mental postcard is great wall, I was vaguely aware of Li River from National Geographic Magazines. That happens to be prominent.

Similarly Will said:

I've heard something like people are really poor there, I've heard that before and I've heard it's not as nice as it is.

At the stage of trip planning, participants looked into further information about China. In order to gain a better understanding of China, they consulted different information sources. Friends, family, tour books, movies, and the internet were found to be the most popular sources participants consulted before they traveled to China. For example, when asked about what kind of information sources have you used for trip planning, Fisher stated:

Tour books, three different ones, and a lot of looking around on the internet, and we also watched some period piece sort of historical movies, images of the Forbidden City from Last Empire movie. We watched "Raise the Red Lantern" movie, so we had some images of earlier historical times.

4.2.2 Building destination preference

The study showed whether the pre-conceived image of China was negative or positive, or the image was vague. Participants in the study were holding a vague pre-conceived image of a developing country because they come from developed countries and have not really been to developing countries. Their pre-conceived images of China were a mix of rural, primitive, developing, big, heavily populated and poor. When asked what the pre-conceived images were after conducting further research of the destination, Jon described:

Really big cities maybe, really crowded, I thought some of the cities maybe kind of dirty.

Their expectations of the trip are to experience different culture, customs and historical sites. They were prepared for the difficulties they might encounter during the travel.

They were more willing to visit destinations possess exotic, unique image, were willing to try new things; they took the trip as an adventure.

I wasn't really sure what to expect, I try to . . . when I travel, I try to not expect anything, I just take the experiences as they come. – Kyle

We expected there would be cultural shock, and difficulties in adapting to a new environment like that. — Fisher

This found to be consistent with Bramwell and Rawdings' (1996) proposition of destination preference, which indicated that destinations should have distinctive images, which are different from tourists' everyday life experiences to be chosen as a travel destination.

4.3 Actual experience

4.3.1 Experiencing intercultural encounters

Throughout the study, cultural impact was continually expressed. As a country with over 5,000 year's history, its cultural impact is considerably significant when it comes to

international tourism. There are distinctive differences between Chinese culture and North American culture, the major distinctions between Chinese culture and North American culture have been identified on religion, custom, language, value, ethics, and social relationship (Xu & Mei, 2002). Because of the existence of the difference in culture, China remains mysterious and attractive to North American travelers. The demand and outcome of intercultural encounters during the visit influence tourists' travel experience and satisfaction to the destination.

Chinese cuisine

Chinese cuisine is deeply rooted in China's history, it is often perceived as an authentic cultural marker (Wu & Cheng, 2002). Participants from the study were impressed by the uniqueness of Chinese cuisine culture. Firstly, they were impressed by the large diversity in Chinese cuisine. Different from cuisine in North America, Chinese cuisine employs an immense variety of ingredients, flavors, preparation and cooking techniques in its cuisine. Geography, climate, agriculture, and culture vary greatly from region to region, giving rise to the different styles of food.

Chinese cuisine is classified into four schools (north, south, east, and west), which are further divided into eight main regional cuisines, which are Anhui, Guangdong, Fujian, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan, and Zhejiang. There are also featured Buddhist and Muslim sub-cuisines within the greater Chinese cuisine. According to participants' responses, they were surprised by the diversity and uniqueness of Chinese food; they were willing to try different kinds of food, even odd street food, such as fried scorpion, which is also odd to most of the Chinese people. In addition, all the participants discussed how much they enjoyed Chinese food; some of them considered it

as their favorite experiences in China, some of them said that they missed Chinese food a lot after they went back to their own country, especially hot pot. For instance, Jason mentioned:

I liked everything, it was always unique, and some things that I like now I didn't know that I will like, like the hotpot now, you don't get that kind of food in the US or in many places, I enjoyed it pretty much, I miss hotpot a lot.

However, some of the participants were unsatisfied with the limited food selection when they were traveling at certain regions of China. Specifically, Fisher mentioned:

In general, we really enjoyed the food. It was still pretty challenging sometimes to find dishes we could be comfortable with. I think that depended on the region of China, we are not seafood eaters, so maybe it was a bit more difficult on our coastal traveling. I think once we found restaurant we like in Suzhou or in anywhere . . . I mean the food was really great when we found a good restaurant.

Secondly, participants were impressed by the distinctive dining styles, which include how food is served and taken. In China, the meals come in multiple dishes that are shared by everyone on the table. Chinese food is usually served on a round table with a rotating tray in the middle of it if the food is ordered communally and shared by a big group of people. Sitting at a round table allows everyone to communicate with each other with eye contact more conveniently. The rotating tray helps with the food sharing. Moreover, Round has significant meanings for Chinese. Firstly, it presents reunion, as exhibited by the Chinese word "tuanyuan 团圆" (literally means 'united and rounded'); secondly, it symbolizes "success" as exhibited by the Chinese word "Yuanman 圆满" (literally means "Rounded and Complete").

Western food is normally served individually; people eat their own dishes at meals. This is totally different with Chinese. Surprisingly, participants enjoyed Chinese way of dining; they enjoyed sharing food with each other, they felt that it was awesome having

meals and sharing food with a large group of friends, that made them feel closer to each other. Furthermore, they felt it was a great thing to get to try a little bit of everything at every meal. Jon described his experience at one of his favorite Chinese restaurant like this:

I think my favorite experience just be one of the restaurant we went to, I thought it was really cool, I guess we went couple of times, big group of people. I thought it was really cool, we had our private room, everybody we just ordered a ton of stuff, and everybody shared, and you get to try a little bit of everything. That's probably my favorite. - Jon.

When I asked how do you feel about food hygiene with sharing food? All the participants said they didn't worry too much about it, in addition, some participants claimed that they've never got sick form it. For example, Kyle responded:

Yes, it was little different, I don't know, you are not used to everybody point to the stuff, the same bowl, and everything, but I haven't really worried about germs or something like that, so didn't bother me. I kind liked it; I thought it was, I liked it better than here I guess. Everybody was able to share and it wasn't so selfish I don't know, you got to try a lot of different things. It is kind of make me feel closer to everybody I guess.

