

PRE- AND POST-TRIP PERCEPTIONS: AN INSIGHT INTO CHINESE PACKAGE HOLIDAY MARKET TO AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

China is currently Australia's fifth largest inbound tourism market (Tourism Australia, 2007a), with the potential to become the largest in terms of tourist receipts and the second largest in terms of tourist arrivals by 2015 (Tourism Forecasting Committee, 2006). The rapid economic development in China has led to a dramatic increase in personal income, an improved living standard, and a burgeoning Chinese middle class with enormous spending power and the desire to travel abroad. The Chinese middle class is comprised of mainly private entrepreneurs, managers in the state-owned enterprises, white-collar employees in foreign and joint-venture enterprises, as well as professionals such as lawyers and engineers. In 2001, middle and high income classes constituted 11 percent (52 million) of China's urban population (World Tourism Organisation [WTO], 2003). Chinese National Bureau of Statistics estimated that by 2010, the Chinese middle class will expand to 25 percent of the total population (170 million) (Xin, 2004), presenting a great opportunity for Australia's inbound tourism industry.

As China approves more destinations for its citizens to travel to, Australia is facing immense competition from destinations around the world. A clearer and fuller comprehension of the market is critical to Australia in its campaign for more Chinese travellers. Examining how Australia, as a destination is perceived by Chinese leisure

travellers becomes particularly important where an understanding of not only the appropriateness of existing destination marketing and promotional strategies, but also Chinese travellers satisfaction and post-trip behaviour is required.

Australia's tourism authority and industry have been actively involved in developing and promoting a desirable image of Australia overseas. The projected image of Australia has been modified several times to serve different purposes. Earlier tourism campaigns promoted parts of Australia as a 'little piece of England' or 'the Riviera' to encourage immigration (Cousins, 2003). The emphasis of the promotion then shifted to the distinctiveness of travel experience in Australia. In the mid-1990s, Australia became the first country to build an international brand image and 'Brand Australia' was launched to promote the country's magnificent natural environment, its people and lifestyle both in domestic and overseas markets. Free-spirited friendly people, dramatic physical landscape, and unique fauna have frequently been chosen to represent Australia since then (Cousins, 2003). International awareness of Australia as a tourist destination reached record high in 2000 when the Sydney Olympic Games was held. However, tourism to Australia was affected by a series of global events (e.g. September 11 terrorist attacks and SARS outbreak) after the Olympic Games. In order to raise the international awareness, the 'Brand Australia' program was refreshed in 2004 and Australia was portrayed in the new brand as more than just sun and fun, but also with diversity and cosmopolitan culture (Tourism Australia, 2005).

Several studies (Amalia, 1996; Murphy, 1999; Ross, 1993; Reisinger & Turner, 2000; Son & Pearce, 2005; Waitt, 1996; Weber, 1997) have measured Australia's tourism image among international travellers. However, none of these studies focuses the increasingly important Chinese market. To address this gap, this study offers an

empirical analysis of Australia's perception as a tourist destination among Chinese package holiday travellers. The study compared travellers pre- and post-trip perceptions and the findings can be used by tourism businesses and destination marketers to more effectively manage and communicate to this market.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF CHINESE OUTBOUND MARKET

The package tour may be defined as 'standardized, quality-controlled, repeatable offers comprising two or more elements of transport, accommodation, food, destination attractions, other facilities and services' (Middleton, 1994: 292). They are comprehensive packages sold to consumers at a single inclusive price (Middleton, 1994). The Chinese holiday market to Australia is largely restricted to package tourism due to the Approved Destination Status (ADS) used by the Chinese government to control and monitor its outbound tourism. The ADS applies to only group tours and Australia was among the earliest ADS destinations granted by the Chinese government. Under the ADS agreement, Australia introduced a specifically designed visitor visa and streamlined visa application service for Chinese package holiday travellers. Additionally, government officials and business travellers from China are often on package tours of an incentive nature (Tourism Australia, 2007b).

The likelihood of travellers choosing an all-inclusive package to some extent is determined by the perceived travel risk and financial constraint (Wang *et al.*, 2002). The all-inclusive package provides sense of security to inexperienced travellers in an unfamiliar environment (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Its popularity in a market often

reflects the geographical, cultural and social distances between the origin country and the destination (Enoch, 1996), which may partially explain its high appeal in addition to also being cheaper among Asian travellers, such as those from Japan, Korea and China. The tour package market is often dominated by several large tour operators who are able to negotiate lower prices with suppliers in the destination. There is also a high degree of vertical integration in the tour operator industry, especially in Europe (Theuvsen, 2004), resulting in reduced transaction cost, increased efficiency in using resources, economies of scale, and increased market power. This is ultimately reflected in the package price and benefits travellers. However, these packages are inflexible and offer little intercultural interaction. Furthermore, package prices often do not include all possible charges (Lo & Lam, 2004).

