Shanshui Poetry and Painting in Forming Outbound Tourists’ Perception of Destination Personality: A Netnographic Examination

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Abstract. Classical poetry and landscape painting are important traditional Chinese cultural associations and carriers of Chinese shanshui culture. This study reports the findings derived from examining their roles in forming the perceived destination personality held by Chinese tourists to Hokkaido. Based on a content and thematic analysis of tourists written accounts posted on online travel sharing community, the research reveals that classical poems and landscape painting take the roles of expressive vehicle of viewed scenery and lyric means to express tourists’ emotion and thought. They also exhibit Chinese tourists’ aesthetic interest in the feminine destination attributes. Findings of this research offer implications to destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to promote their Chinese marketing strategy through crafting culture-specific marketing messages and properly communicating with its target market.

Introduction

The cultural influence exerting on tourists behavior and attitude has been intensively argued [1] and taken as a parameters to shape perceive destination personality [2]. Tourist aesthetic judgment is influenced by religious beliefs, cultural background and other normative values [3]. The cultural variation is one of the main causes of the differences in individuals' attitudes and behaviors [4]. The preceding statements imply that tourists with different culture contexts may hold diverse aesthetic assessment toward the same destination and sequentially present culture-specific evaluation toward destination personality.

Mainland China progressively becomes the major outbound tourism generating region in recent years [5]. Regarding Chinese outbound tourism studies, psychology of Chinese travelers and marketing strategies have been extensively studied [6]. Meanwhile, understanding the influence of Chinese unique cultural reality on its outbound tourists’ behavior remains a research lacuna [7]. It calls for a nuanced investigation into the influence of Chinese epistemology and cultural value on what Chinese tourist would gaze and how to gaze in exotic places.

Literature Review

Destination Personality

Destination personality represents the human characteristics that are ascribed to a destination [8]. It provides a viable metaphor for building destination brands and understanding tourists' perceptions about the destination [9]. Being faced with the tough competition of tourism market, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are more effortful to embrace branding initiatives, which could make the destination more likely to be chosen as the final decision by more visitors and investors [10]. The existing literature provides limited explanation of the cultural heterogeneity in forming destination personality perception. It is also evident that the majority of researchers on this topic have a substantial preference for structured methodologies and fail to capture the unique components contained in this construct [11].
**Shanshui Poem and Painting**

Rivers and mountains (Shanshui) is what ancient Chinese refer to as the terminology for landscape. As argued by Confucius, *The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in hills. The wise are active; the virtuous are tranquil. The wise are joyful; the virtuous are long-lived.* Travel has long history in China and been accepted as a recreational opportunities and outlet of mental distress. Starting from the eastern Jin Dynasty, literati began to travel and recreate to discover nature’s beauty as well as poetizing and painting to extol the aesthetic appreciation of natural landscapes [12]. During this movement, the interest of loving Shanshui became the basic quality of scholarship. **Shanshui** paintings and poems are created to illustrate their judgment toward the aesthetic value of nature and rumination of philosophical beliefs about the relationship between human and nature.

In a long-term exposure to poeticized pedagogy, the scenic beauty outlined by poetries and depicted by **shanshui** painting stimulates the desire for on-site appreciation. Chinese tourists’ travel decision to the domestic tourism destination full of poem is regarded as an act of pilgrimage, or a validation of the poetic knowledge which they have received from childhood [13]. Classical poetry has been demonstrated to exert influence on Chinese tourists’ destination experience and on-site behavior [13].

**Chinese Aesthetics Thinking**

Through Chinese lens, there is no pure objective world, but always in association to the things that can be associated with them. Chinese prefer figurative or metaphorical thinking. Relational thinking is one of prominent features of Chinese aesthetic behavior. It gives tow indexes to the aesthetics features of Chinese society: 1) beauty is the emotional show of the concept and solely reflected by image; 2) aesthetic attitude hold by people is maintained in virtue of sensitive contemplation of image in nature.

From the perspective of Chinese sociology and history, the laurel of beauty is always awarded to female. This aesthetic principle was summarized by the theory of male gaze, in which masculine scripts were privileged. Female is regarded as the criterion of scenery, as such, women are observed and become the spectacle in this perspective. For ancient China, the mythological figure of femininity is always emergent as a prominent aesthetic image. In tourism context, ancient Chinese literati generally alluded to feminine aesthetic image by nominating scenic mountains as “Goddess Peak”、“Fairy Peak” and others. Tourism is intrinsically a product of gendered societies, women and sexual imagery are utilized to manifest the exotic feature of a destination in tourism marketing competition [14]. The poetic feeling, that is Chinese idiomatic expressions to describe admirable landscape, is also related with the destination personality dimension of femininity [4].