On the other hand, some of the participants worried about food hygiene, they read about the food hygiene problem through the internet, such as online magazine from New York Times. They expressed concern about overly recycled oil and milk when they were traveling in China. China's food industry was notorious for food safety problems. During the year 2011, a group of people were reported for illegally buying waster oil from restaurants and turning into cooking oil. After investigation, police in Zhejiang, Shangdong, and Henan busted six places that sold the illegally made cooking oil, and detained 32 people. Another food safety scandal emerged in 2008 when huge amounts of the industrial chemical melamine were found to have been illegally added to dairy

products to give the appearance of higher protein content. The scandal was blamed for the deaths of at least six infants and for the illness of 300,000 others in China.

There was definitely something we have to be careful about. We learnt, we were careful not to eat street food it involved oil because it's been such a problem with overly recycled oil, but we did eat street food if oil is not involved. - Fisher

Sightseeing

Participants shared their experience at several attractions, which included historical sites, such as the great wall, the Forbidden City, and the terra-cotta warriors; natural attractions, such as mountains; and landmarks such as pearl tower. Participants were amazed by those attractions; they found the attractions unique, breathtaking, and cool.

I went hiking in the mountains when I was in Xian, the mountains was very beautiful. I think that's probably the best natural scenery of China. The mountains I found them quite beautiful. Otherwise there are not a lot of natural things, I mean the cities, and it is pretty much wiped out. —Camel

We went to the great wall, it was really nice, and I enjoyed the Forbidden City too, even like looking out the window when we taking the trains between cities, I even thought that was really nice going through the mountains - Kyle

At the same time, some of the participants were disappointed by the historical attractions which have been unnecessarily reconstructed. Comparing with their previous travel experiences in Europe, they felt that the historical attractions in China have not been protected properly.

I found the historical tours in China bit disappointing. It seem like there is not a lot left over, not like comparing to going to Europe, you know, you go there, you can see castles, you can see stuff that have been there for many years. In Xian you can see the wall and the stuff, the temple was reconstructed, unnecessarily, all the old things, I mean in China it looks like, things are rebuilt and even the great wall, it is pretty much put back together. I kind of missed out on that, that kind of my primarily thing that I excited about, the museum and historical things. – Jason

Experiencing a language barrier

Another challenge that participants mentioned was the language barrier. Participants experienced communication confusion at several occasions, most of them felt the language barriers when ordering at a restaurant or when they were on public transportation which required clear and instant understandings. One could be easily miss-led to different dishes at a restaurant, or get confused with the similar bus stops when they were travelling by subway or buses. Some participants traveled with a tour guide or friends who spoke English and Chinese most of the time. When asked about communication and language barriers, Janice stated:

A little bit, I was traveling with someone spoke English and Chinese, so I would her communicate anything that I needed to. But people on public transportation and people in the restaurant don't speak English, there were too much confusion when I was trying to communicate with them. - Janice

According to participants, a good deal of “Chinglish” was found on public signs in China; sometimes it was really difficult for them to understand. However, some of the participants felt it was fun and unique. Camel stated:

The Chinglish were very funny, they were pretty funny, I took some pictures of them.

The public sanitation facilities

Without a doubt, the uniqueness of Chinese culture is the indispensable element that adds meaning and colors to tourism. Nevertheless, the data indicated that it sometimes caused trouble for tourists with different cultural backgrounds. Most of the public sanitation facilities were equipped with western-style toilet bowl, but in some places in China, for example, country sides, traditional squat toilets were still widely used. It has been a challenge to some of the older participants.

You know toilet in some parts of China, for sure for the western person, they are difficult. Because we are not used to the different squat toilet, I am 61, my knees are not that great, and the squat toilet was quite difficult. But you know you will always find in a lot of places were western style toilets. –Evelyn

Furthermore, participants were unsatisfied with the hygiene of the public sanitation facilities, such as public toilet, they felt it was too dirty to use. Will stated like this:

I didn't go to any public toilet because they were so dirty, that would be my one issue that I didn't get to use any of the public toilet. - Will

Hospitality

Confucius is known as the most influencing and remembered person from ancient China. His philosophy is the model for official and personal behavior for many Chinese people, and it remains an important part of Chinese culture to this day. His sayings were translated in to different languages and were spread around the world. There is a saying of him that reflected the welcoming and hospitality of Chinese people – is it not a delight after all to have friends come from afar? As a result, another essence that has been continually expressed by the participants is that they were impressed by how welcoming and friendly Chinese people were. For example, Will stressed:

I really found that Chinese people are really friendly, and very welcoming, really enjoyed that aspect being in China. And then just all the people that walking around were really nice and really friendly, they are just happy to help and they are just happy to talk to you, everyone was really nice.

Moreover, some of the participants were getting unexpected welcome and help from Chinese people. Jason compared rural people with city people; he found that rural people were much nicer than city people; he said that was the same case back in the US:

It was mixed, some people I think who care less about you, well other people were very very very very kind, people at hotel, when I moved from one hotel to another hotel in downtown Beijing, one of the employees rode the bike cross town for me,

he wouldn't take any money for it, he wouldn't take a kuai, it was really nice. You run into some people who wouldn't care you at all, like you know, when you were in foreign country, everything was hard, and some people don't like to be patient with you. I found that rural people to be a little bit kinder than the city people, especially in Beijing, Beijing people are not, I guess it is like big city people say about newyorkers stuff, they are kind of, just people sometimes, rural people were much more nicer.

Entertainment

In spite of the participants' busy schedules with the tour and sightseeing, participants described their first time experiences with Chinese entertainment. They had good times at the internet café club, and Karaoke. Karaoke, one of the many night entertainments in China has become more and more popular and is accepted by people of all ages. Kara was derived from the Japanese words "kara" which is short for "Karano", means empty, and "oke" which is short for "okesutora", means orchestra. The words combined literally mean empty orchestra, which implies the function of a karaoke machine. Karaoke is a form of entertainment in which amateur singers sing along with recorded music, the music is typically of a well-know song in which the voice of the original singer is absent. Lyrics are usually displayed on a video screen, and usually change color to guide the singer. It is also called KTV in some countries. From the study, I noticed the difference between Chinese style karaoke and North American style Karaoke. In terms of interior design, technology and services, competition in the karaoke business is fierce in China. Therefore, they stress the need of having extravagant interior design and decorations to attract patrons. They also go as far as providing hotel-like five star services for their patrons. Venues also constantly seek ways to incorporate new technology to further improve the customer experience.