To all-inclusive package travellers, the tour guide's service is indispensable (Wang *et al.*, 2000) and the performance of the guide influences the trip experience and visitor satisfaction in a fundamental way (Yu *et al.*, 2002). The tour guide plays multiple roles during the package tour, including 'provision of security and protection, information, promotion of group interaction, surrogate parent, pathfinder and mentor, leader and mediator, and entertainer' (Wang *et al.*, 2002: 489). In intercultural settings, the role of the tour guide as the mediator between travellers and host community and culture is particularly critical, as foreign travellers depend on tour guide for communication and their trip experience 'is at least partially filtered and structured by a single mediator, their guide' (Yu *et al.*, 2002: 77). In a study of Taiwanese package travellers, Wang *et al.* (2000) explored the critical incidents related to the tour guide that contribute to dis/satisfaction. These incidents occurred most frequently in the areas of shopping, optional tours and airport/airplane services (e.g. seating arrangement and check-in). The

authors related this to the intense price competition and tour operators' dependence on commission from shopping and optional tours to recover the cost of the package. These findings may offer valuable insights for Chinese outbound market due to similarities in race, culture and language between Taiwan and mainland China.

Although much has been written on China's tourism development, Chen (2001) asserted that studies are mostly on domestic and inbound tourism. Although the number of studies in the field has been increasing, there appears to be few studies using rigorous and sophisticated quantitative research approach. More recently, Chon (2005) expressed a similar view that more vigorous marketing research is needed for Chinese outbound tourism. The body of literature on Chinese outbound tourism to Australia has been expanding in the past several years with a number of studies using different perspectives including: general market development (Chai, 1996), market structure/business network (Guo & Turner, 2002; Pan, 2003; Pan & Laws, 2003), unethical business conduct (Dwyer *et al.*, 2007; King *et al.*, 2006), and tourist characteristic/behaviour/preference (Yu & Weiler, 2001; Li & Carr, 2004; Kong, 2005).

Among these studies, Yu and Weiler (2001) identified Chinese visitors travel characteristics, lifestyles, and travel benefits sought. The authors pointed out that there was a gap between travellers preferences and what have been arranged for them. Focusing on the Gold Coast, Li and Carr (2004) suggested that more satisfied Chinese travellers were more willing to recommend the city to others. The study also found that Chinese travellers were satisfied with Gold Coast's natural attractions, clean and safe environment, and good weather, but less satisfied with shopping, food and cost related areas. Another study by Kong (2005) examined Chinese travellers expectation and experience in Canberra. Travellers expectation was positively disconfirmed by their

travel experience with the exception of 'recreation and entertainment'. Nonetheless, both Li and Carr (2004) and Kong (2005) had a narrow focus on only one Australian city and used relatively small samples (154 and 62, respectively). As it is unlikely that Chinese travellers overall experience in Australia is dominated by their experience in one city, a larger scale study on Chinese travellers to Australia should be conducted to further assess the issues raised.

DESTINATION PERCEPTION

Perception is 'the acquisition and processing of sensory information in order to see, hear, taste, smell, or feel objects in the world' and more importantly, it 'guides an organism's actions with respect to those objects' (Sekuler & Blake, 2002: 621). The ability of perception to initiate behavioural activities has a major implication in tourism. The choice of destination emerges on the one hand, from travellers needs and desires for travel driven by their capacity and taste, and on the other hand, from the opportunities/products offered by available destinations to fulfill such needs and desires. Destination image, as a mixture of positive and negative perceptions of different aspects of a tourist destination, represents tourism reality. These perceptions are 'likely to be critical elements in the destination choice process, irrespective of whether or not they are true representations of what that place has to offer' (Um & Crompton, 1990: 433). Through studying travellers perceptions of the destination, tourism marketers may be able to understand and predict travellers consumption behaviour toward the destination. The popular topics related to destination perception include its role in determining

travellers purchasing behaviour, satisfaction and destination positioning (Chon, 1990; Gallarza *et al.*, 2002).