**Research Method and Findings**

Netnography (online ethnography) is a comprehensive research methodology to analyze online data. As a multi-method. During the stage of choosing on-line community, some criterions were taken into consideration, such as high traffic, detailed data, between member interactions. Mafengwo website (http://www.mafengwo.cn) was selected as the platform to collecting samples. It features User Generated Content (UGC), big data about tourism and transaction platform of self-guided tour. This website is also a well-received and most frequently used travel social media site among Chinese travelers to release their travel literature. It has over 3 million active users per day, thus could provide abundant information, especially vast amounts of data for academic purpose. It ensures the facticity of the comments by its content release rules. Hence, the user generated content posted on this platform could be deemed as a reliable data source, and owns representativeness of Chinese tourists’ perspectives.
Table 1. Hokkaido’s personality traits: operationalization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Trait</th>
<th>Similar items</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>competence</td>
<td>optimistic, aggressive, reliable, sincere, open-minded, mature, confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excitement</td>
<td>exciting, ruggedness, adventurous, passionate, wild, cool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sincerity</td>
<td>considerable, thoughtful, moderate, down-to-earth, trustworthy, real, honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sophistication</td>
<td>glamorous, sophisticated, feminine, good-looking, glamorous, charming, smooth, upper-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ruggedness</td>
<td>outdoor, western, wild, rugged, tough, masculine, outdoorsy, hard-working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peacefulness</td>
<td>warm, easy, smooth, family-oriented, sentimental, playful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uniqueness</td>
<td>original, unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traditionalism</td>
<td>old, traditional, typical, small-town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sacredness</td>
<td>buddhist, solemn, sacrificial, religious, holy and pure, spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vibrancy</td>
<td>up-to-date, metropolitan, trendy, flourishing, bustling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>femininity</td>
<td>misty, elegant, brisk, poetical, shangrila, gentle, graceful, exquisite, artistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the collected written accounts using shanshui poetry and painting to describe tourists’ destination perception were subject to the examination of content analysis. The circumstances of poem and painting and the related perceived destination personality were unscrambled. In this process, as outlined in Table 1, the operationalization of personality traits constituted the criteria for categorizing the written accounts in accordance with these traits.

Three themes emerged regarding the explanation of specific poem or painting is quoted by tourists. The first circumstance when such citation happened is that they are employed as the expressive vehicle of viewed scenery. The second theme is related with the role of lyric means that poem and painting playing in exposing tourists’ emotional involvement on the destination. The third one demonstrates the aesthetic interest in the feminine attribute of destination. The following subsections would elaborate them in an interpretive way.

**Expressive Vehicle of On-site Encounter**

The accordance of the aura and feeling conveyed by Shanshui poetry and painting with encountered scenery formulates tourists’ poetic gaze and guides them to receive a particular dimension of destination personality. As demonstrated by Case#1 and Case#2, when the consonance between viewed scenery and artistic conception occurs, Chinese tourists involuntarily eulogize the spectacular scenery using the poetic language or compare it with the picturesque image as depicted in ancient painting.

Case#1 One day, I was driving my car along a path in Turumidai, rime was tall and straight, milky-white snow was falling. I suddenly got the epiphany for the poem 'As though a gust of spring wind swept past overnight, Bringing thousands upon thousands of pear trees into bloom'.

Case#2 When I was climbing the mountains located near sarubo, the wind blew fiercely along with heavy rain, the frightful sight as depicted by the poem 'The rising wind forebodes the coming storm'.

**Lyric Means to Express Emotion and Thought**

As recapitulated from literature review, tourism attraction through the prism of Chinese shanshui culture is not purely physical environment, but the carrier imbued with humanistic spirit and affective connotation. It implies that the underlying affective image of a destination is predefined by
the artistic mood of poem and painting. Although in some cases, the scenery doesn’t fit well with the objective landscape outlined by poems and paintings, a considerable portion of these instances cited classical poem or painting to express beholders’ aesthetic consumption or spiritual experience. This phenomenon is related with their perception about the qualities and temperaments of the destination attributes.

A representative case is the quotation of “The First Ode on the Red Cliff” in Case#3 and Case#4. It was composed by SuShi (1037-1101) in the style of " Fu" (a descriptive prose interspersed with verse) during his exile in HuangZhou. Being caught in political frustration and interior anguish, motivated by venting negative emotion, he abandoned himself to nature and found sustenance in mountains and rivers. This literary work documented his travelogues while sightseeing in the historical place, the Red Cliff and revealed his observation, appreciation and perfection in imagination. Chinese people have been impressed with its desolate and intense style, vast and broad-minded thoughts [15]. The views may be not in accordance with the field environment that Chinese tourists encounter with in Hokkaido, however, is in conjunction with the psychological feelings acquired from the expansively misty surroundings (Case#3), and outdoor star and lake (Case#4).