In North America, Karaoke equipment is usually provided in pubs with an open mike, most of these establishments allow patrons to sing for free, it is often done by very drunk people in pubs, who mostly were very bad singers, it is all about having fun or having a laugh, and it is also about embarrassment and letting off steam. It is much less serious than in China. Out of eight participants, six of them mentioned they enjoyed Chinese style Karaoke, and they were impressed by the premium recreation facilities and unexpected services. For instance, Jason, who stayed in China about one month, said he went to Karaoke many time and enjoyed it:

I was very impressed by Karaoke; I did not think it to be such a exclusive experience, I mean it seems like a five star hotel, and they have food that I didn't expected that at all, the Karaoke in the US is like a little bar that you sing in front of everyone there, so they don't do private karaoke so much. I liked it; it was part of the fun.

4.3.2 Personal safety

Personal safety is usually considered top priority for all travelers; people cannot enjoy a vacation unless they feel as safe as possible. However, no matter how well one prepares for a trip, accidents can happen. Out of eight participants, three of them mentioned they went through an accident when they were traveling in Phoenix, Beijing, and Harbin.

Nevertheless, they still felt they were safe in China. Will, who got his wallet stolen stated:

You know I had a bad experience but you can have bad experience at anywhere in the world. So you know I don't think too much of it. You can go to any countries in the world, there's times when you cannot feel safe on the street. We've never felt that in China.

There were certain times that participants were scared; they felt scared when they were in fast driving vehicles. Compared to North American standards of driving, participants felt the drivers in China were driving dangerously. Some participants got used to the fast driving eventually.

When I first got there, I was like actually kind of scared, the first taxi we got in, he was going on the high way, he was going really fast, he is going like between other cars and like, I don't think we really got taxi that had seat belts in the back. So I was always kind of scared but I got used to that actually. So I guess I just had to get used to the way that everybody was driving over there. I wasn't so nervous about it. – Kyle

But some of the older participants indicated that it was pretty scary sitting in the fast driving vehicles, such as taxi and buses, especially for someone who has witnessed a lot of accidents.

The other thing I found on some of the bus rides, even from the Shanghai airport to Suzhou, I found the bus driver was, you know by western standard, by our standard here, He was driving dangerously, not safe, too much waving in and out the traffic, I guess you aware you know, it was not just a feeling that traffic was very congested. We didn't just care about accidents; we witnessed a lot of accidents, yea, the traffic is crazy. – Fisher

4.3.3 The transportation

Speaking of the public transportation, participants enjoyed and admired the highly efficient transportation systems of China; they felt it was convenient to travel between cities on high-speed train systems. They were satisfied with the price and the convenience of the public transportation. For instance, when asked about the public transportation in China, Will responded:

I really like the train system that China has, where you can go between cities really easily. I thought that was really nice really convenient. The subways in Shanghai and Beijing are nice too. The taxi and buses was convenient and really cheap, I wish they do that in the US.

Unfortunately, some of the participants were having trouble with unsound tickets purchasing rules and limitations.

We were spoiled by being on the high speed route to Shanghai, a great deal of admiration for that high speed train system, however, as a tourist, it was very very difficult to make use of because of the tickets purchasing rules and limitations. And now tickets have to have foreigner's passport number on them, so the line ups

were very long. There was only one English speaking window only in the big train stations. You can only by tickets 5 days in advance. It became very very difficult. The rule's kept changing too that was bit of a problem too. So we could get somewhere, but we wouldn't be guaranteed we could get our return tickets to get back where we wanted to. That was very difficult. —Janice

4.3.4 Pollution

The Energy Information Agency (IEA) of the United States reported that China is the world's most polluting country as it emits 6,018 million tons of greenhouse gases each year (IEA, 2011). The subject of China's pollution problems has recently garnered a great deal of attention. Apparently, every participant from the study also noticed this issue of China. According to participants, the air and water are seriously polluted, they had seen a lot of people wearing masks during the day when they were traveling in Beijing, and they felt sorry for the water pollution of Yangzi River when they were traveling along it. Moreover, participants were feeling uncomfortable surrounded by garbage and industrial smell when they were traveling.

The historical sites certainly took our breath away, such antiques, I mean whether the Great Wall or Terra-cotta Warriors or some of the major attractions. And the difficulty was the level of pollution and damage to the environment. So that's something we did strongly aware. We went on some hikes, which were sort of established trails we went on. We were always continually surrounded by garbage and debris. I think that's big problem, I think it's difficult. I think a lot of North Americans are very judgmental about the garbage, it was so different when North America just one generation ago. And I think when there is both the personal will and the political will form the power to be, both of those things will need to come in to play to make it change in to China. —Evelyn

4.3.5 Adjusting Accommodation

Data showed that participants were flexible in their expectations of accommodation; they were prepared for a wide range of hotel accommodation. As Jon mentioned in the interview:

In terms of hotels, we were always prepared to do a kind of a wide range of hotels. So we did everything from hotels to five stars. So we were prepared to be in a place that was you know a little bit more primitive. We were pretty flexible on our expectations.

So Generally speaking, they were satisfied with the accommodations. Only Jason complained about the squat toilet in the hostels, the hard bed, and the shower. He said that he couldn't get used to those facilities when they were traveling in China.

Accommodations were pretty good; the Chinese hotel that I stayed in was a little bit less than I am used to. As far as the beds are kind of hard, and I never quite get used to having the shower fall on to the ground, I always take bath. I don't like squat toilet, I think they are bad..ha-ha. —Jason

4.3.6 Surprises

Participants were surprised by how clean and developed the cities are. Comparing with their pre-conceived image of China, the actual feelings of the cities like Shanghai, and Suzhou were beyond their expectations. Their expectations of the cities were primarily dirtier and more primitive. They did not expect the cities could be as nice as they are with the large population. For example, Evelyn expressed her feelings of shanghai:

Shanghai was my favorite city. I was really surprised by how nice it was. I usually don't like cities. I've been to Chicago, I've been to New York, and I didn't like those at all. But I really like Shanghai. I thought it was a really nice place. I was surprised by how clean it was, how friendly the people were. Everything we do there was neat.

