

**A CULTURAL FRAMING OF NATURE: CHINESE TOURISTS'
MOTIVATIONS FOR, EXPECTATIONS OF, AND SATISFACTION WITH
THEIR NEW ZEALAND TOURIST EXPERIENCE**

Joanna Fountain, Stephen Espiner and Xiaoyan Xie

Faculty of Environment, Society and Design

Lincoln University

P.O.Box 84, Lincoln, 7647, Canterbury, New Zealand

Stephen.Espiner@lincoln.ac.nz

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, the Chinese holiday market has become very important to the New Zealand tourism industry, and now represents its fourth largest source of visitors. Understanding Chinese tourist motivations for, expectations of, and satisfaction with their tourism experience is, therefore, crucial for the future development of the market. Existing research suggests that for Chinese visitors, like other market segments, the natural landscape has a big influence over the decision to travel to New Zealand. There is an emerging concern, however, that the country's tourism product must diversify if it is to continue to attract an increasingly sophisticated and discerning market, and attention is now shifting to utilize the appeal of culture and heritage attractions in New Zealand, particularly those centred on Māori cultural products. This paper reports on research into Chinese tourists' motivations, expectations and behaviour with respect to their travel in New Zealand. Particular emphasis is given to an exploration of the relative importance of nature and culture to Chinese tourists in New Zealand. Data were collected via a self-completed questionnaire administered to 181 Chinese tourists visiting Queenstown. The findings suggest that the Chinese market may be particularly suited to a culturally-oriented experience of New Zealand, but one based less on Māori culture as it is often portrayed to tourists (e.g. cultural performances, experiencing a hangī), and more on the opportunities to learn about Māori stories and legends as part of visiting natural environments. The implications of these findings for shaping the Chinese tourist gaze in New Zealand are discussed.

Keywords: Chinese tourists, New Zealand, motivations, expectations, nature, cultural tourism

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, outbound tourism demand from mainland China has become an important focus for destination managers and marketers and tourism academics (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline & Wang, 2010). The Chinese government's loosening of restrictions on outbound travel since the 1980s has continued with the expansion of the Approved Destination Status (ADS) scheme so that today ADS had been granted to more than 130 countries (Ministry of Tourism, 2010a; Sparks & Pan, 2008). This relaxation of travel restrictions has been accompanied by swift economic development which has resulted in a growing middle class with the means and desire to gain first-hand experience of the rest of the world (Arlt, 2006; Ministry of Tourism, 2010). Today China is seen by observers as one of the two most important tourist-generating markets worldwide with the potential to have a massive influence on the marketing of tourism and destination development in coming years (Kim, Guo & Agrusa, 2005). Between 1993 and 2002, the average rate of annual growth was 20 percent (Kim et al, 2005) and by 2007 outbound travel by Chinese residents had reached 40 million trips annually; a quadrupling in ten years (Ministry of Tourism, 2009). There has been a corresponding growth in expenditure; in 2005 Chinese nationals spent US\$22 billion on tourism abroad, an increase from US\$3.6 billion ten years earlier (Arlt, 2006). This growth has slowed somewhat in the past few years; in 2008 visitor numbers dropped slightly as a consequence of the Beijing Olympics and, a few months' later, the Sichuan earthquake, while in 2009 the global economic down-turn, and concerns surrounding the Influenza A H1N1 (Swine Flu) pandemic, also affected visitors numbers. Notwithstanding these recent setbacks, the Chinese outbound market is expected to exceed 51 million in 2010 (Ministry of Tourism, 2010).

The Chinese visitor market has become very important to the New Zealand tourism industry, and now represents its fourth largest source of visitors (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). Most tourism by mainland Chinese to New Zealand has occurred since 1999, when New Zealand became one of the first western countries to be granted ADS status. A simplified passport application process and direct air-links between

China and New Zealand since 2006 have aided visitation from China. To the year ending June 2010, there were 105,191 Chinese visitors to New Zealand, accounting for approximately five percent of total annual overseas visitors (Ministry of Tourism, 2010), and forecasts suggest that visitation from China will continue to grow (Ministry of Tourism, 2010).

Given the emerging importance of the Chinese visitor market to New Zealand tourism, it is crucial to understand their expectations of and satisfaction with their tourism experience in this country. To date there has been somewhat limited research on this topic, however this is increasing (eg. Becken, 2003; Chan, 2009; Cone, 2005; Mohsin, 2008; Ryan & Mo, 2001; Tian, 2008; Zhao, 2006; Zhu, 2006). Existing research suggests that for Chinese visitors, like other market segments, the natural landscape has an important influence over the decision to travel to New Zealand (Chan, 2009; Cone, 2005; Zhao, 2006) and that they are reasonably satisfied with their experiences in New Zealand, although levels of satisfaction within the Chinese visitor market to New Zealand is generally lower than that of other markets (Ministry of Tourism, 2010).

Therefore, the purpose of this research has been to explore Chinese tourists' motivations, expectations and behaviours with respect to a range of attractions and activities in which they participate on their travel in New Zealand via a self-completed questionnaire administered to 181 Chinese tourists visiting Queenstown. This paper reports, in particular, on the relative importance of natural attractions and cultural elements to Chinese tourists during their time in New Zealand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding tourists' expectations and preferences when they make travel decisions is fundamental to effective destination management and marketing. Similarly, being aware of how tourists interpret the experiences they encounter, and how these experiences compare with their expectations, provides important insights to tourist satisfaction. Generally, in the consumer behaviour literature, customer satisfaction is seen as a function of performance expectations and expectancy disconfirmation (Eagles & McCool, 2002; Jacobson, 2001; Lata & Everett, 2000; Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985), with the general assumption being that "satisfaction increases as the performance/expectation ratio increases" (Oliver, 1980, p. 460). Satisfaction arises from the individual's subjective evaluation of an experience, relative to his or her expectation of that involvement (Moore, 1995; Rollins & Robinson, 2002).