Case#3 When I arrived at Teshikagamachi, the mountain along with misty weather confronted me was akin to fairyland, I felt that ‘how light-hearted I was! I was beyond worldly cares, and, like a fairy, was taking flight to the sky’

Case#4 In the outdoor, seeing the stars and lake, I felt like having idle drifting on the ocean and my spirit was enmeshed into the sense of frailty just like I was drifting, as depicted in the following sentence: ‘Presently the moon rose above the eastern mountain, where it hung between the Dipper and the Cowherd, whilst the river, in a white mist, merged with the moonlit sky..... We row a small boat on the water....... The Red Cliff faces Xiakou in the west and Wuchang in the east and is embraced by mountains and waters...... We are as infinitesimal as a grain in the vast sea’

Aesthetic Interest in the Feminine Destination Attributes

The combination of imaginative thinking and aesthetic image of female is especially embodied in the traditional poetry, which is adept at employing the rhetorical device of metaphor and personification to delineate the approached landscape. The quotation in case#5 is derived from the universally praised poem 《Drinking at the Lake First in Sunny and then in Rainy Weather》. It epitomizes the natural grace and attractive verve of West Lake in JiangNan by comparing its scenery with XiShi, who is highly renowned for her beauty in ancient China. West Lake was impersonated by poet due to its landscape constituted by soft breeze, light drizzle, slight mist and weeping willow. The scenery is permeated with the atmosphere of elegance and briskness. The quotation in case#6 is derived from the poem, The Everlasting Regret. The cited sentence described Yang Concubine’ graceful gesture and elegant beauty, through putting her mournful expression into the comparison of pear blossoms wetted by spring rain. This finding echoes with previous findings that the ideal beauty of natural scenery in traditional aesthetics of Chinese tourists’ destination personality is always related with character of effeminacy [4].

Case#5 The elegant and unadorned scenery in Daisetsu-zan National Park reminded me of the classical poem: ‘West Lake may be compared to Beauty of the West, Whether she is richly adorned or plainly dressed’

Case#6 Here, I got the panoramic view of Sapporo, the scene in distance was covered with rain and mist, as depicted by the sentence: ‘Her jade-white face crisscrossed with tears in lonely world, Like a spray of pear blossoms in spring rain impearled.’

The quoted poetic sentences in case#7 and case#8 exhibited tourists’ aesthetic interest in the feminine destination attributes in another manner: they anthropomorphized the mountain and water as the facial features of graceful lady and identified the similarity of the natural beauty and the ethereal characteristics of pretty lady.

Case#7 The graceful mountain and water scenery of in Lake Akan was perfectly in accordance with the traditional poem: ' A stretch of rippling water is a beaming eye; the arched brows around
are mountains high. If you ask where the way-farer is bound, just see where beaming eyes and arched brow are found. The beautiful sentence arising in my mind was realized by the admirable view confronting me.

Case#8 I arrived at Furano in the spring, lavender flowers fluttered about in the warm wind. One afternoon while we were there at Funano Flower Land, a romantic drizzle came up. This moment echoed the gracious poetry of the butterfly lingers over the flower written by Li Qingzhao: 'The rain seems warm, The sunny breeze blows, The frozen ice is melting away. From the eye shaped leaves of the willow, From the cleeks of the mume blossoms, We perceive the heart of spring is awakening.'

To further substantiate the analysis, the software package Leximancer was used. This software generates a number of perceptual maps and Figure 1 indicates one thought to summarize the key components of the analysis. Extracting from this map, the landscape elements of "Mountain", "Snow", "Moon", "Lake" and "Mist" appear to be most evocative of tourists' quotation and related with tourists' reminiscence of literati' emotion, thought and behavior in the "past". "Mountain" "river" and "water" are associated together to crystallize Chinese tourists' appreciation of shanshui culture.

![Figure 1. Perceptual map from Leximancer analysis.](image)

**Conclusion**

From a netnographic examination of tourists’ online review, current study lucubrated with the roles of traditional poetry and painting in forming Chinese outbound tourists’ perception of destination personality. The results indicate that shanshui poetry and painting have been employed as the expressive vehicle of on-site behavior, the lyric means to express emotion and thought as well as the evidence demonstrating their aesthetic interest in the feminine destination attributes. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the perceptual map, the most frequent words are related with the natural landscape (mountain and water), which are usually described by positive adjectives. This finding indicates that major pull of second wave of Chinese outbound tourists is enjoying unspoiled natural environment and other tourism attributes that domestic tourism of China has lost during its process of industrialization [7].

This study also provides some implications for destination marketing. It was epitomized by self-congruence theory that congruence between a person and a brand (a destination in the field of tourism), influences this person’s attitudes and behavior. Specifically, the greater the match between destination personality and tourist’s self-concept, the more likely is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination, resulting in intention to return and word of mouth [16]. The findings from current research has demonstrated that the culture-specific configuration of destination is effective for destination marketing organization to promote their products and make
destination infiltrated into and accepted by a specific target market. It is suggested that destination personality should be elucidated as a multi-faceted and pluralistic concept, a closer look into the cultural value system and aesthetic preference of target markets is imperative before its prospective customers are approached.

References