Tourism destination image studies have been criticized for lacking of conceptual framework and so far, there is no universal definition for destination image. The nature of destination image is complex, multiple, relativistic and dynamic (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002) and the equivocality in destination image definition and conceptualization is a reflection of the complex nature of the concept and also has given rise to the difficulty and heterogeneity in its measurement (Beerli & Martin, 2003; Gallarza *et al.*, 2002). However, existing literature generally shows some consensus about the components and formation of destination image. For instance, the study by Gartner (1993) that decomposed destination image into cognitive, evaluative and conative elements provided theoretical foundation for many later studies in the area.

Based on the nature of the inputs that contribute to the formation of image, the distinguishing of organic image from induced images (Gunn, 1988) has a major implication for tourism marketing. Organic image is built upon a traveller's personal experience and information collected through a wide array of non-tourist mediums over a long period of time, whilst induced image is developed under the influence of tourist information sources. In the formation of a destination image, accumulating mental images of the destination (organic image) is followed by the forming of induced image of destination when the organic image is modified after more information is obtained. Travellers decide to visit the destination and after the visit, travellers recollect their experience and evaluate the good or bad aspects of the destination against their pre-trip perception. Destination image is refined and this image has an impact on travellers future purchasing behaviour. A positive image may serve as a pull factor for the

destination and increase the likelihood of re-visitation (Weaver & Lawton, 2006). In this image formation process, travellers obtain information both actively and passively from different information sources. There is evidence that package travellers are less spontaneous in planning their overseas travel and have different preferences for information sources (Yamamoto & Gill, 1999). Although Gartner (1993) and Gunn (1988) identified how destination image is composed, it is not clear which components are more effective in creating image.

Destination perception is also critical in determining visitor satisfaction. According to Oliver (1997), the comparison of expectation (pre-trip perception) and experience (post-trip perception) results in positive disconfirmation (experience exceeds expectation) or negative disconfirmation (expectation exceeds experience), leading to satisfaction and dissatisfaction, respectively. The pre-trip / post-trip assessment of destination image was adopted by a limited number of studies, which include Chaudhary (2000), Pizam and Milman (1993), Weber (1997), Vogt and Andereck (2003), Litvin and Ling (2001), and Truong & Foster (2006). Among these studies, Weber (1997) found that German travellers post-trip perception exceeded their expectation in a number of areas, such as landscapes, fauna, shopping, dining, hiking, etc. The positive confirmation of expectation had a considerable impact on travellers satisfaction. The gap analysis between expectation and performance can inform management decision making by detecting areas of poor performance and enhance management's understanding of satisfaction (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1993; Jain & Gupta, 2004; Saleh & Ryan, 1991). It can also be used to identify a destination's strengths and weaknesses so that effective measures can be taken to ensure travellers expectations are met (Chaudhary, 2000).

Some tourism scholars (Pizam & Milman, 1993; Weber, 1997; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005) believed that the expectation should be solicited before the consumption; they thus favour the traditional pre-test/post-test design where travellers expectation is measured prior to the trip and the post-trip perception is measured after the trip. However, this requires obtaining matched pre- and post-trip samples, which is particularly difficult, time consuming and costly with international travel. Another significant weakness of the traditional design is the presence of response shift bias that could lead to misleading results (Howard, 1980; Manthei, 1997; Rohs, 1999).

Several authors (Davis 2003; Howard, 1980; Pratt *et al.*, 2000) advocate the retrospective pre-test approach, in which both the expectation and perception data are collected at the end of the trip. When evaluating tourist product such as a holiday that involves multiple service encounters over an extended period of time, ‘the use of prior expectations as the standard of comparison may also be inappropriate’ as ‘a shift in the post-purchase standard of comparison is likely to occur as a result of change in needs, as well as in the importance of various product attributes’ (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001: 121). This approach, however, was criticised by Getty & Thomson (1994) as being inaccurate and contaminated by actual experience and the retrospective approach is not free of recall bias and social desirability bias. Time is a vital factor that affects travellers ability to recall since memory decay increases as time goes by; therefore, the pre- and pre-trip perceptions should be collected as soon as the trip is finished. A clearly defined time period that participants are required to recall can also assist the memory recollection (Dickson & Hall, 2006).