There is growing recognition of the importance of the role of one's cultural background in determining how one's expectations are established, how an experience is perceived and explained and therefore how satisfied one is with an experience (Caneen, 2004; Hofstede, 2001; Mok & DeFranco, 1999; Reisinger & Turner, 2002). Expectations come from a number of sources, which include the qualities and perceptions acquired from a particular cultural background (Li et al., 2010; Oliver, 1980). How one perceives and assesses a situation will be influenced also by one's cultural background, including the position of one's culture in terms of power distance, individualism and masculinity dimensions (Chang, 2008; Hofstede, 2001). In this context, therefore, it is important to recognise that "Chinese travelers may have particular travel expectations, preferences, and requirements that are not yet well understood by Western marketers" (Li et al., 2010, p.3).

One useful way to assess satisfaction and some of its associated concepts is the EPI (Expectations-Perceptions-Importance) approach (Lata & Everett, 2000). This approach requires respondents to evaluate the importance of some predefined feature or attribute, as well as their perception of the extent to which this feature or attribute met their needs; if the perception of the experience is lower than expectation then this is used as a measure of dissatisfaction. The significance of any discrepancy between perception of the experience and expectation can be established by determining the respondents' assessment of the importance of each feature. The formula for assessing satisfaction therefore is ((Perception-Expectations)*Importance) (Lata & Everett, 2000). The EPI methodology can be used as a

comprehensive, flexible and economic way to provide data suitable for management decisions (Espiner, Higham & Corbett, 2006).

A number of studies globally have explored the motivations and expectations of travellers from mainland China. What is known is that, as yet, they are relatively inexperienced travellers, who tend to prefer to travel on package tours and for whom *value* in their travel experience is very important. This value is sometimes determined on the basis of the number of destinations or sites that can be experienced on one trip, which means, on the whole, Chinese visitors do not spend long in each destination (Becken, 2003; Chan, 2009; Cone, 2005; Guo, Kim & Timothy, 2007; Ministry of Tourism, 2009). The preference for package tours also reflects the Chinese market's concern for safety (Kim et al., 2005; Weiler & Yu, 2006).

In terms of the travel experiences they seek, the key destination attributes for Chinese travellers are reported as being the scenic beauty and natural wonders of the destinations they visit (Cone, 2005; Kim et al., 2005; Weiler & Yu, 2006). Similarly, research on Chinese visitors to New Zealand suggests the primary reasons for choosing to visit revolve around its natural beauty, scenery and its 'clean and green' and unpolluted environment (Cone, 2005; Ryan & Mo, 2001; Zhao, 2006), although safety is also an important consideration (Becken 2003; Coventry, 2008; Ryan & Mo, 2001).

Most of the studies of the Chinese outbound market suggest they are interested in experiencing different historical and cultural resources including local customs (Becken, 2003; Kim et al, 2005; Li et al, 2010; Weiler & Yu, 2006), with some researchers suggesting that Chinese tourists place a higher priority on gaining cultural experience than other markets (Caneen, 2004; Kau & Lim, 2005; Xu, Morgan & Song, 2009). There is some evidence that high-end travellers rate experiences of culture and history more highly than the market as a whole (Cone, 2005). Research in the New Zealand context supports this cultural interest with an important motivation for Chinese visitors being to experience the country's unique culture, history and customs. While some studies have found experiencing Māori culture to be a significant and satisfying element of Chinese visitors' experience of New Zealand (Ryan & Mo, 2001), in assessing the attractiveness of various destination attributes of New Zealand to residents of three cities in China, Moshin (2008) found no activity associated with Māori culture appearing in the top ten list of attributes. This finding, however, may relate to lack of knowledge about the activities as much as lack of interest.

Studies which examine the activities of Chinese visitors in New Zealand are generally hard to compare because of the differing ways in which the activity categories are framed. Chan (2009) reports that the main activities undertaken are sightseeing, shopping, visiting historic sites, attending a Māori cultural performance and visiting a botanical garden. By comparison, Ministry of Tourism (2009) data suggest the top activities are walking and trekking, visiting volcanic/geothermal attractions; visiting lookouts or viewing platforms, cultural attractions and other land based sightseeing. Ryan and Mo (2001) report that during their time in New Zealand Chinese tourists place a great deal of importance on sightseeing and experiencing new places. They derive satisfaction from sightseeing in nature-based settings (visiting national parks and viewing gardens and farms) and in cities and on boat cruises, and enjoy experiencing Māori culture (Ryan & Mo, 2001). Generally Chinese visitors to New Zealand are more interested in a passive enjoyment of New Zealand's natural scenery; that is via 'sightseeing' rather than active involvement, although younger visitors are more interested in active experiences (Ryan & Mo, 2001).

Chinese tourists tend to leave New Zealand with lower satisfaction than other markets, including the lowest satisfaction ratings for food and beverage and accommodation, and significantly lower satisfaction ratings than the 'all markets' average for activities undertaken in New Zealand (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). A similar finding is reported in Australia (Weiler & Yu, 2006; Pan & Laws, 2001). This lower level of satisfaction has been blamed partly on a tendency in the past for Chinese tour operators to cut costs on food, accommodation and activities on tours in Australasia, or to prioritise shopping in order to obtain kickbacks (Keeping them happy, 2005; Tourism New Zealand, 2010; Weiler & Yu, 2006).

