

# Generational perspective on consumer behavior: China's potential outbound tourist market



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## ABSTRACT

This study represents a pioneering attempt to explore tourist consumer behaviors (motivations, information sources, destination choices, travel activity preferences and destination evaluation criteria) in China's potential outbound market from a generational perspective. Targeting all of China, we recruited a sample of 4047 respondents covering five generations: the Firm Communist Generation (FCG), the Lost Generation (LG), the Reform and Opening-up Generation (ROG), the Only-child Generation (OG), and the Globalist Generation (GG) to perform Chi-square, ANOVA tests and Correspondence Analysis. The results demonstrate significant differences and some similarities in tourist behaviors among generations. Through empirical investigation, this study supports and expands generation theory from an Eastern country perspective, and provides useful information for researchers and practitioners.

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## 1. Introduction

Chinese outbound tourists play a critical role in the world's development and prosperity. In 2015, they made 128 million trips and spent US\$ 292 billion on international tourism, thus contributing 23.2% of the world's growth in tourism (UNWTO, 2016). Chairman Xi Jinping even predicted that the outbound travel from China would amount to over 0.5 billion between 2014 and 2018 (Dai & Li, 2014). Considering this enormous potential, an insight into the travel behaviors of potential mainland Chinese outbound tourists should be of interest to tourism managers and planners. However, it is very difficult to study Chinese tourists as a whole without proper segmentation.

Generational analysis is one of the most useful segmentation methods, because of the relative homogeneity within generations, and obvious heterogeneity across generations (Schewe & Noble, 2000). Furthermore, it can be used to forecast the needs and wants of groups, and drive advertising in consumer sectors (Pennington-Gray, Kerstetter, & Warnick, 2002; Rentz & Reynolds, 1991; Rentz, Reynolds, & Stout, 1983). Therefore, it is widely used in tourism to understand tourists' travel behaviors (Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Pendergast, 2010; Lehto, Jang, Achana, & O'Leary, 2008; Pennington-Gray, Fridgen, & Stynes, 2003). Despite the wide application of generational analysis in tourism in developed countries, few research has been conducted into Chinese outbound market from generational perspective. Based on tourism

consumption model theory, this study collected data from potential mainland Chinese outbound tourists to sketch their attitudes, beliefs and travel preferences. Therefore, our present study aims to: (i) develop a profile of each Chinese generation, and (ii) assess the similarities and differences in international travel behaviors among Chinese generations, thus (iii) expand generational theory to an Eastern country, and (iv) provide information for tourism researchers and practitioners.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Generation theory

Generation theory was developed by Mannheim (Mannheim, 1952), and advanced by many other researchers (Eyerman & Turner, 1998; Howe & Strauss, 1997; Inglehart, 1997; Strauss & Howe, 1991). A generation is a cohort of people who were born in the same period, experienced and were influenced by the same significant life events in their formative time, thus acquired collective memory and developed peer personality of similar attitudes, values and behaviors for a lifetime. Furthermore, the defining properties of a generation are attributed to the collective memory, rather than their ages (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012). The collective memory arouse from significant political, economic, cultural and technological events or environmental resources, especially those that were in short supply for each generation (Chauvel, 2010; Inglehart, 1997). However, the shared experience does not hit the point to the creation of a generation. Only a concrete bond with formative forces exists, can the external events transform

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individuals into members of a generation as an actuality. As all living age groups may experience the same events, but could not be attributed to a single generation, the determining influence of early impression on the formulation of similar consciousness should be highlighted (Mannheim, 1952). This critical development stage is thought to be 14–24 years of age (Holbrook & Schindler, 1994; Inglehart, 1990; Meredith & Schewe, 1994; Rogler, 2002). Therefore, the experience of the formative time mold a generation's core values, which “do not change with one's year or stage of life” (Meredith & Schewe, 1994).

A generation is usually 18–22 years in length (Eriksen, 1950). This long span of a generation also contributes to individual differences within generations, however the generalizations of core values, attitudes of a generation do exist (N. Howe & Strauss, 1997; Strauss & Howe, 1991) and provide clues for behaviors (Schewe & Meredith, 2004; Schewe & Noble, 2000). Therefore, generation theory was widely discussed in public and social areas, hot issues including work-related values (D'Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008; To & Tam, 2014), learning orientation and education (Busari, 2013; D'Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008), voting (Tilley & Evans, 2014), etc. Research has suggested that values guide consumers' behaviors (Munson & McIntyre, 1979), and generational difference in consumer behaviors has been intensively investigated in the domains of shopping (Parment, 2013), fashion (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010), wine consumption (Fountain & Lamb, 2011) and fair-trade consumption (Ma, Littrell, & Niehm, 2012). Similarly, generational analysis can also be useful for understanding tourists' attitudes, behaviors and preferences.

## 2.2. Generational analysis in tourism

As an easy and concise proxy for personality of a whole population, generational analysis can be served as a valuable segmentation technique for tourism, which goes beyond the description deeply to understand the roots of motivations. In view of the intrinsic differences among generations, tourism marketers can segment consumers, forecast their needs and wants, design new products, make and implement marketing strategies very well. Thus in recent years there has been increasing interest in this topic both in practice and in the academic area.

In practice, tourism marketing authorities in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, have adopted generational analysis as the proper segmentation (Gardiner, King, & Grace, 2013). For example, in the United States, the Silent Generation reports the largest preference for taking the longest trips out of state and region, while Baby Boomers travel and spend the most. Generation Xers are more likely to travel with children, whereas Generation Yers are more active travelers than other generations (as cited in Li, Li, & Hudson, 2013).

