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# Identifying Causes for the Decline in International Arrivals to China—Perspective of Sustainable Inbound Tourism Development

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**Abstract:** Chinese inbound tourism growth peaked in 2012 and in following years, arrivals have exhibited a downward trend. Over the same time Chinese outbound tourism has increased significantly and by 2016 the number of Chinese outbound tourists (52.7 million) was nearly twice that of international arrivals to China (28.1 million) (CTA, 2018). The aim of this paper is to identify the determinants of international tourists visiting China based on destination attributes. For the purposes of this research, Australia was selected as a study site on the grounds that China has been a popular destination for Australian residents. This study examines a range of behavioral factors that may affect intentions to travel to China including: past travel experience to China; perceptions of overseas destination attributes; beliefs in China's ability to satisfy the needs and constraints that appear to prevent Australian residents from traveling to China; and tourists' intentions to visit or revisit. Data collected from Australian residents on aspects of travel to China included perceptions, beliefs, constraints, information sources, and past experience. The research shows that past experience was positively associated with intention to visit or revisit. Five constraint factors were identified. Based on these findings, the study discusses practical implications for management and government officials needed to boost Chinese inbound tourism.

**Keywords:** Chinese inbound tourism; Australia; perception and beliefs; constraints; sustainable development

## 1. Introduction

There are a growing number of studies that explore the determinants of international tourism at a national level [1], however in the case of China there are relatively few studies into the factors that determine inbound tourism. [2,3] This is surprising given that the Chinese inbound tourism market had grown rapidly from 1.8 million in 1978 when the "open-up" policy commenced, to 58 million in 2012. In 2013 the rate of growth in inbound visitors began to fall and by 2016 had declined to 28.1 million. Chinese outbound tourism has, however, continued to grow rapidly, rising from 1.12 million in 1992 to 122 million in 2016. The difference between inbound and outbound tourism has created a significant tourism deficit that amounted to 68.4 million by 2016 [4]. As part of any strategy to reduce the size of the tourism deficit there is a need to develop a more detailed understanding of the factors that attract, or in some cases fail to attract, international visitors.

The aim of this paper is to identify factors that may be inhibiting further growth of inbound travel to China. Australia was selected as a case study on the basis that China has been a popular destination for Australian residents. Between 2012 and 2014, the number of Australian visitors to China declined from 1.18 million to 0.91 million while China's ranking as a preferred outbound destination for Australians declined from 5th in 2008 to 10th in 2014 [5].

Psychology and travel behavior have been used widely to study tourist travel preferences. As a first step, this paper examined the level of satisfaction with tourists' past travel experience to China based on destination attributes to develop an understanding of the relationship between past travel experience and intention to revisit. The samples of respondents were divided into two groups, based on those who had visited China and those who had not. We then analyzed tourists' perceptions and beliefs about China as a tourism destination to identify the gap between what tourists perceived and what they believed. Furthermore, the research investigated constraint factors that appeared to be preventing Australian residents travelling to China. Finally, the paper surveyed information sources that Australian residents used for their travel decision-making to learn more about how the different information sources may affect tourists' perceptions.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

### *2.1. Destination Attributes*

Tourists' decision-making processes for visiting a destination have been a focal point for tourism researchers and industry practitioners. Extensive studies have been undertaken to identify the key factors that trigger tourists' decision-making and the determinants that influence this process. Because of the intangible nature of tourism destinations, tourists generally evaluate destinations using multiple attributes. This may include attributes such as shopping, heritage, landscape, activities, safety issues, reputation and cost [6]. Any given trip undertaken by a tourist includes numerous factors, many of which can be attributed to the organizations and agencies that influence the journey to and from the destination and within the destination. Stylos [7] described a destination as "an area with different natural attributes, features, or attractions that appeal to non-local visitors—that is, tourists or excursionists". Collectively, these attributes contribute to tourists' experiences during their trips. Satisfaction with these destination attributes effects the level of tourists' enjoyment, their intention to undertake a repeat visit, and their intention to give positive recommendations.

From a destination perspective, understanding how tourists experience the services they encounter during a holiday experience is important for understanding how attitudes towards the destination are formed and change over time [8]. Sparks et al. [9] described attitude as an individual's positive or negative feelings (evaluation) about a target object. Attitude is the evaluation of key destination attributes (expectancy-value perspective), which will, in turn, influence intentions to engage in a particular type of tourism activity. The evaluation of destination attributes may also effect intended behavior [10]. When converted into travel behaviors, tourists' evaluation of a destination will affect their intentions to visit or revisit. Safety, beautiful scenery, well-equipped tourism facilities, different cultural and historical resources, and good weather were taken as the five most important destination attributes [9]. In terms of destination attributes, this research seeks to understand how the perception of Australian residents may shape the beliefs they hold towards China. It is argued that individuals may not necessarily believe in the existence of the object they perceive, that is, there is a gap between what is perceived and what is believed. In the case of Australian residents, what they believed about China may differ from what they perceive about China.