Globally, Chinese travellers tend to be influenced by good quality service and tourism facilities, with accommodation and food and beverage quality and service frequently mentioned as very important (Li et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2005; Weiler & Yu, 2006). The length of most Chinese holidaymakers' trips to New Zealand, for whom the average length of stay was just 5.1 days in 2008 (Ministry of Tourism, 2009), also means, for many Chinese visitors, much of their experience of New Zealand is spent travelling between destinations, or having to visit attractions in a rushed and superficial way, which may reduce satisfaction with the experience (Chen, 2002; Rowan, 2005; see also Weiler & Yu, 2006). There is also some evidence to suggest that Chinese visitors interpret their New Zealand itinerary as an expensive 'add-on' to a trip to Australia, which may negatively affect satisfaction levels (Cone, 2005). The proportion of Chinese visitors travelling to both Australia and New Zealand on a single trip is declining but still represents 77 percent of all visitors (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). The lack of satisfaction in the market may also reflect a failure in the industry to understand Chinese visitors' needs fully.

One of the difficulties in most research on Chinese tourists' motivations and activities in New Zealand is a presumption that there is a relatively clear separation between what might be called 'natural' and 'cultural' activities. For example, a number of studies report an interest by Chinese tourists in the "good natural environment" (Chan, 2009) or the fact that New Zealand is "clean, green, fresh, peaceful" (Zhao, 2006). However, this may reveal a lack of understanding of Chinese culture and philosophy in which such a separation between culture and nature is not straightforward. The definition of a cultural experience for Chinese tourists is not an experience removed from nature; for cultural experiences are critical and found everywhere, including in wildlife and landscapes. Little tourism literature to date has explored the cultural reasons behind Chinese tourists' expectations and travel decisions, although there are some interesting exceptions to this (Arlt, 2006; Li, 2005, 2008; Mok & DeFranco, 1999).

The importance of culture to Chinese tourists might be explained by their more than 5000 years of history, which has created abundant cultural resources for China. However, the close relationship between man and nature comes also from the key principles of Confucianism and Taoist philosophy, described by Li (2005) as "Chinese common knowledge". One of these central principles is the concept of harmony. A basic Confucian assumption is that humans exist in relation to other people, and in relation to nature (Mok & DeFranco, 1999). In human relationships, this leads to a prioritising of respect for authority, face, group orientation and interdependence. In relation to nature, human beings are regarded as part of nature, and a harmonious relationship between nature and humans is central to Chinese culture (Li, 2005). The belief is that "nature without man and man without nature were incomplete" (Li, 2008, p.499). Because nature is imperfect, humans need to improve on it with buildings and other constructions in order to create harmony. What this means is that the Western conception of 'wilderness', as unmodified and untouched nature, is foreign to a Chinese mindset, and the concept has rather negative connotations. In other words, for any natural landscape to be meaningful to Chinese "the physical landscape must be permeated with human cultural and historic heritage" (Li, 2008, p.501). There must be evidence of that harmonious relationship between man and nature; it must be a "culture-scape" (Li, 2008, p.494).

Confucius taught that human beings should learn from nature, with people of different characters gaining different knowledge and experience from nature around them (Arlt, 2006). Similarly, Taoism suggests that man should follow nature, integrate with nature and search for aesthetic values from nature (Arlt, 2006), so the attractiveness of nature is evaluated by its connection with legend, stories, poems, history or famous people, not only natural beauty. For example, Li (2008) reports that the Chinese know the names of about 100 pine trees which have been made famous through many poems – these are important tourist attractions, but Chinese visitors go there for their cultural value, not any botanical significance. She reports also that many of the most famous 'natural' tourist sites in China are renowned not for their scenic attractions but for their comprehensive links to China's cultural heroes – poets, historical leaders and so on. She argues that without this cultural validation many of these sites would not have been developed as

tourist destinations. In other words, these differences based on common Chinese knowledge results in a distinctive “Chinese tourist gaze” on nature (Li, 2008).

Clearly, in a New Zealand context, a cultural tourism experience does not exclude the natural environment or vice versa. In fact, a cultural experience can ‘add value’ to the experience of the country and landscape, and interpretation of New Zealand’s natural heritage from a Māori perspective is recognised as offering a unique point of difference for New Zealand tourism operators (Colmar Brunton, 2003; McIntosh, 2004; Molloy, 1993; Wilson, Horn, Sampson, Becken & Hart, 2006). As Carr states the “intangible aspects of cultural significant landscape features are often elusive” (2006, p 83) but visitors may become aware of them through promotional literature, place names or through interpretation which relates local stories, myths and history. Increasingly, tourism operators are adding a cultural aspect to interpretation of the natural environment, and Wilson et al. (2006, p.65) report that tourists feel that incorporating historical stories into their New Zealand experience offers a “richer dimension to the experience”. The issue at the forefront of the present research is whether the Chinese tourist experience of New Zealand currently satisfies their tendency to desire a cultural framing of nature.

METHODS

This research project relied on a self-completed survey, conducted with Chinese visitors to Queenstown. Queenstown was chosen as the location for data collection due to its importance on the itineraries of Chinese visitors to New Zealand and the fact that it is usually the penultimate destination for Chinese visitors, meaning it is a good place for them to reflect on their trip to New Zealand. The respondents were selected by means of convenience sampling in three areas of Queenstown; outside the reception of the Skyline Function Centre, in the Queenstown Mall and in the cruise harbour. These three places were chosen due to their popularity with tourists and the fact that these were all places where tourists might be waiting (to take a cruise, the skyline gondola) or had free time (Queenstown Mall). The researcher stationed herself in these locations and approached people of obvious Asian descent, asking each potential respondent an initial question to determine whether they were international tourists from mainland China and within the target age range. Once eligibility was established, the researcher and research project were introduced and participation in the research project was sought. Where willingness was confirmed, the respondent was given a copy of the questionnaire to complete. The next respondent was approached once the questionnaire had been accepted by the previous participant.

All data collection took place over a week in November 2009 during daylight hours. Data were collected from 181 respondents over 18 years of age who identified themselves as international tourists. Over the sampling period, 272 international tourists were asked to take part in the research, resulting in a response rate of 66.5 percent.