In the academic area, a diversity of research has been published on tourist consumer behavior from a generational perspective and significant generational differences were detected.

Pennington-Gray analyzed travel activity preference of various Canadian generational tourists (GI Generation, Silent Generation, Baby Boomer and Generation X) and found that travel activity differed by generation groups (Pennington-Gray et al., 2002). Lehto et al. (2008) addressed generational effects on tourism experience sought and activity participation of older North American tourists. Their results indicated that Silent Generation and Baby Boomer in North America differed with respect to travel motivation as well as travel activities. Baby Boomers were more similar to younger generations, and sought more energetic experiences such as physical excitement, adventure and family time away from home, while the Silent Generation behaved more traditionally and pursued more static experiences such as casinos, cuisine, history and culture. Similarly, Huang and Petrick (2010) compared the domestic travel behavior of three U.S. generations (Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y). They found travel information search, preferred activities and perception of destination characteristics were strongly dependent on generational membership. A recent study by Li et al. (2013) explored the international travel behavior of various U.S.

generations (Silent Generation, Baby Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y). Their results demonstrated more differences than similarities across four American generations in their international tourist behaviors.

Different from the researches above, Gardiner, Grace, and King (2014) investigated generational effects on travel decision-making process and the future travel beliefs, attitudes and intentions of three Australian generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y). The results demonstrated significant generational differences in travel decision-making process and future travel behavior. In addition, further analysis indicated significant effects of formative experience on future decision making.

In addition to the exploration in single country or single region, some researches intended to extend this analysis context to wider scope. Muller and Cleave integrated American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand's Baby Boomer as a whole to address its travel behavior and thus put forward corresponding marketing plan and strategies (Cleave, Green, & Muller, 2000; Muller & Cleave, 2000). Similarly, Xola Consulting explored North America and Western European Generation Y's travel behaviors, and found this generation displayed similar demands for travel experiences with cultural exchange and environmental immersion (Consulting, 2006).

To distinguish generational effects from that of age, life cycle and period, longitudinal analysis was also employed in this area. Early examples include Oppermann's analysis on travel patterns and destination choice among German generational tourists (Oppermann, 1995) and You and O'Leary's examination of the travel behavior and travel philosophy of Japanese senior generations (You & O'lear, 2000). Both results showed that generational effects dominated age effects, and the travel behaviors maintained relative stability. Subsequent researches further supported the conclusion, indicating the validity of generational analysis in tourism (Beldona, 2005; Beldona, Nusair, & Demicco, 2009; Furr, Bonn, & Hausman, 2001).

To sum up, previous researches on generational travel behaviors have explored travel motivations (Cleave et al., 2000), travel information searches and booking (Beldona et al., 2009), travel activity preferences (Pennington-Gray et al., 2002), destination perception (Huang & Petrick, 2010) and travel decision making (Gardiner et al., 2013; Gardiner et al., 2014). All living generation groups are discussed, especially for senior generations. In terms of sample country and travel occurrence area, domestic travel from developed countries are the mainstream, little endeavor was exerted to tourists from China and other developing countries, except Chung, Chen and Lin's generational analysis to understand the motivation and destination image of mainland Chinese tourists visiting Taiwan (Chung, Chen, & Lin, 2016). Lacking from the scholarly literature is empirical research on Chinese international travel behaviors from generation perspective. Therefore, this study aims to explore the attitudes and behaviors of Chinese five generations of potential outbound tourists.

## 2.3. Consumer behavior model in tourism

Travel consumer behavior is complex, as it involves the whole process from leaving home to returning home (Medlik & Middleton, 1973). To unravel the core determinants and integrate their interrelations, many different models have been presented. Despite of their differences, these models have collectively emphasized such mental activities before, during and after travel as motivation, information source, destination choice, travel activity preference and destination evaluation (Dunne, 2009).

Motivation is the internal psychologically derived “push” factor that impels people to travel (Moutinho, 1987). It is both the initiation for following behaviors, and the grounds for travel evaluations (Jamal & Lee, 2003), therefore it is accepted as the first variable for understanding the potential Chinese outbound market. Meanwhile, tourists are also motivated by the external environmental derived “pull” of attractions

and activities, thus destination choice and activity combination are the other two variables. As the tourism product is intangible and delivered away from home, there are many kinds of risks involved in travelling (Lovell & Wright, 2001), therefore information search naturally occurs to decrease the uncertainty and improve the travel quality (Fodness & Murray, 1997). Moreover, knowledge of the preferred information sources by generations will allow the target groups to be easily approached (Kim, Weaver, & McCleary, 1996), therefore information source is also counted in examination. Destination evaluation is associated with intentions to return again and participate in additional products not experienced (Woodside & King, 2001), so it is also included as variables.

#### 2.4. Chinese generations

Currently, little agreement exists on the labels, the time intervals of Chinese generations. Based on the core points of formative time and collective memory of a generation, the authors divided Chinese society into five living generations. They are the: (i) Firm Communist Generation (FCG), (ii) Lost Generation (LG), (iii) Reform and Opening-up Generation (ROG), (iv) Only-child Generation (OG), and (v) Globalist Generation (GG). Although the GG is currently in the formative time, considering its volume and the great impact on family decision, it is also included in our analysis. The profile of each generation and their background, values, attitudes and behaviors, especially their travel consumer behaviors (stemming from the results of questionnaire), are outlined in Supplementary online material (Table S1).