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Four groups of Australian residents have different perceptions about overseas destination attributes.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *Four groups of Australian residents have different beliefs about the ability of China to satisfy their perceptions regarding destination attributes.*

### *2.2. Past Travel Experience*

Researchers [11–13] have stated that theories of human behavior could predict an individual's behavioral intentions and actual actions based on past relevant behaviors. A number of studies have supported the view that past travel experiences positively influence visitors' revisit intentions [14,15], and found that past travel experiences increased the likelihood of revisiting. The relationship between tourist satisfaction [16–18] and revisit intentions has been frequently discussed in the literature. Past research has also suggested that satisfied visitors tend to recommend the destination to other people [19,20], indicating that satisfied visitors hold positive attitudes towards a destination.

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 3.** *For Australian visitors, past travel experiences in China have a positive influence on their intention to visit or revisit.*

### *2.3. Travel Constraints*

Travel constraints, or barriers, are an important consideration in why tourists chose, or do not chose, a specific destination. Theoretical frameworks to explain travel constraints emerged in the 1980s [21,22]. According to the literature, travel constraints, as discussed by Kerstetter, Yen, and Yarnal [23], refer to the factors that keep people from initiating or continuing to travel. Tourists who are unable to maintain or increase the frequency of their travel may develop negative views on the quality of travel by those constraints [24]. In general, travel barriers may be categorized into three dimensions: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural constraints [10]. Intrapersonal constraints are associated with an individual's psychological state and their personal interests, such as sickness and time. Interpersonal constraints are related to an individual's interactions with others (e.g., friends' and families' negative opinions). Structural constraints are classified as external factors, such as economic barriers, availability of time, access, and opportunity. Collectively, these may affect an individual's ability to achieve their intentions of visiting a particular country [25]. Analysis of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints suggest the existence of rules that have been adopted by many researchers [26–28]. Included in these findings were conclusions that money and time were more important than other constraints. In terms of predicting intentions to travel, intrapersonal constraints and interpersonal constraints were two of the most influential elements based on the theory of planned behavior models.

Past research focused on identifying constraints associated with commencing, maintaining, and increasing involvement in particular pursuits [29], as well as reasons for dropping out of certain activities [30,31], compared the price competitiveness of 19 destinations, including Australia and China, finding that for Australian tourists, China is ranked low as a long-haul destination, although is quite competitive in terms of goods and services they purchased.

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 4.** *Intrapersonal constraints have more impact on Australian residents than interpersonal constraints and structural constraints.*

### *2.4. Extended Theory of Planned Behavior*

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) provides a useful framework for understanding tourists' intended and actual behaviors [32]. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) [33] has also been used to

assist in understanding and predicting social behavior. Ajzen [32,34] extended the TRA model by adding perceived behavioral control (PBC). TPB holds that human behavior is the result of deliberate plans, which may explain how people change their behavior patterns. TPB can also be used to predicate human behavior and explain tourists' behavioral intentions [35]. In the 185 studies investigated by Armitage and Conner [36], TPB explained 39% of behavior intention and 27% of behavior variance, and is often used in the study of tourist behavior. In TPB, attitude towards a behavior (AT) is a determinant factor of behavioral intentions (BI). TPB assumes that behavioral intentions explain the motivation for particular behaviors. It was found that there was a significant positive correlation between tourists' attitudes and tourists' behavioral intentions. TPB suggests that tourists' visits start with three major components: travel experience, post trip evaluation, and revisit intention. Drawing upon the TPB model, this research was undertaken in Australia and investigated potential tourists' perceptions and beliefs in terms of destination attributes, as well as constraints on international travel to China.

### *2.5. Information Sources*

The study also surveyed the sources of information used by Australian residents when considering China as a possible travel destination. Previous research has determined that various sources of information play a role in forming destination image [37–39]. Information sources are likely to include organic (self-experience or non-commercial sources) and induced (advertiser message derived) components [9]. Beverley and Grace [9] found that information sources, such as television programs, friends, magazines, travel books and personal experience, are highly ranked by tourists. The TPB model has been applied in this study to identify information sources that could influence Australian residents' travel decisions about China.