Some participants were impressed by the landmark of Shanghai — the pearl tower. From this tower one can have a dramatic view of Shanghai through the plastic floor on the top of the tower. Also, they felt it was convenient to find whatever they needed when they were traveling in those cities. Kyle noted:

I like Shanghai a lot; the one has a lot of cool things, like towers, buildings, and it seems like very clean and everything was easier to find where around I guess.

4.3.7 Disappointments

Disappointments were found in two areas, the first one is that participants were disappointed with the historical sites, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs; Jason was complained about the unnecessarily rebuild of the Great Wall and other historical sites in Xian. He was expecting more original historical sites like what he saw in Europe. The historical sites of China were the things he was excited about before his visit, however, the actual experience at the historical sites were below his expectations. He really felt disappointed at this aspect of the visit:

I like historical cities, but I found the historical tours in China bit disappointing. It seem like there is not a lot left over, not like comparing to going to Europe, you know, you go there, you can see castles, you can see stuff that have been there for many years. In Xi án you can see the wall and the stuff but the temple was reconstructed, unnecessarily, all the old things, I mean you can see in Europe better. In China it looks like, things are rebuilt and even the Great Wall, it is pretty much put back together. I kind of missed out on that, that kind of my primarily thing that I excited about, the museum and historical things.

Another disappointment is about the unique culture. Some of the participants were really expecting to see real Chinese Gongfu. But unfortunately, they did not see as much as they expected, they were constrained by time; they feel pity to not have enough time to explore Chinese Gongfu during the visit. When asked if you are satisfied with the trip, Kyle answered:

Pretty much, I mean there are few things we didn't get to do; I kind want to go, like see some Gongfu or something like that. I thought we will see a little more that. But we only got to see a little bit, but I pretty much did everything that I wanted to. It's pretty much I thought to be was better than it's gonna be I guess.

4.4 After the visit

4.4.1 Achieving accumulated overall images of China

Accumulated overall images emerged after the visit at China. Participants' overall image of China could be concluded as a nice place to visit, fun to visit, impressive, amazing, really welcoming, developing, multi-layered, and complex. After experiencing the distinctive culture of China, participants felt that the trip was a memorable adventure. They were impressed by different aspects of China. They had a better understanding of China, and they had a better understanding of what are going on in China. Comparing their pre-conceived images of China, their new accumulated images of China are more comprehensive, vivid and rich.

I think it developed more multi-layered, complex, a broader understanding of the complexities in a very complex society, there is this coexistence of new affluence, and still very primitive. They coexist and you can't focus just on one aspect only of the society, and I knew that China has a lot of coal-fire power plans before I went there, but seeing them in Yangtze River, how many power lines crest Cross the country side, just amazing, we were really impressed by the cost of the industrial development on the country. We knew something about China going in but actually seeing them, and we now understand it better.— Fisher

4.4.2 The change

Reflecting on the purpose of the study, the data indicated clear changes between pre-conceived images and post-perceived images of China. When asked about whether the overall images after the visit differed with the pre-conceived images, all the participants said, "yes". Consistent with Gunn's (1972) seven stages model, it is evident that the accumulated overall images are different from the pre-images. From pre-image, through actual experience, to post-conceived image, participants went through different destination image formation stages. During the interview, participants discussed their pre-conceived images of China, their pre-conceived images could be concluded as big

cities, primitive, crowded, poverty, not nice, lost of bicycles, dirty, adventuresome, and developing. During their actual visit at the destination, negative and positive images were formed based on their actual travel experiences at China. At last, new accumulated images were achieved upon their reflection and evaluation of the destination after the visit. The image evolved from mythical, stereotypical to realistic and holistic. Table below showed how the pre-conceived images differ with the overall post- perceived images.

Pre-conceived images	Perceived images after the visit
Big cities	Remained the same
Primitive	Remained the same
Crowded	Remained the same
Poor	Remained the same
Not nice	A nice place to visit
Lots of bicycles	Lots of Cars, crazy traffic
Dirty	Very clean at some of the cities
Adventuresome	Fun to visit, impressive, amazing
Developing	Multi-layered
	Complex
	People are really welcoming
	Chinese food is amazing

Figure 12.

For instance, Janice described her pre-conceived image of China like this:

I was expecting like really big cities. Really crowded maybe, I thought some of the cities may be kind of dirty.

When asked about her post-conceived image of China, she responded:

China was a really nice place; it was really fun to visit. It was really welcoming. It was a just a nice place to visit. You can see there was a lot construction everywhere. There was growing a lot. I was impressed by that, I think it was an impressive place to visit. I was impressed by the people and everything that was going on.

4.4.3 Experience Sharing

Data showed that after the trip at China, participants were eager to share their experiences with families, friends. Most of them posted the photos from the trip on Facebook; some of them posted blogs about the trip on social blogs and travel blogs. The experiences were shared not only with their families and friends; they shared with everybody around the world. There were two participants noted that they were unable to log on to Facebook when they were in China, they felt that was inconvenient to share their photos and experiences with people when needed.

When asked about if they will recommend China as a travel destination to others, all of the participants said they would. Some also made suggestions for future travelers. Chinese food was one thing that they really enjoyed, some participants said it was the best part of the trip and it was definitely worth it. Furthermore, they encouraged future travelers to visit China; they were encouraging people not to worry too much about the cultural difference and the language barriers. Several participants discussed that the trip was full of adventure and cultural shocks, it might not suit everybody, but for travelers who are adventuresome and excited about different culture aspects, China would be a wonderful place to visit. In addition, they gave some advices on trip planning; some participants pointed out it was not impossible to see everything in one trip, so they suggested that it is important to pick out what you really want to see, and arrange the time

appropriately. When asked about what he would recommend to future travelers, Camel said:

The first thing I say is go, you gotta go. And don't be thinking you are going to travel in a familiar culture, you know the hotels, the food, the toilet will not gonna be like two week trip to somewhere in Europe. Although they can be, if you want to, you could but I think you will be missing a very vibrant part of China if you limited yourself that way. I will tell people not to worry about the language. Are there always to be enough people who speak English? You could always get along.