#### 2.5. Hypotheses

For the aim of this study, we hypothesize that:

**H1.** There are significant generational differences among the five generations of travelers in travel motivations.

**H2a.** There are significant generational differences among the five generations of travelers in information source preferences.

**H2b.** Senior generations (FCG, LG) prefer traditional information sources (publication, broadcast media, word-of-mouth) and non-senior generations (ROG, OG, GG) prefer Internet.

**H3.** There are significant generational differences among the five generations of travelers in future destination choices.

**H4.** There are significant generational differences among the five generations of travelers in travel activity preferences.

**H5.** There are significant generational differences among the five generations of travelers in destination evaluation criteria.

### 3. Data and methods

#### 3.1. Data collection

We conducted the Survey of Travel Preferences by Chinese Generations (STPCG) for one month in June 2014. This national survey consisted of an online survey and a traditional “pencil and paper” survey, these methods provided approximately 30% and 70% of the responses respectively.

The widespread use of internet allowed us to deliver an online survey, which has the advantage of anonymity, a better response rate and wider geographic dispersal than a traditional survey (Aaker, Kumar, Day, Lawley, & Stewart, 2007). At first, a professional market research firm (<http://www.sojump.com/>) was used to obtain a link to the survey, then the online survey was launched by means of “chain referral sampling”, through social networking platforms such as tencent, QQ, wechat

and blogs. The authors provided the survey link to their colleagues, schoolmates, friends and relatives. These people answered the questionnaires, and then spread the link among their relationships. Also, the authors delivered the link to university and professional webpages. In this way, a better response rate and a more earnest answer were achieved than arbitrarily distributing questionnaires to individuals by e-mail. Finally, a total of 1190 respondents, mainly from the ROG, OG and LG generations participated in the online survey from June 11 to July 10. Furthermore, the sample distribution involved all the 34 province-level administrations in China and was parallel to the Chinese population distribution with the concentration in eastern coastal areas. However, the online survey involved some sampling bias such as a deficiency of other two generations (FCG and GG). In addition, the samples were more education and professions specialized, with part of the samples having higher educational background and more intending to work in enterprises and institutions.

To compensate for the limitations of the online survey, a traditional “pencil and paper” survey was applied simultaneously to secure representative samples of all the five generations to parallel the Chinese population. Care was also taken to represent all of the geographic regions, as well as all income and education groups. For this purpose, 4000 questionnaires were distributed in three crowded areas in Nanjing, the capital city of Jiangsu Province in the Yangtze River delta. Another 1000 questionnaires were distributed in Changsha, the capital city of Hunan Province in the central part of China, and the remaining 500 questionnaires were distributed in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan Province in southwest China. Taken together, these three locations represented the population of eastern, central and western China. To be clear, aimed for travel behaviors of the whole Chinese outbound market, the second-tiered city in the eastern area of Nanjing rather than Beijing or Shanghai, the first-rate Changsha and first-rate Kunming were chosen as the eastern, central and western representative as not all regions are the same flourishing or the same underdeveloped.

By this way, 3857 responses were returned, from individuals aged from 13 to 80, representing a response rate of 70.13%. However, 446 responses were eliminated because of monotonous answers (for example, all questions are responded with the same choice A), missing data or otherwise incomplete surveys. In addition, 554 respondents were too young (mostly 13–15 years old) to be included; while the 16 or 17 years old GG respondents were kept for their relatively mature attitudes and beliefs. After these removals, 2857 valid questionnaires were left for our analysis.

Therefore, a total of 4047 responses were kept for further analysis, with the total useful response rate of 60.49%. The respondents were roughly representative of the demographic of the entire Chinese population, when considered by regions, generations, education and income (Table S2).

#### 3.2. Measurement method

The survey items were gathered from previous studies, and preprocessed and analyzed at the beginning of the project. The questionnaire consisted of two sets of variables: consumer behavior constructs, and socio-demographic characteristics.

The following were the independent variable of generation and travel behavior measures:

**Generations.** As noted previously, the categories were: FCG, LG, ROG, OG and GG.

**Motivations.** Based on the Leisure Motivation Scale (Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Ryan & Glendon, 1998), Tanaka Kichi's travel motivation theory (Tanaka, 1950), and other previous literature (Boksberger & Laesser, 2009; Ward, 2014) as well as personal interview, motivations were measured with 19 items (Table S3).

**Information sources.** Based on previous literature (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Fodness & Murray, 1997), information source

preference was measured through five dichotomous items (Table S4). The respondents were asked to pick the items they most frequently used.

**Future travel destination choices.** The respondents were asked their future tendency of travelling abroad and the specific future international destinations (Table S5).

**Travel activity preferences.** A combination of 27 travel activity categories (Table S6) were selected based on a literature review (Littrell, Paige, & Song, 2004; Markert, 2004; Patkose, Burnett, & Cook, 2007). The respondents chose “yes” or “no” based on their own decisions.

**Destination evaluation criteria.** After a literature review (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Li et al., 2013), 19 attributes of destinations were provided for choice (Table S7).

### 3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted with a two-step approach using SPSS 20.0. In the first step, we conducted ANOVA tests for numerical variables (likelihood of travelling abroad), and Chi-squared tests for categorical variables (all other attributes) to identify the differences and similarities among generations. We applied two types of Chi-squared tests (Crosstabs and the Kruskal-Wallis test), as the results from the two analyses showed little difference, the Crosstabs results were accepted for its intuition.