The survey contained three sections and 19 close-ended questions. Section one focused on general information related to respondents’ travel to New Zealand. Section two was more specific about the Chinese tourists’ perspective of their experiences in New Zealand. Section three collected respondent profile information, including age and gender. The questionnaire was designed in English and translated into Chinese (Mandarin) and the translation was verified by another Chinese/English speaker and pre-tested with a small number of Chinese students before implementation in the field. The questionnaire took approximately five minutes for each visitor to complete. Data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet before being transferred to SPSS 17 for analysis.

FINDINGS

Profile of the sample and visit characteristics

An analysis of age distribution of the sample reveals that respondents were considerably younger than the national average for Chinese visitors as reported in Ministry of Tourism (2009) data (Figure 1),

particularly amongst the youngest age group, 19 to 29 years (35.9%); it should be noted that the national data for this age group excludes 19 year olds. Those aged 60 to 69 years are also somewhat overrepresented in the sample. The age groups most underrepresented are the middle aged (40-59 years).

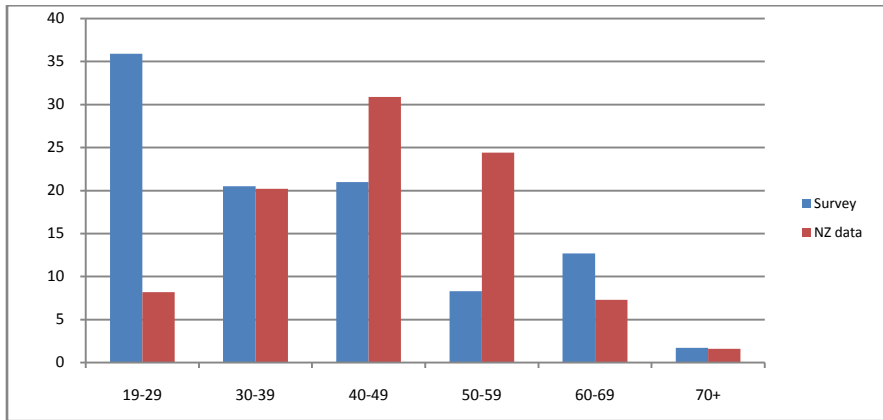


Figure 1: Age of survey respondents compared to Chinese visitors to New Zealand (Ministry of Tourism, 2009)

The gender split of the sample is relatively even (males 48.1 %; females 51.9%), which means a slight over-representation of females who constituted 45 percent of all Chinese visitors in 2008 (Ministry of Tourism, 2009).

In terms of length of stay, respondents' visits to New Zealand were much longer than the national average (Figure 2). While 79 percent of all Chinese visitors to New Zealand stay one week or less, just over a quarter of this sample (28.2%) were in the country for one to seven days, with the largest proportion of the sample (37%) staying between one and two weeks and a further 19 percent staying between two and three weeks. Of the 16.1 percent of respondents who were staying for more than four weeks, five respondents (2.8%) were staying for almost a full year. Excluding these five respondents, the average length of stay for the sample was 13.3 days.

The respondents to this survey were fairly experienced travellers; a third of the sample (33.1%) had visited New Zealand before, compared with only 16 percent of all Chinese visitors to New Zealand (Ministry of Tourism, 2009).

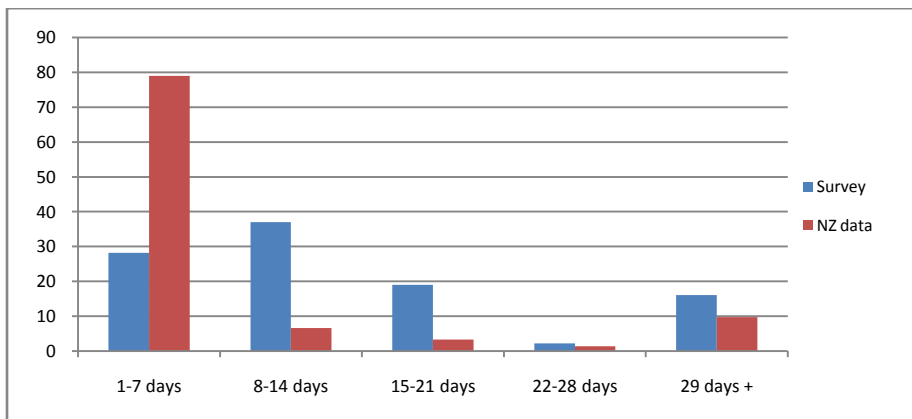


Figure 2: Length of stay of respondents compared to Chinese visitors to New Zealand (Ministry of Tourism, 2009)

Table 1 outlines the travel party of the Chinese tourists interviewed in the survey. Half of all respondents (53.6%) were travelling with family members or their spouse, with most of the remainder travelling with friends (42.0%). A very small proportion of respondents were either travelling alone (2.8%) or with business associates (1.7%).

Table 1: Travel party

| | Freq | % |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Travelling alone | 5 | 2.8 |
| Travelling with family/spouse | 97 | 53.6 |
| Travelling with friends | 76 | 42.0 |
| Travelling with business associates | 3 | 1.7 |
| TOTAL | 181 | 100 |

More than half the sample reported that they were travelling independently (55.6%) rather than as part of an organised group (44.4%; Table 2). The proportion of respondents travelling independently is much higher than amongst this market as a whole, where approximately 71% of the total market is travelling in an organised group (Ministry of Tourism, 2009)

Table 2: Travel type

| | Freq | % |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Travelling as part of organised group | 80 | 44.4 |
| Travelling independently (FIT) | 100 | 55.6 |
| TOTAL | 180 | 100 |

Some interesting differences are apparent when the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents travelling independently (FIT) are compared with those respondents travelling in an organised group (Figures 3 and 4). While 86.3 percent of those on an organised tour were visiting New Zealand for two weeks or less, only half of those respondents travelling independently were in the country for 14 days or less, with a 21 percent staying for four weeks or more.