Lang and O'Leary [40] stated that "benefit pursued, activity participation and destination preference" are the most important traveler information categories. Therefore, the combined use of destination attributes, the perceived importance of tourist behavior and the levels of satisfaction with travel experience were used to provide a comprehensive overview of Australian tourists' behavior.

## 3. Methodology

### *Research Method*

A cross-sectional sample survey was used to test Australian residents' overseas perceptions and beliefs about Mainland China and included items designed to identity constraints, past experience, satisfaction level, perceived image and intention to visit. Survey items were based on past research, including the measurement of destination attributes [41], beliefs about travel destination [42], constraints and travel intention [5,9], and past experience and intention of visit [43].

The survey had three sections: Section 1 requested respondents provide a range of demographic data. Section 2 included three subsections and was aimed at respondents who had not previously visited mainland China. Section 2 (i) contained a series of questions about the attributes that respondents looked for in overseas destinations. Survey items were drawn from previous research studies, including Echtner and Ritchie [44], Beeri and Martin [45], and Baloglu and Brinberg [46]. Responses were measured by using a 5-point Likert Scale with scores ranging from "not at all important (1)" to "very important (5)'. Section 2 (ii) asked respondents if they thought China had similar attributes to those that they desired when travelling to a new destination. Section 2 (iii) asked respondents a series of items that represented constraints they believed may affect their decisions about travel to China.

Part 3 of the survey was designed to collect data from respondents who had previously travelled to mainland China. Survey items included number of previous visits and satisfaction levels. Satisfaction items were drawn from previous research [47,48]. Eleven satisfaction attributes were identified and included in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction level on

a scale from "not satisfactory (1)" to "highly satisfactory (7)". Respondents were then requested to indicate their level of satisfaction using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "very unsatisfied (1)" to "highly satisfied (5)". Finally, respondents were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would recommend mainland China as a destination to other people.

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed at sites in Brisbane, Cairns, and Townsville between July and September 2015. A total of 500 surveys were distributed through a random street intercept method by five trained interviewers. A further 1000 surveys were placed in household mailboxes. A total of 453 street intercept and 249 mail box surveys were collected. Of these, 319 street intercepts and 181 mail out surveys were able to be used, giving an overall response rate of 33.3%.

## 4. Results

*Demographic Characteristics Description*

Descriptive statistics of the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS22.0 software. As shown in Table 1, 40.6% of respondents were female. They were predominately young, with 56.4% under 35 years old. In terms of education, 28.4% of respondents reported held a bachelor's degree or a qualification from a secondary or vocational college (38.2%), and 22.2% of respondents reported yearly earnings of between AU$32,000–69,000. In terms of occupation, 39% of respondents were students, 18.2% were professionals, 5.4% worked in the service sector, and 4.4% indicated office or clerical roles. Of the respondents who had visited China, 82.2% were independent travelers.

**Table 1.** Respondents' Demographic Profiles (N = 500).

| | Content | N | Portion (%) | | Content | N | Portion (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 203 | 40.6 | Occupation | Self-employed | 41 | 8.2 |
| | Female | 297 | 59.4 | | Professional | 91 | 18.2 |
| Age | Below 18 | 30 | 6.0 | | Retail | 25 | 5.0 |
| | 19–25 | 192 | 38.4 | | Domestic duties | 10 | 2.0 |
| | 26–35 | 90 | 18.0 | | Management | 7 | 1.4 |
| | 36–45 | 62 | 12.4 | | Office or Clerical | 22 | 4.4 |
| | 46–55 | 50 | 10.0 | | Public service | 21 | 4.2 |
| | 56–65 | 36 | 7.2 | | Manual or Factory worker | 15 | 3.0 |
| | Above 65 | 40 | 8.0 | | Service industry | 27 | 5.4 |
| Marital Status | Single | 287 | 57.4 | | Trade person | 17 | 3.4 |
| | Married | 148 | 29.6 | | Student | 195 | 39.0 |
| | Others | 65 | 13.0 | | Retired | 29 | 5.8 |
| Type of Trip | Follow a tour group | 89 | 17.8 | Annual Income | AU$31,000 and under | 291 | 58.2 |
| | Independent traveler | 411 | 82.2 | | AU$32,000–69,000 | 111 | 22.2 |
| Favorite Travel Party | Alone | 74 | 14.8 | | AU$70,000–99,000 | 61 | 12.2 |
| | Partner/spouse | 138 | 27.6 | | AU$100,000 plus | 37 | 7.4 |
| | Strangers from blog | 4 | 0.8 | Preferred Destination (top 5) | USA | 124 | 24.8 |
| | Friends | 145 | 29.0 | | New Zealand | 116 | 23.2 |
| | Family with children | 109 | 21.8 | | UK | 70 | 14.0 |
| | With relatives | 27 | 5.4 | | Japan | 68 | 13.6 |
| | Club | 3 | 0.6 | | China | 33 | 6.6 |
| Original Location | Brisbane | 185 | 37.0 | Educational Level | Secondary | 191 | 38.2 |
| | Townsville | 111 | 22.2 | | Trade/TAFE | 83 | 16.6 |
| | Cairns | 204 | 40.8 | | Bachelor | 142 | 28.4 |
| | **(N = 500)** | | | | Graduate School | 84 | 16.8 |