Although Chi-squared tests are effective at detecting differences or similarities among generations, but they cannot exactly determine which generations are different from the others (Li et al., 2013). To address this, we included a second step of Correspondence Analysis (CA). The CA is a perceptual mapping technique that can visually provide the association between generations and travel attributes, and show the degree of the association.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Sample characteristics

Of the 4047 respondents, 56 (1.4% of the sample) belonged to the FCG, 341 (8.4%) were in the LG, 1432 (35.4%) were the ROG, 1358 (33.6%) belonged to the OG and the final 860 (21.2%) were in the GG; thus, there was a relatively low proportion of the two senior generations (Table S2).

In the sample, 2184 females (54%) outnumbered 1863 males (46%). By education, 39.8% of the respondents had only high school education

or below, and 42.6% had a bachelor's degree. Of the surveyed individuals, 38.9% were single, 5.9% were married but had no children, and almost half (48.5%) lived with their children. The rest represented an empty nest. Furthermore, most respondents were employed, and just over half (52.5%) had a monthly income between 1500 and 9000 RMB (1000RMB = 157 US\$), a proportion which is quite close to the current data for all of China and especially the 2013 Chinese outbound tourism population (Dai & Li, 2014).

### 4.2. Hypothesis testing

#### 4.2.1. H1 Travel motivations by generations

There were significant differences among generations for 16 of the 19 travel motivations, thus supporting H1 (Table S3). The only three motivations for which there was no difference among generations were visiting relatives or friends, making a pilgrimage, and study and investigation.

The perceptual map produced from the CA shows that travel motivations are linked with generations ( $\chi^2 = 426.227$ ,  $df = 76$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), as 81.9% and 94.3% of the inertia can be explained with two and three dimensions respectively, the third dimension was added so that the data can be appropriately depicted (Fig. 1). The map demonstrates that the ROG and OG are more similar to each other in their travel motivations, than to the other three generations. These two generations were particularly motivated to travel by enjoying beautiful scenery, rest and amusement, broadening their horizons, appreciating good food and lifting their spirits. The FCG appears in the upper left and far away from other generations and all motivations in the perceptual map (Fig. 1), indicating that this generation was quite different from other generations in the motivation aspect and seems to have little strongly dominant motivation. The LG was motivated by health issues and social relationships. In contrast, the GG was interested in shopping, taking photos and appreciating good food.

#### 4.2.2. H2 Information source preferences by generations

There were significant differences among generations in the use of word of mouth, publications, and the Internet as information sources, but no significant difference in professional advice and broadcasts, thus partially supporting hypothesis H2a (Table S4).

When considering the data in absolute terms, the senior generations (FCG and LG) did not prefer traditional information sources more than their younger counterpart (Table S4). However, when considering the relative importance of each information source, word of mouth was the most favored information source within the senior FCG and LG

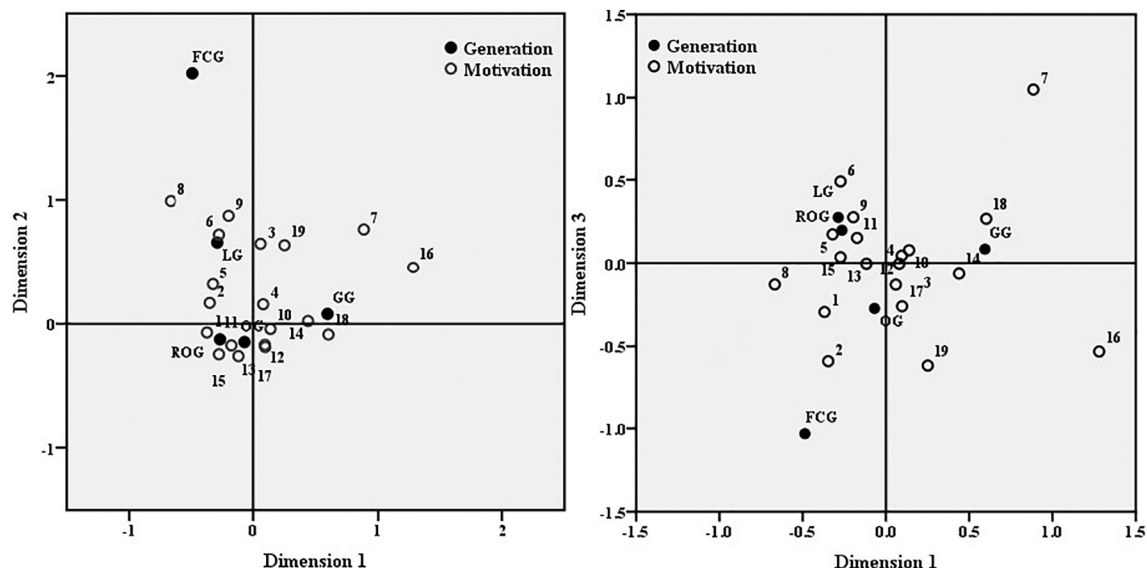


Fig. 1. Perceptual map, in three dimensions, showing results of correspondence analysis for five generations and 19 motivations.

generations. In contrast, among the younger generations (ROG, OG and GG), the internet was the most favored information source (Table S4). Thus, H2b is significantly supported by this criterion. However, the internet was considered the second favorite resource by the FCG, and the joint first by the LG, which is inconsistent with H2b. Therefore, H2b is only partially supported by this criterion.