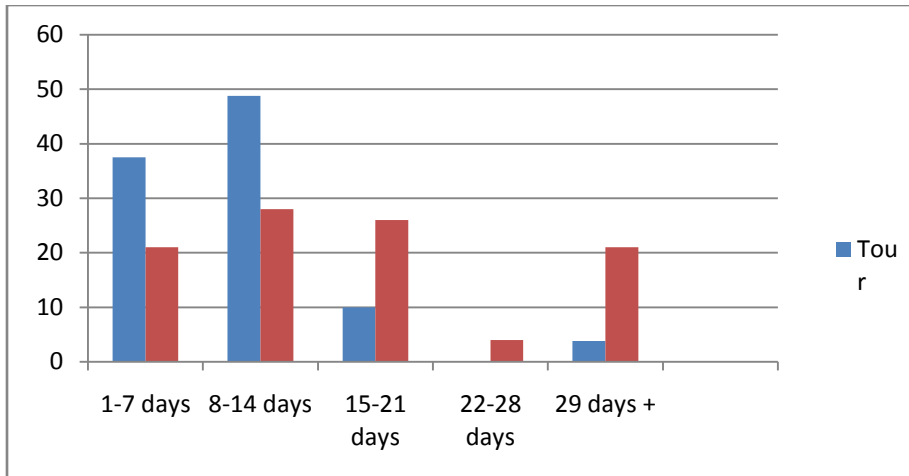


Figure 3: Length of stay of respondents compared by trip type

Similarly there were marked differences in the age distribution of those on organised tours versus independent travellers, with those on organised tours generally being the older visitors. Three-quarters (76.9%) of those under 30 years of age were travelling independently. The age groups most likely to be travelling on organised tours were aged 40-49 years (65.8%) and 60-69 years (63.6%).

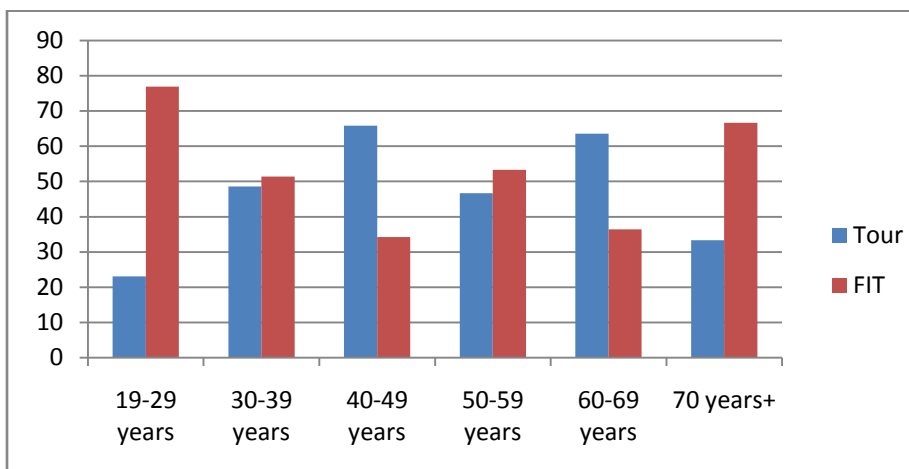


Figure 4: Trip type by age groups

Respondents were presented with a list of 32 destinations and asked which of the places they had visited on their trip to New Zealand, with a visit defined as a stay in the place for an hour or more. The top 20 responses are listed in Table 3. Given the location of the survey in Queenstown, it is not surprising that most of the top ten destinations are in the South Island, the exceptions being Auckland and Rotorua. It is interesting to note that of the destinations listed, 13 out of the 14 lowest-ranked destinations were national parks. Chinese tourists *did* visit national parks when they visited some of New Zealand's most iconic attractions, but it seems they may not have been aware of the national park status of the location. For example while 40.9% of the Chinese tourists stated they had visited Fiordland National Park (location of Milford Sound, which over half of the respondents said they had visited), less than one percent mentioned that they had visited Westland National Park (location of the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers).

Table 3: Destinations in New Zealand visited

| | Freq | % |
|----------------------------|------|-------|
| Queenstown | 181 | 100.0 |
| Christchurch | 173 | 95.6 |
| Auckland | 160 | 88.4 |
| Rotorua | 109 | 60.2 |
| Franz Josef or Fox Glacier | 92 | 50.8 |
| Milford Sound | 91 | 50.3 |
| Lake Tekapo | 77 | 42.5 |
| Fiordland National Park | 74 | 40.9 |
| Dunedin | 63 | 34.8 |
| Hanmer Springs | 63 | 34.8 |
| Mt Cook | 62 | 34.3 |
| Wellington | 57 | 31.5 |
| Kaikoura | 55 | 30.4 |
| Akaroa | 50 | 27.6 |
| Lake Wanaka | 46 | 25.4 |
| Lake Taupo | 33 | 18.2 |
| Waikato | 25 | 13.8 |
| Greymouth | 12 | 6.6 |
| Arthurs Pass National Park | 6 | 3.3 |
| Hawkes Bay | 6 | 3.3 |

In terms of activities engaged in during their visit, over 80 percent of respondents stated that they had viewed natural landscapes, shopped, visited a museum, taken a scenic boat cruise and learned about Māori culture (Table 4). Learning the stories behind nature was an activity reported by just over half of all respondents (54.1%), while nature-based adventure activities, such as hiking, mountain biking, horse trekking and bungee jumping, generally ranked much lower.