Destinations differ from each other in many aspects such as the cost, distance, activities offered, general atmosphere, and so on. When measuring the image of a

destination, it is important to consider those attributes that differentiate it from other destinations. A review of literature on Australia's tourism image by Wang and Davidson (2008) concluded that Australia has been seen as a safe and friendly destination with magnificent natural attractions and living environment. These are Australia's advantages as Chinese travellers appeared to regard safety as among the most important destination attributes (Kim *et al.*, 2005; Zhang, 2005) and preferred destinations with beautiful scenery (Kim *et al.*, 2005). However, Wang and Davidson (2008) found that culture, food and shopping are the areas that Australia underperformed in perception among international travellers. The study also identified a list of attributes differentiating Australia from other tourist destinations, providing useful information for future image studies on Australia. These attributes were included in the present study.

RESEARCH METHOD

A self-administered questionnaire survey was used to collect data from departing Chinese package holiday travellers at Brisbane International Airport during a three week period. The questionnaire was developed in English, then professionally translated into Simplified Chinese. Information was collected on travellers trip related characteristics, social demographics, as well as pre- and post-trip perceptions about Australia as a tourist destination. Chinese travellers were approached for their consent to participate in the survey, which returned 380 usable questionnaires.

Travellers perception was measured on a 21-attribute scale designed based on Echtner and Ritchie (1991), Gallarza *et al.* (2002), Beerli and Martin (2003), and Wang and Davidson (2008). The first three studies provide a guide on what general attributes to be included in the present study, whilst Wang and Davidson (2008) identified positively and negatively perceived attributes of Australia, which differentiate the country from the others. The attributes were then refined by the authors, two tourism researchers and three Chinese tour guides. A statement was developed for each destination attribute and the respondents were required to express their opinion on a 5-point Likert scale with one being 'strongly disagree' to five being 'strongly agree'. Both pre- and post-trip perceptions were collected at the conclusion of the trip for three reasons: first, the difficulty of accessing the same sample before and after the trip; second, the time and financial constraints; and third, the presence of response shift bias with long-haul international travel. To reduce the response bias, the pre- and post-trip perceptions data were collected at the beginning and the conclusion of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested first on 90 Chinese students in the Brisbane and Gold Coast region and then a sample of Chinese travellers in Surfers Paradise, Gold Coast.

RESULTS

The profiles of sample are summarised in Table 1. The sample contains mostly younger aged adults (aged 25-44) who were well-educated with tertiary qualifications (73%). Geographic concentration in terms of travellers place of residence was evident as

Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Zhejiang contributed more than two thirds of the respondents. Travel itineraries typically engaged 4 or 5 cities within a short period of 5 to 8 days. The sample is dominated by package travellers (98%) and most travellers (92.2%) visited Australia for the first time. Although this study collected data in Brisbane, the sample resembles a national sample used in the 2003 ADS Visitor Experience Study conducted by Australian Tourist Commission (2003), which also features slightly more male than female, mostly well educated young to middle aged adults.

Perceptions of Individual Destination Attributes

As shown in Table 2, the five best perceived attributes in the pre-trip perception are ‘The environment in Australia is very clean’, ‘Australia has magnificent sunny beaches’, ‘Australia is a good place for rest and relaxation’, ‘Australia has fascinating native animals’ and ‘Australia has spectacular natural attractions’. Similar to the pre-trip perception, natural and general environment related items ranked the top five in the post-trip perception.

The five attributes that had lowest means in the pre-trip perception are the same five that ranked lowest in the post-trip perception, although in different order of mean. These attributes are related to the quality of souvenirs and duty free shopping, accessibility, entertainment/nightlife, museums/art galleries, and the communication barrier. This finding implies that Australia was not perceived highly, nor did it performed well in these areas.

Insert Table2

Table 3 displays the paired samples t-test results. A negative value of change in the mean with a significant t statistic ($p < 0.05$) indicates a significant improvement in perception. Out of the 21 pairs, perception has improved in 13 attributes and has not changed in the other ones. Given the convenience nature of the sample, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test (the non-parametric equivalent of paired samples t-test), was used to confirm the results of paired samples t-test.

Insert Table 3

Factor analysis using principal components extraction with varimax rotation was used to investigate the structure of Chinese package holiday travellers pre- and post-trip perceptions. Both pre- and post-trip perception data had a variable to subject ratio of greater than 15:1, which is adequate for factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The factorability of the perception variables was examined first by checking the correlation matrixes, which showed a considerable number of correlations exceeding 0.3 for both pre- and post-trip perceptions. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) statistics for pre- and post-arrival data are 0.884 and 0.911, respectively. Bartlett's test of sphericity obtained significant results ($p = 0.000$) for both correlation matrixes and a further investigation of the anti-image correlation matrixes revealed no problem.