The perceptual map shows clear association between generations and information sources ( $\chi^2 = 133.895$ ,  $df = 20$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and 90.9% of the inertia can be explained with two dimensions, which indicates the validity of the two-dimension chart (Fig. 2). In the perceptual map, generations and information resources are distant from each other, partially supporting H2a. Specifically, the FCG remains separated in the upper left corner, implying that this senior generation is quite different from the others in information source preferences, although it shares similarities with the LG in preference for word of mouth. Professional advice and broadcasts lie among generations, suggesting they are common travel information resources for all five generations.

#### 4.2.3. H3 Future destination choices by generations

The chi-square tests on the third variable showed highly significant differences among generations in the future tendency ( $\chi^2 = 16.470$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) (Table S5). Obviously, the non-senior generations expressed the strongest willingness to travel abroad within next five years especially the GG, with the OG showing an unexpected downhill, which may be attributed to a large proportion of college students to the OG respondents. For the specific destinations, Table S5 also demonstrates significant differences among generations for all international destinations except Sub-Saharan Africa. To summarize, all of the data strongly supports H3.

The CA perceptual map shows that international tourist destinations are significantly linked with generations ( $\chi^2 = 296.101$ ,  $df = 52$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) (Fig. 3). A total of 87.4% and 96.3 of the inertia can be resolved with two and three dimensions respectively, the third dimension was also included. The Antarctic is located in the bottom left of the map, with no generations around it, indicating that this is not a preferred destination for any of the five generations. The FCG resembles the LG in the strength of their preference for Central and South Asia, compared to that of other generations for these destinations. In contrast, the ROG and OG are interested in the Pacific islands, Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), and Eastern Asia, with the OG also attaching weight to

Sub-Saharan Africa, and the ROG favoring Western Europe and North America. Finally, the GG is fascinated by the Mediterranean, Latin America and the Caribbean.

As Western Europe, North America, Eastern Asia and ANZ lie close to the origin, these locations are considered the common “hotspots” for all generations of Chinese tourists.

#### 4.2.4. H4 Travel activity preferences by generations

Table S6 displays the results of Chi-square test on travel activity preferences, illustrating that there were significant differences among generations in almost all (25/27) of the travel activities, thus supporting H4. The two activities which were not significant different among generations were visiting historic places and attending trade fairs (Table S6).

Travel activities were strongly associated with generations ( $\chi^2 = 781.262$ ,  $df = 104$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) (Fig. 4). Only 73.2% of the inertia was explained by two dimension in the CA perceptual map, thus the third dimension was needed, and 90.3% of the inertia was then achieved to adequately depict the data. The FCG is distinct from the other four generations in favoring casinos or gambling, golf, hunting and fishing. In contrast, the LG cares more about cultural experiences, spiritual pursuits such as attending folklore activities, cultural heritage sights, and visiting historic places. But both senior generations like attending religious activities. The ROG favors countryside tours, festivals, natural scenery sights, watching wildlife, and visiting historic places. In contrast, in the two youngest generations, the OG displays enthusiasm for hot springs, festivals, climbing, camping, local food, water sports, concert music and dance, and visiting historic places; the youngest generation GG loves participating in sports or watching sports, exploration and shopping.

Enjoying local food, and visiting hot springs are located near the origin of the CA perceptual map (Fig. 4), suggesting these are popular activities in which all five generations participate.

#### 4.2.5. H5 Destination evaluation criteria by generations.

There were significant differences in 14 of 19 destination evaluation criteria among generations as expected (Table S7), and H5 is supported. The five destination evaluation criteria which were not significantly different among generations were service quality, language difference, ease of getting into the country, tourist information, and climate.

The CA result indicates that the destination evaluation criteria varied by generations ( $\chi^2 = 274.078$ ,  $df = 72$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ); 82.6% of the inertia

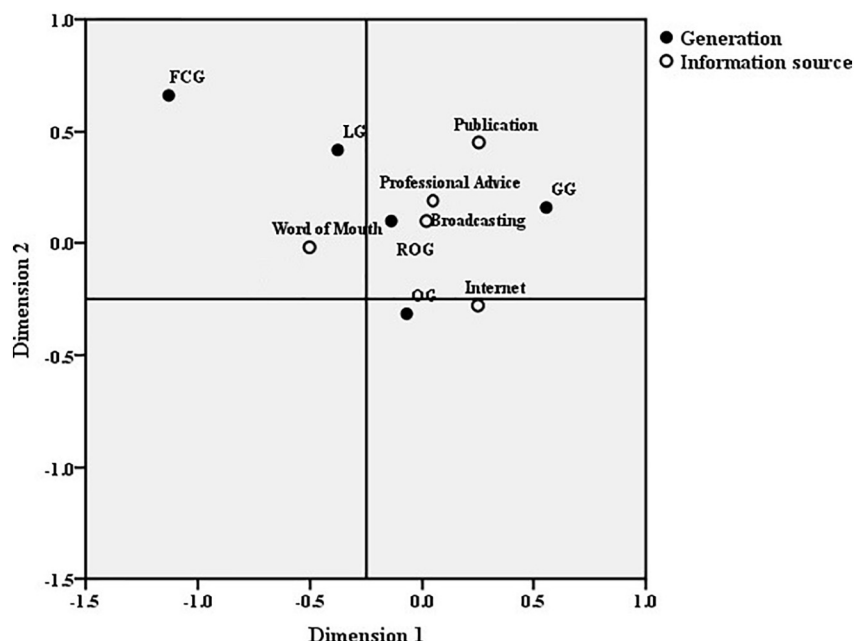


Fig. 2. Perceptual map, in two dimensions, showing results of correspondence analysis for five generations and 5 information sources.