Table 4: Activities engaged in while in New Zealand

| | Freq | % |
|--|------|------|
| Viewing natural landscapes | 178 | 98.3 |
| Shopping | 171 | 94.5 |
| Visiting museum | 161 | 89.0 |
| Scenic boat cruise | 156 | 86.2 |
| Learning about Māori culture | 150 | 82.9 |
| Learning stories behind nature | 98 | 54.1 |
| Visiting historical sites | 91 | 50.3 |
| White water rafting | 67 | 37.0 |
| Traditional Māori feast | 67 | 37.0 |
| Viewing dolphins or whales | 62 | 34.3 |
| Hiking | 33 | 18.2 |
| Horse trekking | 30 | 16.6 |
| Bungee Jumping | 23 | 12.7 |
| Mountain biking | 18 | 9.9 |
| Learning facts about native plants and birds | 16 | 8.8 |

Motivations, expectations and satisfaction

In order to understand the destination attributes that brought these visitors to New Zealand, respondents were asked to rank how important a number of attributes in New Zealand were to their reason to visit on a scale where 1 was 'not important at all' and 7 was 'very important' (see Figure 5). The two most important reasons for Chinese travelling to New Zealand are 'natural scenery' (6.52) and 'New Zealand's clean and green image' (6.44); these responses are clearly ahead of any other reasons. The 'stories behind nature' (4.99), 'wildlife' (4.69) and 'Māori culture' were the only other responses to have a mean over 4 (neutral), with adventure sport (2.62) and Chinese heritage (2.6) the lowest rated reason for travelling to New Zealand.

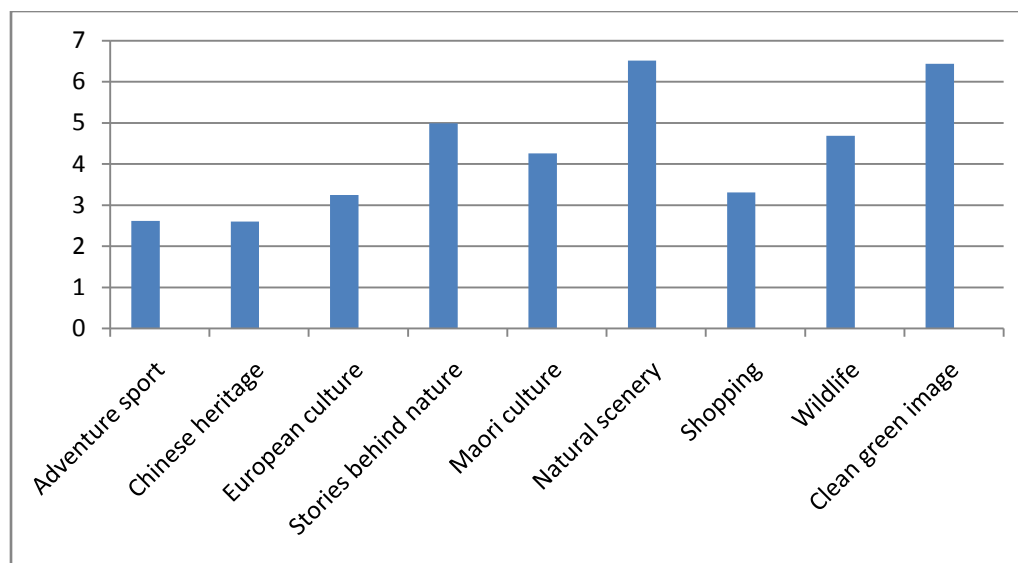


Figure 5: Reasons for visiting New Zealand

The Chinese tourists were asked what they expected to experience during their time in New Zealand, and were asked to rank a number of potential experiences on a scale of 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”. Expectation generally relates to previous knowledge or marketing and promotion of a place, however expectations can change based on actual travel experiences. For this reason respondents were asked about the importance of certain aspects of this trip to them, reflecting actual experience, rather than prior expectation, and asked to rate these on a scale of 1 ‘not important at all’ to 7 ‘very important’. Respondents were asked also how satisfied they had been with these same aspects of their experience on a scale where 1 was ‘very dissatisfied’ and 7 was ‘very satisfied’. These results are presented in Table 5.

‘Viewing New Zealand’s nature’ was clearly the most expected aspect of their trip to New Zealand, also recording the highest importance and satisfaction levels. Interestingly, ‘learning the stories behind New Zealand’s landscape’ was the second highest expectation, and became more important during their trip, although satisfaction with this aspect of their experience was particularly low; the only satisfaction level rating lower was ‘learning about the history and stories of New Zealand wildlife’. By comparison, the lowest expectations of these Chinese tourists’ trip to New Zealand related to Māori culture – ‘Learning about New Zealand Māori history and culture’ (mean 3.23) and ‘experiencing New Zealand Māori cultural practices’ (mean 3.10) were somewhat unexpected of the trip, but grew in importance during the trip and the tourists reported relatively high satisfaction ratings.

Table 5: Comparison between expectation, importance and satisfaction with activities

| | Expectation mean | Importance mean | Satisfaction mean | Gap score ((S-E)*I) |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Learn about New Zealand Māori history and culture | 3.23 | 4.42 | 5.13 | +8.40 |
| Experience New Zealand Māori cultural practices | 3.10 | 4.33 | 5.02 | +8.31 |
| View wildlife in its natural habitat | 4.10 | 4.89 | 4.87 | +3.77 |

| | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|-------|
| Viewing New Zealand's nature | 6.57 | 6.67 | 6.56 | -0.07 |
| Learn about history and stories of New Zealand wildlife | 4.28 | 5.01 | 4.50 | +1.10 |
| Learn stories behind New Zealand's landscape | 5.20 | 5.96 | 4.81 | -2.32 |
| Learn about New Zealand European history and culture | 3.48 | 3.82 | 5.17 | +6.46 |
| Experience New Zealand European cultural practices | 3.49 | 3.83 | 5.18 | +6.47 |

Gap analysis is a tool that can help compare tourism products in terms of the actual performance and its potential performance. It is used in this study to analyse the gap between the expectation and importance of eight attributes and respondents' perceptions of the performance of each. This analysis reveals that the two measures of Māori culture had the most positive gap score, followed by the two measures of learning about and experiencing New Zealand European history and culture. The only gap score which was clearly negative, suggesting expectations have not been met, relates to the highly important attribute 'learning stories behind New Zealand's landscape'.

