

# Intercultural Communication of Outbound Chinese Tourists from Cultural Perspective

Li, Hong

Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia  
Xingtai University, Xingtai, Hebei Province, China

Sandaran SC

<sup>2</sup>Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

Wang, Fang

Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia  
Cangzhou Normal University, Cangzhou, Hebei Province, China

**Abstract** - Under the context of globalization, intercultural communication becomes unprecedentedly frequent. Among the activities that closely related to intercultural communication, intercultural tourism is prominent. As a country with the surging increase of outbound tourism, outbound Chinese tourists show great potential in intercultural tourism and therefore have great impact on intercultural communication. The study on intercultural communication of outbound Chinese tourists from cultural perspective has become a practical topic in analyzing tourist behaviors, tourist satisfaction, tourist expectations, etc. This paper aims at exploring outbound Chinese tourist behavior from cultural perspective and hopes to give suggestions on how to provide high-quality tourism experience according to different cultural values. The study is based on Hofstede's Culture Dimensions Theory and large investigation of the manifestation of outbound Chinese tourist preferences in tourist motivation, shopping habit, and activity selection preferences through comparative method and data analysis, for the conclusion that cultural values, which keep on changing unconsciously, devote a lot for tourist behaviors and the quality of good intercultural communication. In addition, the deep insight into outbound Chinese tourist behavior will largely stimulate international tourism and benefit to all countries.

*Index Terms* - Outbound Chinese tourists, Intercultural tourism, Cultural values.

## INTRODUCTION

Under the context of globalization, no country can be completely isolated from other countries. Intercultural communication between different cultures becomes unavoidable. Consequently the quality of intercultural

communication is becoming a most important factor that influences friendly exchange between countries. Among the activities that closely related to intercultural communication, tourism is the prominent one that draws people from all walks of life and of different cultural backgrounds together. Although the communication in tourism only lasts for a short period of time, it gives profound impression on the people involved. Up to now, tourism has become one of the pillar industries to drive the world economic growth and development. According to the report of World Tourism Organization on December 4th, 2019, tourism currently accounts for 10% in global GDP and job market. Among tourism, outbound tourism is jumping increasingly. Being the top No.1 country in both the number of outbound tourists and the consequent tourist consumption, China devotes a lot. Since 2012, with the largest population of 1.4 billion and the fast-developing economy, China has been the biggest outbound tourist country. Data show in 2017, the number of outbound Chinese tourists was 1.29 billion, which is 45.8 million more than that in 2012. The annual average rising speed is up to 9.17%. In 2018, 1.5 billion, 14.7% higher than that of the same time in 2017. In terms of consumption capability, in 2017, it reached 258 billion USD. Although the number keeps on increasing only in these recent years, China has shown great potential and has brought about widespread attention by researchers in various fields.

Tourist behavior has close connection with tourists' cultural values. In this aspect, Hofstede made profound research in his Culture Dimensions Theory. He compared the four discrepancies between different cultures, namely, "power distance, individualism and collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, etc." [1], which dominate the tourist behaviors unconsciously. Although with time changing, some of the features of outbound Chinese tourists have the clear tendency to deviate years'

tradition, the basic cultural values still exist and are displayed visibly in their behaviors, especially their motivation preference, outbound shopping habit preference, outbound activity selection preference, etc. The study on intercultural communication of outbound Chinese tourist behavior from cultural perspective can be of great help to those who are related to intercultural tourism in destination countries. They would comprehend outbound Chinese tourists' sometimes "unacceptable", "strange", "crazy", "abnormal", or "different" behaviors from cultural values that are deeply rooted in their life. After knowing the underlying reasons, they will be more likely to understand outbound Chinese behavior, be more generous, and therefore adjust their products and service according to the outbound Chinese tourists' cultural differences in intercultural communication. Therefore, not only the outbound Chinese tourists can get better tourism experience and satisfaction, but also people in tourist destination countries would also feel comfortable and have more enthusiasm in expanding international tourism, therefore more business opportunities will be created harmoniously.

### METHODOLOGY

First, the study on intercultural tourism in intercultural communication is an interdisciplinary subject, which involves studies on tourism, intercultural communication, psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc. Vast materials are of vital importance. Therefore, **literature research method** is a must. As comparatively a new subject, many problems are still in progress. Influential books and articles such as *Culture's Consequences*[2], *China Outbound Tourism*[3], *Tourists' Strategies: An acculturation Approach*[4], etc. give overall analysis on tourism and culture, some especially exploring outbound China tourism and providing very powerful references. In this study, Hofstede's Culture

Dimensions Theory is the foundation, on the basis of which outbound Chinese tourists' behaviors are categorized separately into four dimensions, making clear the underlying reasons that cause the particular preference and then questions conveying target comparative cultural values of outbound Chinese tourists are designed.