Kyle, who was deeply impressed by Chinese food noted:

Yeah, I mean, I would say that if you like the food, definitely go. That was one of the biggest things for me and it was definitely worth it.

4.4.4 Revisit Planning

All participants mentioned that they were going to revisit China in the future; some of them presented with their strong willing to revisit. Specifically, some of them were going to revisit the same places. For example, Jon said he and his wife were deeply impressed by Harbin winter festival; they were going to experience the winter festival again next year:

Yes, revisit, we will go back maybe next winter, to Harbin, for the winter festival. We really enjoyed the winter festival in Harbin. And we'd really like to take the new train to Tibet as well.

On the contrary, other participants stated that they would not visit the same places they've been to, they were more willing to see other things they wanted to see. Jason said:

Yes, of course I will revisit China; I don't think I would revisit the cities I've already been to. I think I got to see everything I wanted to see.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study examined the destination images of China at different image formation stages. Data collected from the participants indicated the evolution of the images. Findings of the study are concluded into three parts, before visiting China, actual travel experience, and after visiting China. As the destination is regarded as the crucial factor to influence tourist's ultimate destination choice, actual travel experience, and post-purchasing choice, the research on destination images is meant to contribute practical information to the tourism market.

5.1 Before visiting China

5.1.1 Consulting different sources

According to Gunn (1972), mental images of a place were formed through the accumulation of information from unbiased, organic sources such as school, book, and television documentaries, and the experience of friends and family. Consistent with Gunn's model, participants' mental post-cards of China was formed through school education, television documentaries, and sources that they've encountered through life. The images were simple and vogue. However, at the stage of conducting deeper research of the destination, the sources participants have encountered or used were different with Gunn' theory.

Gunn (1972) concluded that induced image such as advertising and brochures form tourists 'services were the kind of sources that travelers would turn to for further information about the destination. From the study, it showed that friends or families who were from the destination or have visited the destination, tour books, movies, and the

internet was the most popular sources that travelers would consult prior to the trip. Especially the internet, participants did a lot of looking around through the internet, searching the related information during trip planning.

The rapid development in science and technology revolutionized the way of information acquisition. With the development and spread of network technology, most traditional communication media including television and radio are reshaped or redefined by the internet. Moreover, newspapers, books, and other print publishing are adapting to website technology, or are reshaped into blogging and social media. Internet forum, and social networking have boomed as more and more people found the internet was the fastest and easiest way for information sharing and acquiring. As a result, the internet delivered massive information to the travelers contained the information from the marketing side and the unbiased the sources from the tourists, such as e-newspapers, internet forum, and social-networking websites.

5.1.2 Destination preference

The World Tourism Organization reported that more than 40% of international tourists are cultural tourists (Richards, 1996). Based on this data, it has been claimed that cultural tourists represent a new type of mass tourist who seeks meaningful travel experiences (McKercher and DuCros, 2003). The participants in this study described a strong preference of exotic destinations. Apparently, they were culture tourists. Participants were attracted by the distinctive culture aspect of China; they were excited about exploring unknown experiences and intercultural encounters by visiting China. They were prepared for culture shocks and difficulties they might have in the developing country.

5.2 Actual travel experiences

A prominent theme that emerged from the data analysis was cultural encounters. The cultural impact was reflected in several areas: Chinese cuisine, sightseeing, language, sanitation facilities, hospitality and entertainment. Travelers naturally take their own personalities, culture, and habits with them when traveling. When they arrive in a new country with a different culture, they may experience a wide variety of feelings and reactions. For example, travelers may feel confused, nervous, uncomfortable, and irritable. The finding of the study showed that participants were feeling confused, embarrassed, uncomfortable, and surprised by culture shocks such as the language and the Chinese style squat toilet. On the contrary, they also showed a high level of acceptance with Chinese culture. They enjoyed the Chinese cuisine and even the way of Chinese dining, either of them was quite different with their own culture.

The pre-conceived image of a tourism destination may not reflect a valid image of the destination; a mismatch between pre-conceived perception and reality can influence the level of satisfaction of the trip (Whyne & Hammond, 1985). During the visit, participants made a lot of comparisons; culture, environment, habits, and prices were compared with the situations in their own countries. Previous travel experiences, pre-conceived images, and expectations were compared with their actual experiences at China. Insights into advantages and problems; satisfaction and un-satisfactions emerged through comparisons across respondents' interviews. Positive images and negative images were formed through experiencing China themselves. Images of the destination remained the same when pre-images consistent with their actual experiences at the destination; images became negative when actual experiences were below pre-images or

expectations; images became positive when actual experiences were beyond pre-images or expectation.

To sum up, both positive images and negative images were formed based on participants' actual experiences at the destination. The table below concluded the result.

Positive images and Surprises	Negative images and disappointment
Hospitality	
The entertainment	
Developed cities	
Food	Food
Personal safety	Personal safety
Transportation	Transportation
Accommodation	Accommodation
Sightseeing	Sightseeing
	Pollution
	Public sanitation
	Chinese Gongfu Culture

Figure 13.

5.3 After visiting China

The findings of the study showed a clear change between pre-conceived images and post-perceived images. Images evolved in different stages and levels. Specifically, more accurate, rich, comprehensive, and holistic images were developed upon participants' evaluation and reflection after the visit.

O'Leary and Deegan (2005) noted, for tourism development, it is important that actual participation at a destination equal or surpass the pre-image of the destination for the experience to be satisfying. Pizam et al. (1978) defined tourist satisfaction as the

result of the interaction between a tourist's experience at the destination area and the expectations he or she had about that destination. The tourist is satisfied when the weighted sum total of experiences compared to the expectations results in feeling of gratification (positive disconfirmation). The tourist is dissatisfied when his or her actual experiences compared with expectations result in feeling of displeasure (negative disconfirmation). Apparently, findings of the study indicated participants' satisfaction of their trip to China. Even negative images of China were found in their actual experiences at China, the sum total of participants' experiences compared to the pre-images and expectations resulted in feeling of gratification. This is reconfirmed with their willing to make recommendations and to revisit China.