The difference between expectation, importance and satisfaction is revealed graphically in Figure 6, where '1' on each measure is the most negative response, and '7' is the most positive response. This figure reviews high expectation and even higher importance ratings, but much more moderate responses on satisfaction. By comparison on the attributes 'Learn about Māori history and culture' (Figure 7) and 'Experience New Zealand Māori cultural practices' (Figure 8) expectations are generally low, while importance is moderate and satisfaction high.

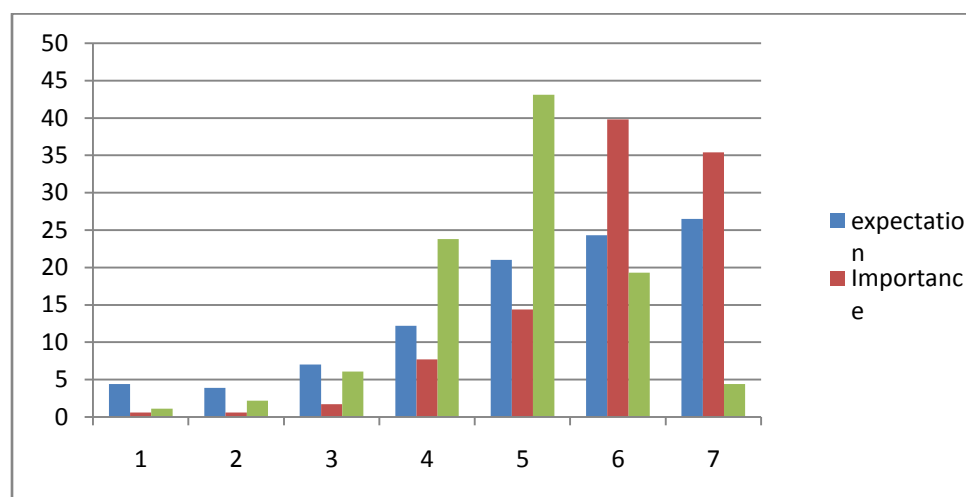


Figure 6: Learning stories behind New Zealand's landscapes

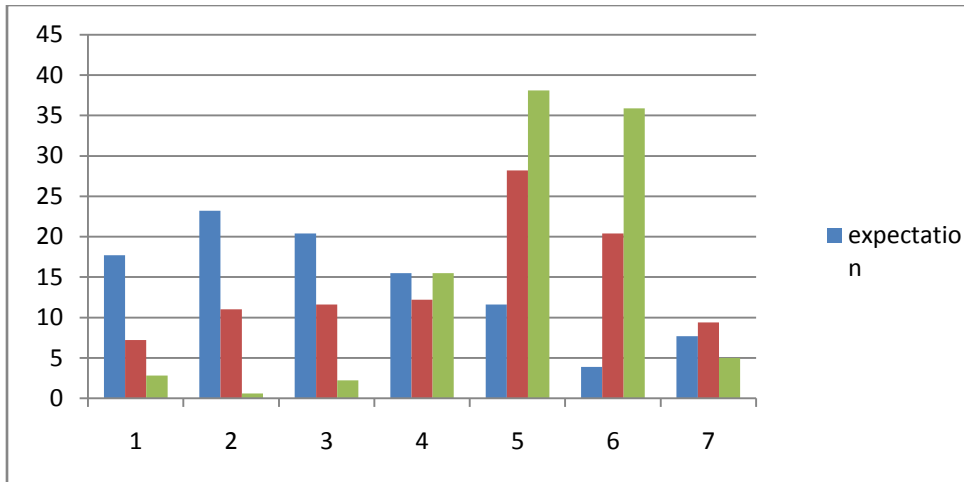


Figure 7: Learning about Māori history and culture

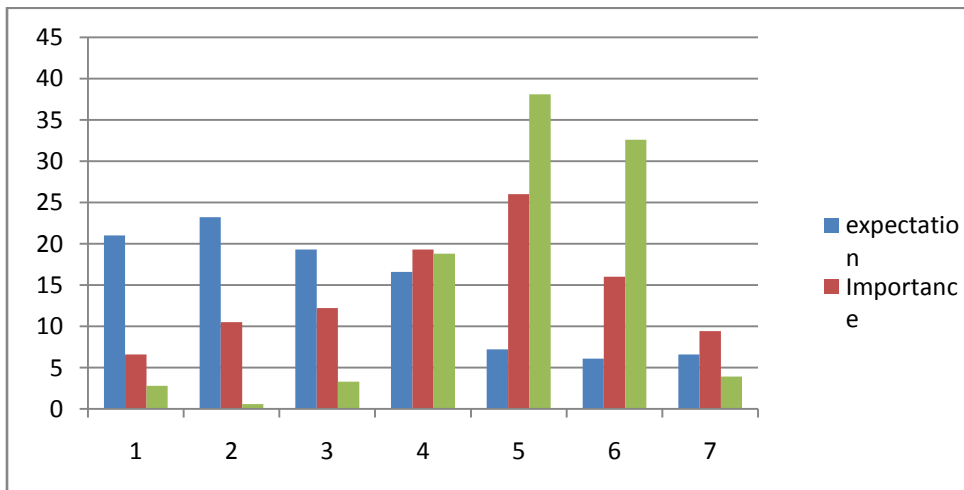


Figure 8: Experiencing New Zealand Māori cultural practices

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research support previous studies which suggest that the main reasons for Chinese travelling to New Zealand are the destination’s natural scenery and clean, green image (Chan, 2009; Cone, 2005; Ryan & Mo, 2001). This reflects the motivations of most of the country’s international visitors, 90 percent of whom chose New Zealand as a holiday destination due the natural landscape and scenery (Colmar Brunton, 2003).