For pre-trip perception scores, the initial solution attained using all perception attributes and based on eigenvalue resulted in low communalities for 2 attributes:

‘Australia is value for money destination’ and ‘Australia has excellent museums/art galleries’. The factor analysis was re-run without these two attributes. The final solution for pre-trip perception has 6 factors explaining 61.354 percent of the variance in data (see Table 4). The resultant communalities range from 0.474 to 0.721. The six factors are ‘natural and well-known attractions’, ‘quality of tourist services and culture’, ‘quality of general tourist atmosphere’, ‘entertainment and recreation’, ‘general environment’, and ‘accessibility’. The cross loading of ‘Australian service staff are qualified, helpful and friendly’ and ‘Australia has good tourism infrastructure/facilities’ on both factor two and three is due to the similarity of concept these two factors measure. The variance explained by each factor ranges from 6.665 to 12.396 percent and the first four factors carry a similar amount of explained variance in the solution.

Insert Table 4

For post-trip perception, the final solution has 4 factors accounting for 61.485 percent of the variance, with communalities ranging from 0.491 to 0.748. These factors are ‘natural attraction and general environment’, ‘quality and variety of goods/services’, ‘cultural and well-known attractions’, and ‘accessibility’ (see Table 5). Two attributes ‘Australia is a value for money destination’ and ‘Australia has exciting casino and gambling facilities’ were excluded from the analysis due to problematic communalities. Cronbach’s alpha test of reliability produced an alpha of 0.865 for pre-trip perceptions and 0.906 for post-trip perceptions, suggesting that the measurement is reliable. Cronbach’s alpha values for each factor are displayed in Table 4 and Table 5. All factors, except ‘accessibility’ have an alpha lower than 0.6 (0.385 for pre-trip

perceptions and 0.513 for post-trip perceptions). 'Accessibility' successfully emerged as a factor for four times in both the pilot test and major data analysis, indicating that this is a stable factor. The low alpha value is more likely due to the fact there are only two attributes in the factor.

Insert Table 5

Summary of Pre- and Post-trip Perceptions

The derived factor solution for post-trip perception distinguishes itself from that for the pre-trip perception in that the number of factors or dimensions is reduced from 6 to 4. Natural attraction and general environment are independent factors in the pre-trip solution, but merged as a single factor in the post-trip solution. This indicates that natural attractions and general environment were not unrelated dimensions in travellers perception and they worked together to create an integrated picture of Australia's natural environment which also appeared to be the most important factor in travellers post-trip perception, as suggested by its highest factor mean.

Quality and variety related attributes clustered together to form the second biggest component of travellers post-trip perception. 'Entertainment and recreation' is a factor in the pre-trip perception but it failed to merge as an independent factor in the post-trip perception. Attributes that are relevant to entertainment and recreation became part of the 'quality and variety of goods/service' dimension in the post-trip perception. This may imply that Chinese package holiday travellers did not recognise entertainment and recreation as a separate category of tourist product/activity. Instead, they were more

concerned about the quality and variety aspects of the entertaining and recreational activities.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The results of this study offer Australia tangible implications in relation to destination marketing and management. Gunn's (1988) destination image concept discussed previously implies that travellers may be able to form an image of a destination, which they have not visited before. Given the low proportion of repeat travellers and non-English speaking background of Chinese holiday package travellers, it may be assumed that the pre-trip perception of Australia is largely an induced image rather than organic image formed by personal experience and non-tourist media. Tourism related advertising and promotion therefore are particularly imperative to creating a positive and realistic destination image of Australia.

The base image held by travellers before the trip may help destination identify its strengths and weaknesses, and to develop effective marketing (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The investigation of pre-trip perception found that Australia's natural scenery/attractions and agreeable environment/climate were perceived most highly among Chinese package holiday travellers, thus they can be viewed as Australia's advantages. The pre-trip perception data also implied that Australia's weaknesses were in museums, accessibility, shopping and entertainment related areas, and this is confirmed by the post-trip data, which showed that Australia underperformed in these areas. Similar findings were also revealed in Australia's other international markets that

show Australia does not offer good cultural/historical attractions and shopping opportunities (Waite, 1996; Murphy, 1999; Li & Carr, 2004; Son & Pearce, 2005).