Second, **questionnaires** are adopted as first-hand data sources to get the needed rating scale. These questionnaires are designed into two forms. One consists of only close-ended questions, and the other of open-ended questions. In the first one, all the questions are accompanied with five answers with 5 different degrees and scored from 1 to 5. In the other one, key words are highlighted and counted according to the frequencies mentioned by the interviewees. To avoid ambiguity, the questionnaires with close-ended questions will be distributed to a small number of people for preliminary trial. Then they will be modified and distributed on a large scale in electronic forms and done online.

Third, **quantitative method**. Based on the questionnaires done on the first stage, the answers are converted into their corresponding numbers from 1 to 5 and then input into SPSS19.0 under different categories such as different gender groups, different educational background groups, different age, region groups, etc., which are actually the independent variables. The purposes, i.e. the various preferences of outbound Chinese tourists, are the dependent variables. After calculating, if p is below 0.05, the results will be valid. In this way, comprehensive results showing the compared preferences of different groups of outbound Chinese tourists and the influence of cultural value can be seen.

**TABLE 1.** QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT OUTBOUND CHINESE TOURISTS' PREFERENCES IN INTERCULTURAL TOURISM

motivation preference	Q1: Is your no.1 purpose of outbound travelling getting new experience? A. Strongly agree B. Agree C. Just so-so D. Disagree E. Absolutely disagree
shopping preferences	Q1: How much is the idea of face-saving influence you when you go shopping in outbound tourism? A. Very B. Quite influential C. That depends D. Not very E. not influential at all
	Q2: Is the first reason that makes you buy luxurious products for yourself? A. Strongly agree B. Agree C. Just so-so D. Disagree E. Absolutely disagree
activity selection preference	Q: Is package tour your first choice when you travel abroad? A. Yes, of course B. Most of the time, yes. C. That depends D. Not always E. Seldom think of it

## MAIN RESULTS

Based on the results from the questionnaires with open-end questions, high frequently used words like emotion words, preference words, etc. are selected out and listed in order, which show the different degrees of what they care most in

their culture. From the figures of SPSS, comparison between different groups in age, work, educational background, lifestyle, etc., representing different tourism preferences can be seen. Take the shopping habits of Chinese outbound tourists from the preliminary questionnaire as an example.

TABLE 2. VARIABLES INDICATING OUTBOUND CHINESE TOURISTS' PREFERENCES ON THE WHOLE



In the above figures, the blue dots represent the factors influencing shopping choices, including face-saving, ideas from others, perception of goods, personal economic capability and other possible reasons; the orange dots represent the top 5 popular shopping categories, namely daily use, cosmetics, souvenirs, local specialists and clothing/cases (from left to right separately). Comparing the results with Hofstede's Culture Dimensions Theory, some, like the comparatively high consumption preferences in face-saving consumption and the consumption on

cosmetics, are almost in accordance with Hofstede's theory but some are somewhat deviated from his.

Similarly, when talking about why they prefer to choose package tour, most of them show very clear tendency of collectivism and uncertainty avoidance. However, to young people, some choose individual intercultural tourism to enjoy more freedom, which is quite different from the older generation. They prefer to take some adventures to explore new places and have greater interest to mix with the local people.

TABLE 3: VARIABLES INDICATING GROUP DIFFERENCES IN SHOPPING PREFERENCES

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Specimen sample	Average value	t-value
Daily use shopping Preference	Female	16	3.99	=6.3*
	Male	12	3.06	
Degree of rational consumption	Less Perception of goods	11	4.15	=8.2*
	More perception of goods	17	4.65	
Motivation preference for new experience	College and university ss	9	4.37	=7.5*
	Adults with working experience	19	2.94	
Activity selection preference in groups	younger than 40 ys old	13	3.81	=5.2*
	older than 41 ys old	15	4.88	

\*P<.05

From the above results, some more findings can be seen when outbound Chinese tourists are studied via classification study instead of being studied as a whole. First, in daily use shopping preference, obviously females

are more active than that of males. They have greater enthusiasm in almost every way. A large number of males only have interest in some particular items, especially luxurious and souvenirs. What's more, young people tend to

consume more on themselves while older ones consume more on gifts for friends or superiors, which also has close connection with face-saving and power distance in Chinese culture. In addition, when they have more perception of the goods, they will be more rational in shopping, which explains why among outbound Chinese tourists, the ones with higher educational background are more rational and the opposite ones are more impulsive and easier to follow others' ideas. This also shows the younger generation with better education nowadays are more likely to pursue personalized products and services. In this point, the traditional Chinese cultural value---thrifty, can not explain very well in their decision-making, while collectivism characteristic, one of the typical features of Chinese culture as a whole, plays an important role in guiding outbound Chinese tourists' shopping and activity preferences. However, even in collectivism, younger people also show some differences. In activity selection, people less than 40 may not choose group activities while a larger part of those more than 40 may choose group ones. Although as a whole, the majority of people have the tendency of collectivism, there are gaps between ages. Next, in travel motivation, college and university students have clearer desire to get new experience, while adults may have various motivations, which means that among younger generation, individualism is more obvious than before but masculinity is still strong.