Respondents were divided into two groups: Group 1 (G1) refers to respondents who have not been to China, while Group 2 (G2) refers to respondents who have previously visited China (Table 2). Respondents who have previously visited China and intended to visit China in the next 5 years were marked as G1-1(positive), while the remainder were classified as G1-2(negative). Respondents who had never visited China but intend to visit in the next 5 years were classified as G2-1 (positive), with the remainder classed as G2-2 (negative). Only 105 respondents had previously visited China. Of the 395 respondents who had never been to China, 156 reported that they planned to visit China in the next 5 years (40%). Of the respondents who had been to China previously (80/105), 76% felt positively about revisiting China (G2-1). The results indicated that the recommendation and satisfaction level for Group 2-1 (positive) and Group 2-2 (negative) was 95% and 68% and 5.10 and 4.31, respectively. Most respondents had a high level of satisfaction and positive recommendation about visiting China. However, as Table 2 illustrates, there is a significant difference in the mean value of attitude to China's image between G1 (4.64) and G2 (6.38). Results indicate that past experience has a positive influence on intention for further visits. Respondents who had previously visited China (G2) had a better image perception about China than respondents who have never been to China (G1).

**Table 2.** Differences between the four Respondent Groups.

| Sample | No. | Willingness of Visit or Revisit [1] | | | Mean of Attitude to China [2] | Recommendation to the others | Mean of Overall Satisfaction of Last Visit [2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Segment | No. | Percentage | | | |
| Never Been (G1) | 395 | Positive (G1-1) | 156 | 40% | 3.25 | – | – |
| | | Negative (G1-2) | 239 | 60% | | – | – |
| Have Been (G2) | 105 | Positive (G2-1) | 80 | 76% | 4.47 | 95% (76/80) | 5.10 |
| | | Negative (G2-2) | 25 | 24% | | 68% (17/25) | 4.31 |

Note: [1] Willingness of visit or revisit refers in the next 5 years; [2] Seven-point scale was used for attitude and overall satisfaction.

Table 3 compares satisfaction between respondents visiting China before 2012 and after 2012. The number of Australian visitors to China began to decline in 2012. The mean values of overall satisfaction between the two groups were 3.57 and 3.46, showing a slight decrease after 2012. In respect to the satisfaction mean score for 11 destinations attribute items, only the score for "shopping and retail" improved after 2012.

**Table 3.** Satisfaction of Past Travel Experience Based on Destination Attributes Before and After 2012.

| Sample | Time | No. | Mean of Overall Satisfaction | Destination Attribute Satisfaction | Mean | Destination Attribute Satisfaction | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Have been to China (G2) | Before 2012 | 45 | 3.57 | Courteous and friendly staff | 3.69 | Public transport | 3.67 |
| | | | | Accommodation value for money | 3.84 | Visit information | 3.31 |
| | | | | Tours gave value for money | 3.84 | Feel safe and secure | 3.87 |
| | | | | Attractions offered value for money | 3.76 | Food | 3.82 |
| | | | | Standard of restaurants | 3.71 | Environment (cleanness, air, etc.) | 2.69 |
| | | | | Shopping and retail | 3.4 | | |

**Table 3.** *Cont.*

| Sample | Time | No. | Mean of Overall Satisfaction | Destination Attribute Satisfaction | Mean | Destination Attribute Satisfaction | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | After 2012 | 60 | 3.46 | Courteous and friendly staff | 3.62 | Public transport | 3.3 |
| | | | | Accommodation value for money | 3.52 | Visit information | 3.25 |
| | | | | Tours gave value for money | 3.42 | Feel safe and secure | 3.68 |
| | | | | Attractions offered value for money | 3.62 | Food | 3.67 |
| | | | | Standard of restaurants | 3.52 | Environment (cleanness, air, etc.) | 2.35 |
| | | | | Shopping and retail | 3.52 | | |