Australia's low performance in culture, shopping and entertainment related areas also suggest that the perceived image of Australia is not consistent with how it has been portrayed in the renewed 'Brand Australia' campaign as a country with diversity and cosmopolitan culture. It is important for Australian tourism industry to be aware of its low performance areas across several markets and actions need to be taken to regulate and improve the business operation in these fields. Alternatively, a delicate shift of marketing emphasis from low performance areas to high performance areas may be appropriate as it is easier to reinforce positively held images than try to alter negative images (Pike, 2004).

The unethical business practices related to shopping in the Chinese inbound market to Australia have been repeatedly publicized. Inbound tour operators in Australia often underprice the tour package and the cost is recovered through shopping commissions and forcing guides to collect tips as part of their wages (King *et al.*, 2006). This may have contributed to the low perception of shopping. There could also be a mismatch of what were offered in the shops and what travellers liked to purchase. Thailand's experience showed that the unethical practice in its inbound Chinese market has seriously damaged the country's tourism image and subsequently led to reduced visitation (Mitton & Hilditch, 2001). The unethical conduct problem is attributable to the unique structure of the Chinese inbound package holiday market as well as behaviour and interrelationship among all parties in this structure. To avoid Thailand's scenario happening to Australia, it is necessary to enact laws prohibiting these unethical practices to stop further damage to Australia's tourism reputation (King *et al.*, 2006).

Given the crucial role tour guides play as a mediator between the host community and travellers in an intercultural setting, supplying more quality tour guides is also essential in assisting effective communication and solving elements of the unethical business practice problem.

Through effective marketing and delivery of quality tourism products, a negative image of Australia's low performance areas can be changed, although it is a slow and difficult process. The list of image change agents identified by Gartner (1993) can be used independently or in combination by Australian tourism marketers to modify the existing image. The characteristics of Chinese package holiday travellers being highly educated young to middle aged adults indicate that the technologies such as destination promotional websites, travel websites, and Internet Blogs may be employed as a greater part of the communication channel for this market. An analysis of Chinese package holiday travellers information search behaviour is necessary to determine the appropriate strategy to communicate with this market.

As suggested by expectancy disconfirmation theory, the gap between expectation and actual experience leads to dissatisfaction/satisfaction. This study showed that the gap did exist between Chinese package holiday travellers pre- and post-trip perceptions in 13 destination attributes, fortunately in a positive way. As implied, the existing marketing and promotional efforts might have been a little modest in terms of these 13 destination attributes. More striking, alluring images and texts may be used in future promotional materials, however, with the caution of not being excessive. Otherwise, the destination will not be able to fulfil travellers expectation resulting in dissatisfaction problem.

Different factorial structures emerged for pre- and post-trip perceptions, implying a structural change in travellers perception of Australia as a result of their visitation. The study found that travellers pre- and post-trip perception can be explained in terms of six and four factors, respectively. These factors represent the major components of travellers expectation and perception. The factor of 'entertainment and recreation' in the pre-trip perception was replaced by 'cultural attractions' in travellers post-trip perception. This can be attributable to the tour package which often has a full itinerary of sightseeing, attractions and shopping during the day and rarely contains any entertainment/recreation element at night. Activities at night are usually optional and involve additional cost.

The intangible nature of tourism product determines that the choice of destination is likely based on travellers pre-trip perception about the destination (Um & Crompton, 1990; Weaver & Lawton, 2006). In Australia's case, tourism promotions have been focusing on Australia's outstanding tourism resources that are believed to be appealing in the Chinese market. In terms of the post-trip perception, in a package tourism market, inbound tour operators dictate what travellers actually see and do in Australia. To successfully create and maintain a favourable destination image, destination marketers need collective support from all tourism suppliers to ensure that the products and services delivered to the travellers are as they are portrayed by the marketers. It is important for tourism marketers at all levels to communicate with the service providers to minimize the gap between the promoted and perceived images. For their own long-term benefits, inbound tour operators need to take into account of the current image of Australia held by this market when developing a tour package. In short, the structural gap between the pre- and post-trip perceptions may imply a mismatch of the marketing

emphasis and product offering, suggesting either a shift of marketing focus toward 'quality and variety' and 'cultural' dimensions, or an enhancement and repackaging of tour product. However, little is known about the formation process of Chinese travellers pre-trip perception of Australia as to the types and sources of information used, whether Tourism Australia's promotion is having a significant impact on these travellers, and how important perception is in motivating these travellers consumption behaviour. Studies in these regards will assist more effective marketing in this market.