Tourists' satisfaction of a destination is critical in terms of encouraging positive word-of-mouth recommendations and return visits to the destination (O'Leary & Deegan, 2005). Chen et al. (2001) suggested that tourism researchers should use different measurement variables or constructs for assessing loyalty to different types of tourist products. For example, airline tickets have the potential to be purchased routinely. Loyalty indicators, such as the likelihood to purchase a product or service again, are appropriate for assessing tourist loyalty to the product; conversely, a trip to a particular attraction is unlikely to be purchased repeatedly, willing to recommend the product to other tourists is an indicator to measure the destination loyalty. In the tourism field, visitors' positive experiences, intention to return to the same destination, and positive word-of-mouth to friends and/or relatives have been considered as adequate measures for tourist loyalty assessment (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Chi & Qu, 2008). Consistent with researchers' proposition, participants' destination loyalty were presented as their positive

overall experiences, revisit the same destination such as Harbin, visit other places in China, and willing to recommend to others.

As noted before, during the visit and after the visit, participants were eager to share their experiences in China with their families and friends. Furthermore, they were posting blogs and photos through the Internet. Messages were sent to the whole world. Compare with the conventional word-of-mouth recommendation, travelers' recommendations and feelings of the destination travels faster and wider through the Internet. Nevertheless, word-of-mouth accommodations presented with stronger persuasion. For instance, when asked would you recommend China to others? Camel said: "The first thing I say is go, you gotta go..." It is considered more open, unbiased, and personal than the pictures, books or video clips. Its influence on the destination decision making would be significant.

5.4 Conclusion

Based on Gunn's seven-stage model, a modified model of destination image theory was created (Figure13). Several components were added to the original framework.

Gun noted on the way to a destination, roads signs, landscape, guides, and etc would affect the formation of the destination image. However, it is not supported by this study.

Other than a road trip or traveling by train, participants traveled to China by air, they didn't have the opportunity to observe the road signs and landscape of China until they landed in China. Gun's proposition is subject to the travel distance and choice of transportation. Stage four was removed from the original framework.

According to the findings of the study, seven stages could be concluded into three categories which are Pre-image, actual travel experience, and overall post-image. Post-

visit behavior reflecting destination loyalty was added to the framework. Positive images, negative images and consistent images were formed by comparing actual experiences at the destination and pre-image and expectations. Overall post-image was formed through reflection and evaluation after the visit; it directly affected the destination loyalty.

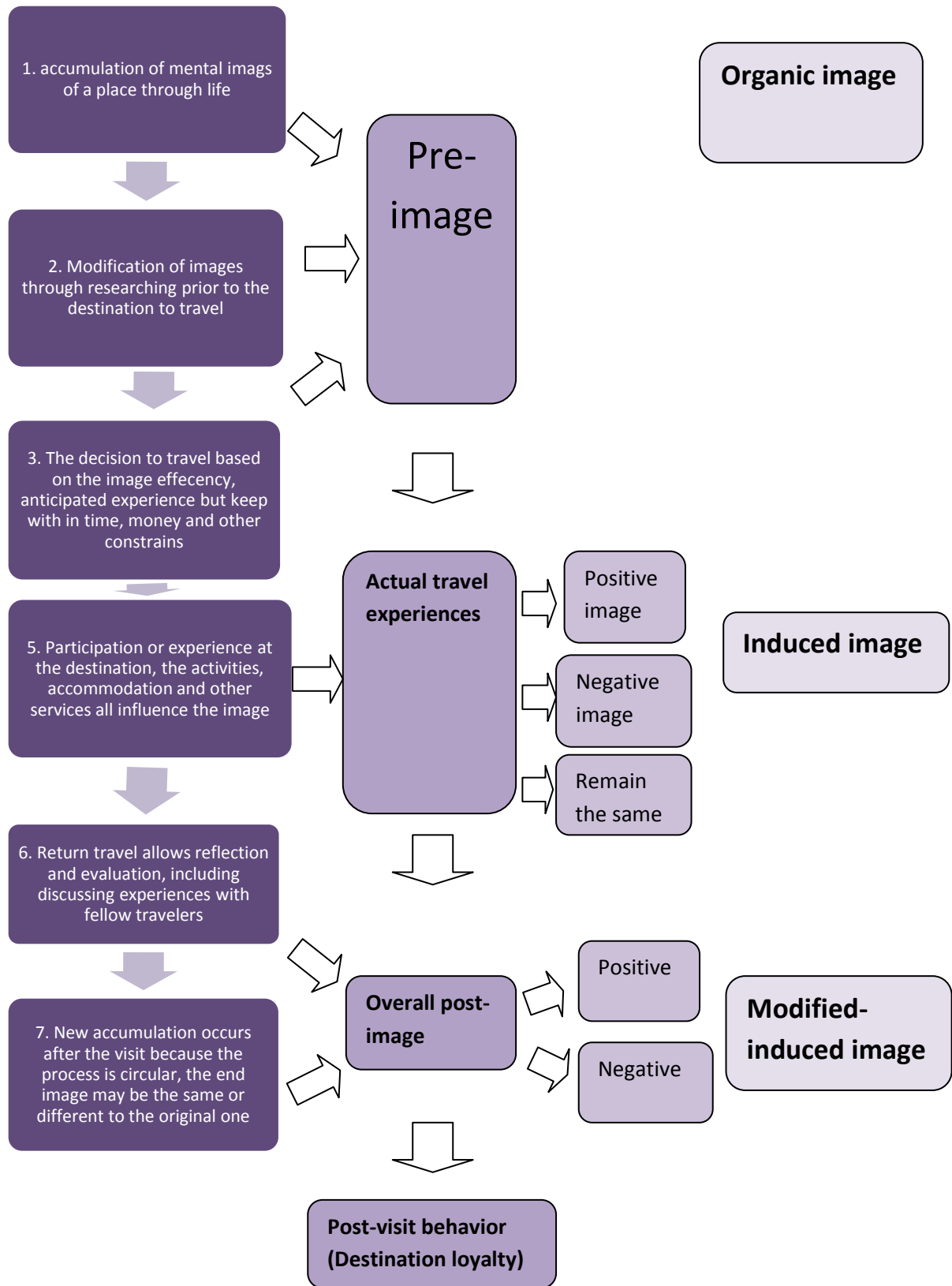


Figure 14. Modified framework of destination image theory based on Gunn's seven-stage model