In terms of their New Zealand experience, it seems that, generally, these Chinese visitors were very satisfied with their experience of the natural scenery, and viewing natural landscapes constituted an important element of their experiences; virtually all respondents stating they had viewed natural landscapes during their trip and 86 percent reporting they had taken a scenic boat trip. Given their desire to view natural scenery, it is interesting to note that the top four destinations visited were urban centres and, apart from visits to New Zealand’s iconic sites such as Aoraki/Mt Cook and Milford Sound, there was little visitation to national parks around the country.

New Zealand’s culture and history is not reported as an important reason for visiting the country amongst this sample, in contrast to previous studies (Cone, 2005; Ryan & Mo, 2001). ‘Māori culture’ ranked

higher than ‘European culture’ as a reason for visiting, but was still relatively unimportant, and neither type of cultural experience was an expected outcome for these tourists. Having said this, it is clear that, during their trip to New Zealand, experiencing and learning about both Māori and European culture grew in importance, with a museum visit and learning about Māori culture being experienced by over 80 percent of respondents. Furthermore, satisfaction levels with cultural experiences were higher than for all other experiences apart from viewing natural scenery. This reflects the fact that satisfaction can be often based on positive unexpected outcomes, as much as expectations (Bowen & Clarke, 2002). These findings suggest that, perhaps, these Chinese tourists have little knowledge about the culture of New Zealand before visiting; a finding reported elsewhere (Mohsin, 2008). Given their obvious satisfaction with this aspect of their visit, more publicity and promotion of the history and culture of New Zealand, both European and Māori, by Tourism New Zealand and tour operators seems warranted.

One aspect that has not been studied in relation to Chinese tourists’ experience of New Zealand in the past is the degree to which New Zealand’s natural landscapes are connected to the culture of the place, and in particular the stories, histories, myths and legends. As stated above, an important element of common Chinese knowledge is the connection between nature and culture in Chinese philosophy, and the sense that landscape without culture is incomplete (Li, 2008). While these Chinese visitors express high levels of satisfaction with their experiences of viewing natural scenery, and seem satisfied with their experiences of New Zealand European and Māori culture, the tourist product they are being offered may lack a *connection* between the ‘nature’ they are experiencing and the ‘culture’ they expect. This is evident in these respondents’ evaluations revealing generally low levels of satisfaction for ‘learning the stories behind New Zealand’s landscape’ – ranked by respondents as the third highest reason for choosing New Zealand as a tourist destination and second highest for expectation of what they would experience during their trip. Only about half of respondents (54.1%) reported that they were able to learn ‘the stories behind New Zealand’s landscape’, and this experience scored one of the lowest levels of satisfaction – the only category rating lower was ‘learning stories about wildlife’. This deficiency in clearly imparting the ‘stories behind nature’ (landscape and wildlife) appears to offer an important opportunity for the New Zealand tourism industry.

The opportunity to provide deeper connections between nature and culture must also be acknowledged by New Zealand’s Department of Conservation (DOC). In the past, DOC, as the formal steward of more than 30 percent of New Zealand’s terrestrial area, and responsible for the management and administration of most natural attractions (including New Zealand’s 14 national parks), has favoured natural heritage interpretation emphasising geological and ecological processes (Molloy, 1993). Without a more obvious cultural dimension, such emphases may not be attractive to, or relevant for, the Chinese tourist gaze. Active engagement with the ‘culture-*scape*’ of these natural resource areas through interpretation, and more publicity about the nature-culture interaction, may add greater appeal for this market. While nature and natural areas remain strong attractions for visitors, there is growing recognition of the need to diversify New Zealand’s tourism product beyond the ‘clean green’ image to further realise the potential of cultural tourism.

The New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 highlights scope for growth of Māori tourism opportunities, asserting that “Māori culture provides a distinctive element” which, combined with our natural attractions, “gives New Zealand its unique position as a tourist destination” (Ministry of Tourism, 2007, p.20; McIntosh, 2004). A secondary motivator for 40 percent of international visitors to New Zealand is the desire to experience the culture and history of the country, with much of this interest focused on Māori cultural products (AC Neilson, 2002, cited in Wilson et al., 2006, p. 8). The current research suggests that more efforts to connect New Zealand’s culture and history – both Māori and Pakeha – to the natural landscape could strengthen the experience for Chinese visitors to the country. This could take the form of telling more stories about the human history of connection to the natural settings as well as embedding more of the Māori myths and legends to provide a ‘richer dimension to the experience’ of landscape (Wilson et al., 2006, p.65). Stakeholders in New Zealand’s tourism industry must identify

appropriate ways to engage meaningfully with Chinese visitors in order to maximise the benefits associated with an emergent tourist segment with considerable growth potential.

CONCLUSION

This research is based on a sample of Chinese tourists in Queenstown which is likely to differ, in a number of ways, from the wider Chinese visitor market in New Zealand. In summary, the sample reported here is made up of respondents who are younger, more likely to be travelling independently, and who spent longer in the country than is typical of the Chinese market as a whole. The extent to which these findings reflect the motivations and experiences of all Chinese visitors to New Zealand could be explored by undertaking a national survey of the market. Qualitative research with Chinese visitors might also provide a more comprehensive understanding of gaps in the existing New Zealand tourist product and further opportunities to provide a cultural framing of nature for this market.

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