Perceptions and beliefs about important destination attributes by different groups are shown in Table 4. Analysis of the importance of destination attributes found that the four groups of respondents had very similar perceptions in aspects such as "safety of the place you visiting", "clean and safe local food", "experiencing different lifestyle and cultures", "cost of trip", and "natural environment of fresh air and blue sky", showing similar mean scores. For beliefs that China will offer desired destination attributes, most of the mean values for beliefs were lower than 4, which means that Australian respondents thought that China would not satisfy these attributes. A comparison of perception and beliefs of important destination attributes illustrated in Table 4 indicates that there were significant differences in the top seven attributes: Natural environment of fresh air and blue sky (−1.99); Casinos (1.23); Skyscrapers and modern city (1.21); Ease of communication with locals (−1.21); Safety of the place you are visiting (−0.91); Sunshine and beach (−0.87); and clean and safe local food (−0.83). This finding indicates that the natural environment, clean and safe food, and safety are very important attributes when choosing an overseas destination. Respondents felt that China was not able to offer a suitable standard for these attributes. Interestingly, respondents believed that China could offer casino entertainment, which is incorrect. The only area in China able to offer casino facilities is Macau.

**Table 4.** Mean Scores of Perception and Beliefs Based on Destination Attributes for Different Groups.

| Destination Attributes | Mean Score of Perception to Overseas Destination Attributes | | | | | Mean Score of Beliefs whether China can Satisfy their Perception | | | | | Two Mean Comparison |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | G 1-1 | G 1-2 | G 2-1 | G 2-2 | Average 1 | G 1-1 | G 1-2 | G 2-1 | G 2-2 | Average 2 | A.2-A.1 |
| Natural environment of fresh air and blue sky | 3.91 | 4.22 | 3.96 | 3.98 | 4.01 | 2.88 | 2.39 | 2.40 | 2.40 | 2.02 | −1.99 |
| Casinos | 1.71 | 1.76 | 1.44 | 1.69 | 1.65 | 3.01 | 3.45 | 2.64 | 2.40 | 2.88 | 1.23 |
| Skyscrapers and modern city | 2.88 | 2.57 | 2.52 | 2.68 | 2.66 | 3.79 | 3.89 | 4.04 | 3.76 | 3.87 | 1.21 |
| Ease of communication with locals | 3.58 | 3.71 | 3.32 | 3.25 | 3.47 | 2.94 | 2.56 | 2.56 | 2.96 | 2.26 | −1.21 |
| Safety of the place you visiting | 4.42 | 4.40 | 4.32 | 4.35 | 4.37 | 3.51 | 3.43 | 3.24 | 3.64 | 3.46 | −0.91 |
| Sunshine and beach | 3.40 | 3.4 | 3.40 | 3.13 | 3.33 | 2.90 | 2.16 | 2.16 | 2.61 | 2.46 | −0.87 |
| Clean and safe local food | 4.34 | 4.46 | 4.28 | 4.26 | 4.34 | 3.59 | 3.46 | 3.48 | 3.51 | 3.51 | −0.83 |