The concept of satisfaction is defined by marketers as post- purchase behavior that is of strategic importance to business because of its influence on repeat purchases and word-of-mouth recommendations (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). As customer satisfaction can result in favorable word-of –mouth publicity, an understanding of this concept is essential for tourism businesses (Fornell, 1992; Halstead & Page, 1992). According to Milman and Pizam (1995), visitors have a positive image of a destination are more likely to want to revisit the destination. They implied that once tourists were satisfied with their experience, they might like to revisit a destination. The propositions revealed the strong linkage between tourists’ satisfaction and destination loyalty.

Based on the findings of the study, the positive overall perceived image is the key to ensure destination loyalty. Overall perceived image is evaluated after experiencing the destination. Although destination loyalty is not directly affected by any negative images that formed through travelers ‘actual experiences at the destination, but effectively reduce the chance of forming negative images could promote the chance of forming positive overall post-perceived images.

On the one hand, it is suggested the delivery of accurate and updated images of China is essential to retaining destination loyalty. The mismatch between projected image and actual image could result in failure of long term destination branding (Camprub í Guia, & Comas, 2008; Gali & Donaire, 2005). Special attention should be paid to the new-generation media -- the internet, the most popular sources of pre-image formation prior to travel, and its effect on post-visit behavior as people tend to share and discuss their actual experiences through internet fora, blogs, social networks, etc. It is considered a new form of word-of-mouth media.

On the other hand, changes should be made to improve tourists' travel experience. According to the findings of the study, negative images were found on the personal safety, transportation, accommodation, public sanitation Chinese Gongfu, sightseeing, pollution, and food sanitation. Strengthen the management of public safety will help creating safer tourism environment; reduce the risk of having accidents such as theft, and robbery. Public traffic management including traffic regulation on speed restriction must be further improved and controlled. Accommodation could be improved by taking different habits and customs into consideration, multiple choices such as smoking or non-smoking bedroom, tub or shower, etc. should be provided to satisfy different needs. Similarly, Chinese traditional squat toilet and western-style toilet should be provided at public sanitation facilities; in addition, the sanitation of public toilet must be improved. Literature in the tourism and destination branding disciplines emphasized the importance of recognition and distinctiveness of a destination (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). However, the finding also suggested that the unique advantage of Chinese culture heritage offers substantial opportunity for future development. A great deal of improvements should be done in heritage conservation, and culture diffusion. Moreover, pollution and food sanitation were the issues that seriously affected tourists' travel experience and people's daily activities. However, it acquires not only personal will but also political will and powers for these changes to take place. Meanwhile, maintain and promote the positive aspects of China as an international tourism destination is also significant.

Tourism has become one of the most important sectors of the global economy over the last decade (Ferreira, Rial, & Varela, 2009). Effort is required to achieve sustainable growth for tourism. Strategically speaking, marketing management requires a careful

analysis of the destination image transmitted to the tourism market, because of its effect on both decision-making and destination loyalty. In the context of modern marketing, brand image becomes a major factor in the success of any organization (Aaker, 1991). In referring to Gunn's work on destination image, Britton (1979) stated that if organic image form the strongest influence of the tourism decision-making, then the developing country, which has not enjoyed the most favorable press in Western markets, could only rely on induced images to correct these mismatches. It was suggested that the pre-conceived image developed from organic sources could be altered through marketing communication (Anderdeck, 2005).

CHAPTER SIX: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEASRCH

6.1 Limitations

Due to the limited knowledge of historical sites, specific regions, and special events, the probing questions that have been asked during the interview were limited. This may affect the richness of the data and the findings. Besides, Smith (2006) suggested that the use of multiple data sources provides a broader picture, rich insights, and fuller description of the context of phenomenon under study. Due to the time constraints on the study, only interviews were conducted during data collection. Analyzing travel blogs written by tourists from North America could be another source to collect comprehensive data for the study.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

Researchers have asserted that travel motivations affected the image forming process and the choice of destination (Baloglu et al. 1999). Tourists are looking for specific benefits delivered by destinations to satisfy their internal needs while selecting their travel destinations. Gartner (1996) pointed out that the value that individuals attach to destinations is based on motivations. Therefore, to retain customers, tourism marketers need to understand fully those attributes are most likely to influence customers' choice intentions. Berry and Chon et al. (1995) mentioned that failure to pay attention to influential attributes in choice intention may result in a customer's negative evaluation, and may thus lead to unfavorable word-of-mouth. Reflecting on Gunn's seven-stage theory, stage one to stage three implied a destination decision-making process. Through pre-image formation across organic and induced information sources, final decision of

the tourism destination was made. However, the decision-making process was not examined thoroughly in this study. Findings of the study showed that the pre-image of China were primarily negative, but why China has still been chosen? The relationship between the motivation and satisfaction were not examined.

Fisher and Price (1991) found that motivations have an indirect effect by influencing levels of intercultural interaction and direct effect on vacation satisfaction and post-vacation attitude change. Satisfaction largely depends on a comparison of expectations and actual reality encountered at the destination (Chon, 1990). What a person does in a situation is assumed to relate to the expectations that the person holds and to the subjective value of the outcomes that may occur following the action (Feather 1982). In other word, an individual's motivation to perform a certain activity is a function of the expectation that he or she will be able to perform the activity and obtain the desired outcomes, and the personal value of the outcomes. It is vital for destination marketers to understand the correlations between motivations and destination satisfactions. Future studies are needed for understanding the destination decision-making process and the relationship between motivation and destination satisfaction of inbound international tourism of China to help build a broader and comprehensive theoretical framework for effective destination planning and marketing.