CONCLUSION

Contributing to the expansion of existing literature on Chinese travellers and Australia's image, this study identified Australia's strengths and weaknesses in the Chinese package holiday market by examining travellers expectation and perception of Australia. It revealed areas where perceptual changes occurred and offered implications for destination management and marketing. The study raised several issues, which are worth further investigation. Firstly, a number of areas of low performance (e.g. shopping, communication, accessibility, etc.) in this market were identified and this situation needs to be addressed. Secondly, 13 destination attributes were identified as the areas that Chinese package holiday travellers experience exceeded expectation. Destination marketers can use this information to modify promotional materials. Thirdly, a modification effect of trip experience on perception structure was detected. This requires an examination of existing marketing effort and product offering.

Although the inbound Chinese market to Australia has been developing strongly in the past, future growth is not guaranteed if Australia does not respond to the intensified competition, the unethical business practices in the market, and the requirements of Chinese travellers. The information provided in this study can help Australia tailor its destination promotional materials and tourism products toward Chinese package holiday travellers. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the study used a convenience sample that consists of only those travellers departing from Queensland. This may affect the generalisability of the results. When financial assistance becomes available, the study can be replicated for other Australian states.

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Table 1: Social-demographic Details of the Sample

Social-demographic and characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	207	56.6
Female	159	43.4
Age		
15-24	59	16.2
25-34	91	24.5
35-44	140	37.9
45 and over	79	21.4
Marital status		
Single	88	23.5
Married	277	74.1
Other	9	2.4
Place of residence		
Beijing	55	14.8
Shanghai	91	24.5
Guangdong	70	18.8
Zhejiang	39	10.5
Other	117	31.4
Education		
Completed senior middle school or below	86	22.9
College certificate or diploma	73	19.5
Undergraduate degree	160	42.7
Postgraduate degree or above	56	14.9
Occupation		
Business owner	94	25.2
Manager	95	25.5
Professional	49	13.1
Student	55	14.8
Other	80	21.4

Table 2: Mean Rankings of the Pre- and Post-Arrival Perception Attributes (measured on 5-point Likert Scale)

Perception attributes	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
	(Pre-)	(Pre-)	(Post-)	(Post-)
The environment in Australia is very clean.	4.48	1	4.52	2
Australia has magnificent sunny beaches.	4.42	2	4.54	1
Australia is a good place for rest and relaxation.	4.31	3	4.39	4
Australia has fascinating native animals.	4.27	4	4.32	6
Australia has spectacular natural attractions.	4.24	5	4.4	3
Australia is a safe and friendly destination for travellers.	4.17	6	4.24	7
Australian climate is good.	4.17	7	4.32	5
Australia is a country with many well-known tourist sites.	3.88	8	4.01	9
Australia is a value for money destination.	3.87	9	4.03	8
Australian service staff are qualified, helpful and friendly.	3.84	10	3.95	10
Australia has unique Aboriginal culture.	3.71	11	3.87	12
Australia has good tourism infrastructure/facilities, e.g. hotels and restaurants.	3.70	12	3.77	13
Australia has exciting theme parks.	3.62	13	3.87	11
Australia has exciting casino and gambling facilities.	3.56	14	3.69	14
Australia offers many opportunities for sports and adventurous activities.	3.55	15	3.63	15
Australia offers a good variety of souvenirs and duty free goods for travellers.	3.54	16	3.6	16
The quality of souvenirs and duty free goods are high.	3.36	17	3.43	19
There are a variety of entertainment/nightlife activities for travellers.	3.34	18	3.29	21
Australia is easy to get to.	3.29	19	3.45	18
Australia has excellent museums/art galleries.	3.28	20	3.53	17
Communication is not a serious problem for non-English speaking Chinese.	3.25	21	3.35	20