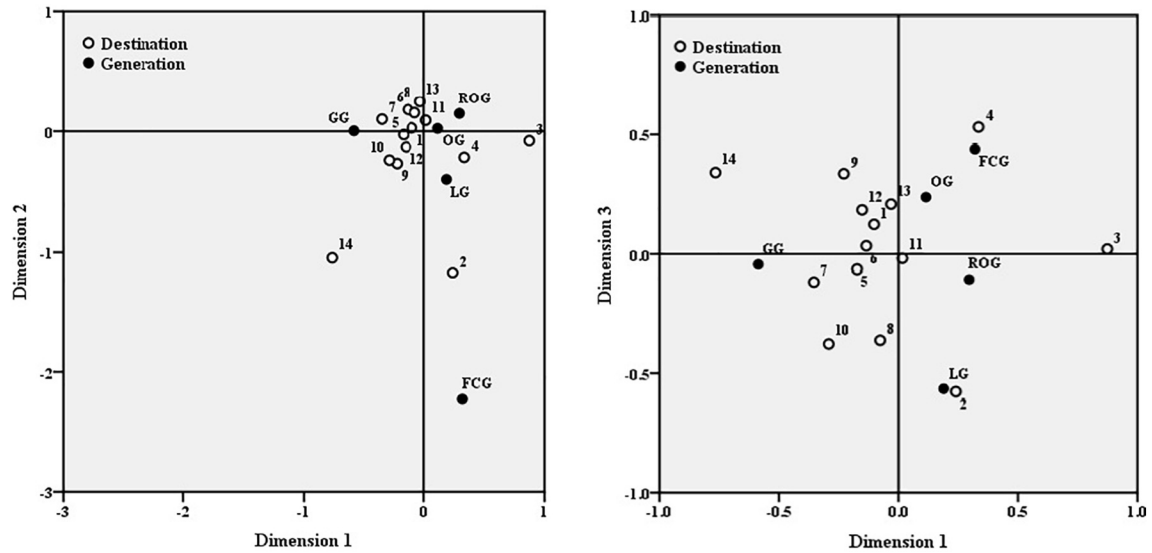


Fig. 3. Perceptual map, in three dimensions, showing results of correspondence analysis for five generations and 14 vacation destinations.

was explained by two dimensions, and 95.3% by three dimensions, thus the three-dimensional chart is adopted (Fig. 5). The perceptual map shows that among the five generations: value for money is most important to the FCG; recreational opportunities, ease of getting into the country, cultural and historical sites and service quality are most valued by the LG; natural scenery, recreational opportunities, cultural and historical sites and sanitation are more important than other criteria for the ROG; the OG pays special attention to friendliness of people, recreational opportunities, sanitation and security, and the GG is mostly interested in shopping.

Eight destination evaluation criteria are located near the origin (Fig. 5), thus these criteria- high service quality, sanitation, security, convenient transportation, excellent tourist information, comfortable climate, food, and superior environmental quality are important for all five generations, and are very important for destination development.

### 5. Marketing and theory implications

#### 5.1. Marketing implications

The main purpose of our study was to assess the differences and similarities of potential Chinese travelers of five different generations in

their international consumer behaviors. All the five hypotheses were supported, albeit the strength of the support varied. Numerous significant differences and some similarities between different generations of Chinese potential outbound travelers were detected, thus a good understanding of the Chinese market was achieved. Several practical implications arouse from the research and these may be of great value to international destination-marketing organizations seeking to tap into the Chinese market.

For the Chinese market, the tourism marketing authorities and tour operators should emphasize in the combination of sightseeing, knowledge, relaxation and comfort. First, promoting the diverse scenery, the unique characteristics as well as the wildness of the destinations should be a priority for destination authorities. Meanwhile, cultural elements especially the aboriginal ones should be highlighted in the promotional materials, as historical and cultural theme is the root of brand attachment (Cheng, Fang, & Chen, 2015) and one of the main causes motivating Chinese people to travel outbound. Third, fine cuisine, raised standard of accommodation and high service quality would be an effective strategy for Chinese tourists. Fourth, safety assurance is another point when marketing Chinese tourists. Therefore, a well-organized travel package combining sightseeing tours, local culture, attainment