#### CONCLUSION

Each individual is a social being and the product of a particular culture, no matter where he or she is. Tourism is a kind of experience economy. To most tourists, it is a typical hedonic consumption different from their normal life. In tourist destination area, the change of culture makes tourists feel fresh, strange, or even shocked because they need to make judgement toward the new experience. Good experience in intercultural tourism arouses more curiosity while bad experience leads to negative complaint or anger, i.e. bad feelings in some people will lead to negative comments and unpleasant experience in intercultural communication. However, the forming of good experience has close connection with cultural understanding to both the tourists and the people in destination countries.

According to Hofstede's Culture Dimensions Theory, Chinese people tend to have strong collectivist tendency. They emphasis more on "we", the benefit of the team, instead of "I". They prefer group activities and avoid being straightforward. So sometimes a small upset may turn into a big team quarrel; an unnecessary conflict may arise because of too much guesswork in communication. Next, China is a country with comparatively low uncertainty avoidance. In outbound tourism, Chinese tourists are much easier to accept flexibility and feel comfortable in changeable environment, while others may not. In some cases, this can be an incentive for discord. In power distance, which is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institution and organization accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede & Bond, 1984: 419), outbound Chinese people

are more likely to feel unhappy when they feel they are neglected or not respected. Therefore some people think they are too sensitive about what they are in other people's eyes. As for masculinity versus femininity, outbound Chinese tourists are comparatively quite stable, with a mixture of the two, according to Hofstede's study. On the whole, such conclusions are still reasonable up to now. However, as Hofstede made his survey on cultural dimension years ago based on the people in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan instead of the mainland of China, the change of time and object of the research on mainland China today is doom to have deviations.

Through study, it can be seen that Hofstede's theory is of great significance for studying international activities and can explain a great number of phenomena in intercultural tourism. Its position in intercultural communication is undisputed. However, with social development, it needs to be perfected. With time on, some have unconsciously been changing among younger generations due to that fact that on the one hand, education in China has improved a lot, which gives people more different perspectives; on the other hand, intercultural tourism, the important part in intercultural communication, is much more vibrant. No one can absolutely free from the influence from other cultures. With the application of internet, the convenient intercultural transportation and better master of foreign languages, Chinese people, especially young ones, have got greater impact from western culture, which has gradually changed young people's vision of the world. Some of their cultural values manifest a mixture of cultures such as individualism, more openness, more adventurous, etc. Therefore, what they prefer in tourism are not completely the same as their parents or grandparents. Culture is not static, although slowly, but along with the time, it is developing and changing invisibly all the time. Through study, more findings concerning tourism in intercultural communication can be seen.

First, cultural values do play a vital role in deciding Chinese outbound tourist behavior. However, cultural values also change over time, and the effects they do on different people are different. To the young generations, different from most of the older generations, their culture value is more or less influenced by western cultures. "To them, self-realization depends on themselves. The need for adventure and excitement is more obvious"[5]. For example, in terms of face-saving, it is not that influential in Chinese people's decision-making nowadays compared with the time twenty years ago. In addition, to people of different age and background, the effects are also not the same. This can be seen noticeably from people's choices of their consumption style and consumption concepts. Therefore, a dynamic constructive approach should be further studied.

Second, suggestions from Chinese outbound tourist behavior from cultural perspective are helpful and meaningful for the development of intercultural tourism as outbound tourism is becoming even closer to most ordinary

people all around the world. Such intercultural communication has become part of people's life. People in every country, including China, all have the desire to get fresh and extraordinary experience from outbound tourism. For countries, this intercultural communication is of great significance to cultural integration and economic development. In tourist service, as more package tours are still highly appreciated by Chinese outbound tourists, more flexible and feasible service products coping with the interest of current outbound Chinese tourists, especially the increasingly powerful young people, the main body of outbound Chinese tourists should be invented. Among them, young people take up a large part. They are called "new generations" of Chinese outbound tourists, who are extremely different from their parents and grandparents. These people, especially female ones, show higher consumption capability and obviously open-minded cultural values, which should be considered seriously. Travel agencies must develop new forms to cope with the diversified personalization of the Chinese outbound tourists, giving them more choices in former package tours on the basis of cultural values. Otherwise, the young generations are very easy to change into individual travels. In tourist product design, humanized leisure products combined with local specialties and in accordance with Chinese cultural values at the same time may have more potential development in the future.

All in all, the study on intercultural communication of outbound Chinese tourists from cultural perspective will not only benefit the Chinese outbound tourists, but also benefit people involved in tourist destination countries. Intercultural tourism means better intercultural communication caused by more consideration on cultural values through providing diversified products and services for people from different cultural background. It takes tremendous efforts. However, it is worthwhile.

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