Table 3: Paired Samples Test Statistics

No.	Perception attribute	Change in Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Status after visit
Pair 1	Australia has magnificent sunny beaches.	-.127	-3.650	.000	Improved
Pair 2	Australia has spectacular natural attractions.	-.161	-4.426	.000	Improved
Pair 3	Australia has fascinating native animals.	-.072	-1.734	.084	No change
Pair 4	Australia is a country with many well-known tourist sites.	-.142	-2.924	.004	Improved
Pair 5	Australia has unique Aboriginal culture.	-.155	-3.116	.002	Improved
Pair 6	Australia has excellent museums/art galleries.	-.278	-4.805	.000	Improved
Pair 7	Australia is a safe and friendly destination for travellers.	-.070	-1.702	.090	No change
Pair 8	The environment in Australia is very clean.	-.041	-1.051	.294	No change
Pair 9	Australian service staff are qualified, helpful and friendly.	-.091	-1.749	.081	No change
Pair 10	Australia has good tourism infrastructure/facilities, e.g. hotels and restaurants.	-.078	-1.407	.161	No change
Pair 11	Australia offers a good variety of souvenirs and duty free goods for travellers.	-.052	-.977	.329	No change
Pair 12	The quality of souvenirs and duty free goods are high.	-.059	-1.104	.270	No change
Pair 13	There are a variety of entertainment/nightlife activities for travellers.	.006	.121	.904	No change
Pair 14	Australia offers many opportunities for sports and adventurous activities.	-.107	-2.030	.043	Improved
Pair 15	Australia has exciting theme parks.	-.225	-4.470	.000	Improved
Pair 16	Australia has exciting casino and gambling facilities.	-.133	-2.814	.005	Improved
Pair 17	Australia is a value for money destination.	-.147	-2.712	.007	Improved
Pair 18	Communication is not a serious problem for non-English speaking Chinese.	-.154	-2.802	.005	Improved
Pair 19	Australia is easy to get to.	-.190	-3.992	.000	Improved
Pair 20	Australia is a good place for rest and relaxation.	-.085	-2.358	.019	Improved
Pair 21	Australian climate is good.	-.146	-3.572	.000	Improved

Table 4: 6-Factor Solution for Pre-Trip Perceptions

Perception item	Variance explained/Cronbach's alpha	Factor loading					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Factor 1: Natural and well-known attractions	12.396%/0.742						
Australia has fascinating native animals.		.716					
Australia has magnificent sunny beaches.		.681					
Australia has spectacular natural attractions.		.671					
Australia is a country with many well-known tourist sites.		.637					
Factor 2: Quality of tourist services and culture	11.916%/0.719						
Australia offers a good variety of souvenirs and duty free goods for travellers.			.726				
The quality of souvenirs and duty free goods are high.			.657				
Australia has unique Aboriginal culture.			.601				
Australia has good tourism infrastructure/facilities.			.494	.486			
Factor 3: Quality of general tourist atmosphere	10.978%/0.700						
Australia is a safe and friendly destination for travellers.				.750			
The environment in Australia is very clean.				.665			
Australian service staff are qualified, helpful and friendly.			.468	.524			
Factor 4: Entertainment and recreation	10.635%/0.654						
There are a variety of entertainment/nightlife activities for travellers.					.671		
Australia has exciting theme parks.					.651		
Australia has exciting casino and gambling facilities.					.612	.428	
Australia offers many opportunities for sports and adventurous activities.					.611		
Factor 5: General environment	8.764%/0.655						
Australian climate is good.						.779	
Australia is a good place for rest and relaxation.						.684	
Factor 6: Accessibility	6.665%/0.385						
Communication is not a serious problem for non-English speaking Chinese.							.825
Australia is easy to get to.							.689

Note: loadings less than 0.4 are not shown.

Table 5: 4-Factor Solution for Post-Trip Perceptions

Perception item	Variance explained/Cronbach's alpha	Factor loading			
		1	2	3	4
Factor 1: Natural attraction and general environment	23.021%/0.849				
Australia has magnificent sunny beaches.		-.846			
Australia has spectacular natural attractions.		.770			
The environment in Australia is very clean.		-.756			
Australia is a good place for rest and relaxation.		.730			
Australia has fascinating native animals.		.661		.427	
Australian climate is good.		.648			
Australia is a safe and friendly destination for travellers.		.572			
Factor 2: Quality and variety of goods/services	9.536%/0.835				
Australia has good tourism infrastructure/facilities.			.712		
Australia offers a good variety of souvenirs and duty free goods for travellers.			.707		
There are a variety of entertainment/nightlife activities for travellers.			.698		
The quality of souvenirs and duty free goods are high.			.677		
Australian service staff are qualified, helpful and friendly.			.636		
Australia offers many opportunities for sports and adventurous activities.			.593		
Australia has exciting theme parks.			.586		
Factor 3: Cultural and well-known attractions	10.679%/0.746				
Australia has unique Aboriginal culture.				.716	
Australia has excellent museums/art galleries.				.679	
Australia is a country with many well-known tourist sites.		.515		.586	
Factor 4: Accessibility	8.250%/0.513				
Communication is not a serious problem for non-English speaking Chinese.					.794
Australia is easy to get to.					.723

Note: loadings less than 0.4 are not shown.