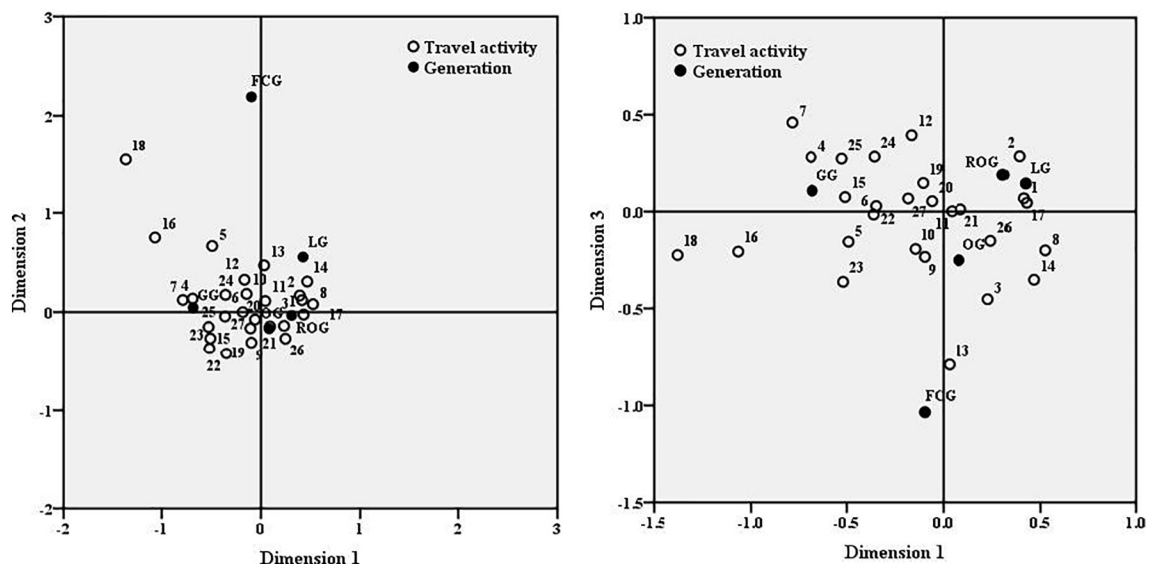


Fig. 4. Perceptual map, in three dimensions, showing results of correspondence analysis for five generations and 27 travel activities.

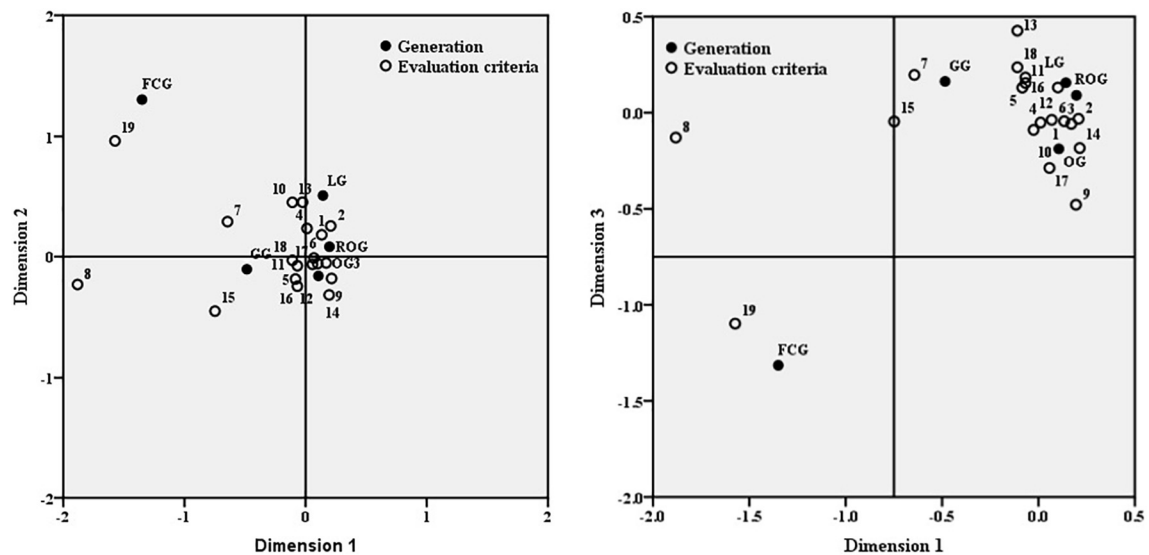


Fig. 5. Perceptual map, in three dimensions, showing results of correspondence analysis for five generations and 19 destination evaluation criteria.

of fun, comfort and ego-enhancement may attract Chinese tourists more. In terms of marketing information distribution, the results demonstrate that Chinese tourists are shaped by internet and word-of-mouth, therefore electronic word-of-mouth via social media such as social network, blogs and forums, and mobile applications is recommended for Chinese market. Particularly, electronic word-of-mouth via mobile such as the Chinese relationship-based “WeChat” would play a key role in marketing Chinese tourists in consideration of the great volume of WeChat users, its popularity among all generations and its easy accessibility of all time and global scale. The customers are encouraged to post pictures and movie chips of their trips, share tour experiences evaluations, publish travel guides and tourist reviews in their WeChat’s Circles in the form of sales commissions, free samples, discounts and coupons.

When targeting the FCG, destination marketing managers may stress travel package and price discount. Care is also taken to produce flexible itineraries with relax, tranquility, as well as new experience and knowledge during their trips. Convenient visa processing and multilingual travel inquiry services availability can be a strong marketing message for this generation. As for travel information distribution, the destination authorities are suggested to initiate their marketing practice by cooperating with aged university and community to expand social contact boundaries, as Chinese retirees usually enjoy their retirement in aged university. Additionally, Easy to use web site may be appropriate for this less experienced generation.

For the LGs, bundle sets of cultural experiences of the destination culture and way of life, chances of contacting with the locals, together with natural scenery and discovery attractions and activities will be appealing, as this generation participates in these activities, and applies them in their destination choice and evaluation.

If the ROG and OG are the preferred market, more emphasis is paid on relaxation and self-enrichment. Therefore challenging and cultural elements should be implanted in marketing idea. Fine dining, high standard of accommodation and improved service quality would also be an important strategy for these generations.