Receiving the influence of respective cultural traditions, the Chinese and North American dietary culture have different characteristics. The different in concepts, patterns, and nature enriched the research value of dietary culture. Findings from the study reveal the participants' great interest in Chinese cuisine, which motivates future thoughts on culinary tourism. More accurate, complete culinary tourism promotion could

be made to attract culinary tourist around the word. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine the culinary international tourism of China and its future applications.

Furthermore, it suggested that when tourists travel to places with culture, there are many factors such as motivation, previous experiences, social context, travel patterns, as well as spatial issues that may influence their intercultural communication and adaptation (Reisinger, 2009). Hottola (2005) has pointed out that, due to the lack of study on tourist experience, the theoretical discussion of culture shock and intercultural adaptation remains subservient to sojourner studies. Future study could put more effort to take those factors into consideration to explore cultural shock and intercultural adaptation of international tourism in China.

At last, findings suggested that it was impossible to explore everything in China in one trip because of the profound culture and broad territory of China. As a result, it would be beneficial to consider different factors such as social demographic factors and motivations to build specific travel routes in order to satisfy different travel needs. This includes examining the needs of different age groups, first-time and repeat visitors, and so on.

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APPENDIX A

Brief Introductions of the Study and the Interview

To Be Eligible for This Study:

1. You come from North America.
2. Your trip to China was a leisurely trip, not a business trip or anything else.
3. You have visited China just once so far, and the length of time since the trip to China is no more than one year.

Brief Introductions of the Study:

Researchers reported that China was growing extensively in inbound tourism markets from year 1998 to 2008, which brought extensive investments to China's tourism and hospitality sectors. According to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in the 2010 rankings of the first four destinations by international tourist arrivals, China has reinforced its position again. China has overtaken Spain and now ranks third after France and the USA. Despite its emergence as a prominent tourist destination, the images of China held by people in western countries are still primarily negative. On one hand, people from western countries have limited or no knowledge about developing countries; On the other hand, the economic, political and social problems associated with developing countries always provoke unfavorable or negative images. Moreover, the images portrayed in the western media were primarily negative. For example, Americans see China as militant, aggressive, authoritarian, and poor. The focus of my study is to explore the destination images in the eyes of western tourists before and after their visiting to China.

Generally speaking, destination image is the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations and emotional thoughts an individual or group hold for a particular place. Usually, before starting the trip, people research the destination. A lot of information about the destination is acquired based on the various information sources they have encountered and used before traveling. Those sources include the destination image portrayed by the destination marketers, advertisement, travel guides, travel journals, movie, books, the internet, general media publicities, and word-of-mouth. Consequently, the formation of such a pre-image is developed prior to arrival at the destination. However, the destination's image is changed or modified in tourists' mind during travel and based on their actual travel experiences, which can achieve comprehensive assessment of destination image.

Most of the image studies in tourism have focused on developed countries and destination, while developing and less-developed countries have received much less research attention (Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). Literature within the tourism disciplines has highlighted the difference between projected image and perceived image, but fewer attentions have been put into exploring the relationship between pre-image and perceived image. Moreover, there have been very few studies dealing with urban tourism in China at the international level. The current study aims at filling these gaps in the literature by exploring the destination image of mainland China in the eyes of Western travelers. Ultimately, it will provide significant information to future marketers who aim at improving travel experience and promoting China to be a desirable international tourism destination.

About the Interview:

The interview will last for about twenty minutes to forty minutes. It is a semi-structured interview. Questions may not follow the exact order on the interview guide, and follow-ups or probing questions not included on the list may be asked as I may pick up on things according to your replies. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you wish to, and you may decide to withdraw from this study at anytime if you wish to. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission.

Please allow several pauses in case the audio recording equipment breaks down or anything else that may happen during the interview.

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

University of Waterloo

October, 31. 2011

Dear

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Stephen L. J. Smith. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Researchers reported that China was growing extensively in inbound tourism markets from year 1998 to 2008, which brought extensive investments to China's tourism and hospitality sectors. According to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in the 2010 rankings of the first 4 destinations by international tourist arrivals, China has reinforced its position again. China has overtaken Spain and now ranks third after France and the USA. Despite its emergence as a prominent tourist destination, the images of China held by people in western countries are still primarily negative. On one hand, people from western countries have limited or no knowledge about developing countries. On the other hand, the economic, political and social problems associated with developing countries always provoke unfavorable or negative images. Moreover, the images portrayed in the western media were primarily negative. For example, Americans see China as militant, aggressive, authoritarian, and poor. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the destination images in the eyes of North America tourists before and after their visiting to China.

Most of the image studies in tourism have focused on developed countries and destination, while developing and less-developed countries have received much less research attention (Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). Literature within the tourism disciplines has highlighted the difference between projected image and perceived image, but less attention has been put into exploring the relationship between pre-image(image of the destination perceived prior to arrival at the destination) and perceived image(image of the destination perceived after visiting). Moreover, there have been very few studies dealing with urban tourism in China at the international level. The current study aims at filling these gaps in the literature by exploring the destination image of mainland China in the eyes of travelers from North America. In doing so, it may provide marketing strategists with significant information.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 20-40 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for Two years in a locked office in my supervisor's office. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 519-5725178 or by email at j264li@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Stephen L. J. Smith at (519) 888-4567 ext. 84045 or email slsmith@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you are not interested in participating in this study, if at all possible, could you recommend a participant who might be interested in participating? If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to future marketers who aim at promoting China to be a desirable tourism destination, as well as to future travelers to China.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Jing Li

CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the researchers from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Jing Li and Dr. Stephen Smith of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Feedback Letter

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

University of Waterloo

December, 31. 2011

Dear

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study entitled Exploring the Destination Image of China through International Urban Tourism. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to exploring the destination image of mainland China in the eyes of travelers from North America by examining the coherence and differences between perceived images of China before and after visiting.

The data collected during interviews may contribute to a better understanding of the appropriate direction of future development in international tourism of China.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or would like a summary of the results, please provide your email address, and when the study is completed, anticipated by January 1st 2012, I will send you the information. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor Stephen L. J. Smith by email or telephone as noted below. As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes, Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext., 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

Jing Li

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