The youngest GG demonstrates preferences for hedonic, sports and adventure. To target this generation more efficiently, the advertising campaigns and tour packages should focus on new sites and routes of natural scenery, adventure activities, fine cuisine, good sanitation, pleasant climate and abundant shopping opportunities. Individualized customized travel information and personalized service are also anticipated.

## 5.2. Theory implications

First, these generational differences in international travel behaviors among Chinese tourists can be explained, and predicted from generational “collective memory”. For example, having overseas visits suppressed by the political system when they were young, the FCGs now express a long-cherished, and urgent, wish to realize their dream of visiting outside of China, rather than to pursue entertainment or shopping. Additionally, the insecurity from the experience of wars, the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine has made the FCGs frugal, thus they place priority on value for money when choosing and evaluating destinations, and they are sensitive to price discounting. Thus, through the segmentation of generation, marketers can not only depict the existence of differences, they can also predict future tendencies from the generations’ collective memory (Howe, 2000). So generational analysis offers an efficient and easy-to-use method to understand, target a huge and complex market. It is in this sense that generational analysis become more superior and more fruitful than other segmentation methods.

Second, the commonalities among travelers of all generations suggests that attention should also be paid to the cultural content of generation theory (Eyerman & Turner, 1998), which is often ignored, but which may greatly define the ethnicity and nationality of generations. The specific Chinese cultural tradition of a core Confucian culture and political system, which lasts a long time, may play an important role in the forming of a specific mode of thinking, which prevails among generations with little difference between them. For example, attributed to the tradition of socialization, word of mouth plays a critically important role in information acquisition for all generations of Chinese. In addition, thousands of years of food culture predisposes Chinese people for paying particular attention to delicious food. Thus, taking trips is not only for sightseeing, but for tasting special local food, and perhaps also for purchasing special foods as gifts for relatives. Additionally, tourists of all generations in China may choose the economically developed countries as their main overseas destinations, which is in sharp contrast with Western tourists who may prefer visiting economically underdeveloped countries with their unique and rich cultures. This difference may be partly interpreted as the Chinese phenomenon of “going with the tide”.

Third, Chinese generations do share something in common with their Western counterparts in travel behaviors, as detailed below, implying the universality of applying generational analysis in tourism, despite cultural differences.

Among the commonalities is that the LG in China shows obvious similarity with Baby Boomer in the West. For tourism experience sought, the LG travels for experience, emotional satisfaction and enjoying the true meaning of life, which is the same as the Baby Boomer generation (Cleaver & Muller, 2002; Patterson & Pegg, 2009). When in search of tourist information, the LG generation attaches great importance to online resources, as is the case with Boomers (Beldona, 2005). In terms of destination choice, the LG also shows an appetite for adventure tourism, like its Western counterparts (Lehto et al., 2008; Patterson & Pegg, 2009). For activity participation, the LG tends to enjoy cultural and spiritual activities, as do Boomers (Huang & Petrick, 2010; Li et al., 2013). All these similarities can be explained from the generational perspective. For the Internet priority, common technological circumstance made the LG and Baby Boomers familiarize themselves with PC technology during their work (Beldona, 2005). For the LG, their adventure-seeking pursuits while on vacation can be attributed to their experience of the Cultural Revolution, and to Chinese economic reforms and openness. In contrast, for the Boomer generation, the experience of the Vietnam War may play a role. Subsequently, the Resumption of university entrance examinations brought the LGs an opportunity for a better education, and they developed a preference for cultural and spiritual oriented activities. Similarly, the younger generations in China and in the West indeed share much in common with each other.

The commonalities between generations in China and in the West are attributed to the common socio-historical context that each pair of generations has lived in. Except the countries studied, many other countries are also living in the era of globalization and information, implying that generational results may be expanded to many other countries and a more similar, or even a unified generation for many countries can be anticipated.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of Chinese generations' travel preferences, and how they relate to their collective memories. Thus the academic theory in generational travel preferences is advanced by this endeavor. Additionally, the study offers both basic data and a theoretical foundation for further studies in other Asia countries.

## 6. Limitations and future research

First, the samples in this study did not perfectly represent the Chinese population. Despite the use of both an internet survey and a traditional questionnaire, access to internet and the questionnaire distribution are still limited, resulting in some mismatching of demographic variables, including location and age distribution. For example, our study focused on urban populations, and little attention was paid to the effect of China's urban and rural binary structure, and the resulting differences in travel. In addition, the FCG sample was relatively small. So more caution should be taken in future studies to achieve a more balanced sample.

Second, the study offers insight into the general travel mindset of Chinese tourists at this point in time, based on the idea that each generation maintains lifelong travel behaviors. However, it is still uncertain whether the behaviors of a generation persist, or if they change with age and life stage. For example, will the LG care more about health issues and choose filling-time activities when they are in the same life phase as the present FCG? Or when the ROG steps into its pre-retirement time as the LG, will they travel for the true meaning of life instead of just achieving a work-life balance? For this reason, follow-up studies are required to distinguish generational influences from age and period. Specially, the longitudinal data monitoring with shorter time interval is need to find out whether, and when, there is an inflection point.

Third, China is a vast and populous country, and great differences exist in location, population distribution, cultural background, economic level, living conditions, ethnic and religious beliefs, degree of openness to the outside world and other aspects. Thus, it is rather difficult to

distinguish generational influence from other factors. Much more in-depth studies are required in the future.

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## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.07.008>.

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