**Table 4.** *Cont.*

| Destination Attributes | Mean Score of Perception to Overseas Destination Attributes | | | | | Mean Score of Beliefs whether China can Satisfy their Perception | | | | | Two Mean Comparison |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | G 1-1 | G 1-2 | G 2-1 | G 2-2 | Average 1 | G 1-1 | G 1-2 | G 2-1 | G 2-2 | Average 2 | A.2-A.1 |
| Experiencing different lifestyle and culture | 4.27 | 4.13 | 4.16 | 4.26 | 4.21 | 4.21 | 3.87 | 4.12 | 4.13 | 4.08 | −0.13 |
| Cost of trip | 4.21 | 4.37 | 4.04 | 4.16 | 4.20 | 3.50 | 3.29 | 3.56 | 3.54 | 3.47 | −0.73 |
| Easy access to destination | 4.04 | 3.97 | 3.88 | 3.65 | 3.89 | 3.59 | 3.27 | 3.36 | 3.75 | 3.47 | −0.42 |
| Quality of accommodation facilities | 3.94 | 4.05 | 3.96 | 3.70 | 3.91 | 3.70 | 3.73 | 3.56 | 3.76 | 3.69 | −0.22 |
| Unique architecture | 3.53 | 3.54 | 4.08 | 3.44 | 3.65 | 3.88 | 3.55 | 3.68 | 3.80 | 3.73 | 0.08 |
| Historic and cultural heritage | 3.91 | 3.71 | 4.00 | 3.91 | 3.88 | 4.09 | 3.97 | 3.92 | 3.95 | 3.98 | 0.1 |
| Shopping | 3.33 | 3.05 | 3.40 | 2.93 | 3.18 | 4.12 | 3.81 | 4.04 | 3.83 | 3.95 | 0.77 |
| Quality of services provided at tourist sites and hotels | 3.87 | 3.85 | 3.96 | 3.75 | 3.86 | 3.60 | 3.49 | 2.64 | 3.53 | 3.32 | −0.54 |
| Nightlife and evening entertainment | 2.79 | 2.86 | 2.52 | 2.60 | 2.69 | 3.33 | 3.44 | 3.12 | 3.38 | 3.32 | 0.63 |
| Local transportation | 3.96 | 3.93 | 3.72 | 3.71 | 3.83 | 3.44 | 3.27 | 3.00 | 3.49 | 3.3 | −0.53 |
| Easy to make new friends | 3.15 | 3.04 | 3.04 | 3.16 | 3.10 | 3.16 | 2.58 | 2.24 | 3.16 | 2.79 | −0.31 |
| Restfulness and relaxation | 3.67 | 3.98 | 3.32 | 3.60 | 3.64 | 3.22 | 2.75 | 2.88 | 3.24 | 3.02 | −0.62 |
| Language that I can understand | 3.37 | 3.38 | 3.48 | 3.13 | 3.34 | 2.85 | 2.20 | 2.48 | 2.86 | 2.60 | −0.74 |
| Having good restaurants | 3.58 | 3.58 | 3.72 | 3.48 | 3.59 | 3.85 | 3.64 | 3.60 | 3.78 | 3.72 | 0.13 |
| Festivals and events | 3.58 | 3.23 | 3.44 | 3.56 | 3.45 | 3.80 | 3.52 | 3.60 | 3.58 | 3.63 | 0.18 |
| National parks and forests | 3.61 | 3.80 | 3.56 | 3.48 | 3.61 | 3.41 | 2.86 | 2.96 | 3.29 | 3.13 | −0.48 |
| Being by a mountain or a river | 3.22 | 3.33 | 3.32 | 3.16 | 3.26 | 3.36 | 3.04 | 3.28 | 3.43 | 3.28 | 0.02 |
| Natural heritage | 3.59 | 3.75 | 3.80 | 3.70 | 3.71 | 3.58 | 3.32 | 3.40 | 3.68 | 3.50 | −0.21 |
| Beautiful countryside | 3.69 | 3.86 | 3.68 | 3.63 | 3.72 | 3.59 | 3.11 | 3.28 | 3.25 | 3.31 | −0.41 |

Note: Group 1-1: respondents who have not been to and would visit China within the next 5 years; Group 1-2: respondents who have not been to and were not interested in visiting China within the next 5 years; Group 2-1: respondents who have been to and intended to revisit China within the next 5 years; Group 2-2: respondents who have been to China but did not plan to revisit China within the next 5 years.

Table 5 shows six important factors after factor analysis (sightseeing, natural beauty and climate, interactions with locals, cost and convenience, infrastructure and safety, and leisure) of destination attributes. The results indicate that for sightseeing and leisure factors, the mean value of belief exceeded the mean value of importance. In contrast, for natural beauty and climate, interaction with locals, cost and convenience, and infrastructure and safety, the mean value of importance is significantly higher than the corresponding mean value of beliefs that China could provide a satisfying travel experience.

**Table 5.** Factor Loading for Target Destination Beliefs and Mean Comparison with Importance of Attributes.

| Destination Attributes | Factor Loading | % Variance Explained | Cronbach's alpha | Mean Beliefs of China | Mean Importance Rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sightseeing** | | 22.658 | 0.755 | 3.927 (0.961) | 3.605 (0.909) |
| Historic and cultural heritage | 0.819 | | | | |
| Festivals and events | 0.699 | | | | |
| Skyscrapers and modern city | 0.618 | | | | |
| Experiencing different life style and cultures | 0.576 | | | | |
| **Natural beauty and climate** | | 13.525 | 0.783 | 3.123 (1.043) | 3.606 (0.9) |
| National parks and forests | 0.762 | | | | |
| Being by a mountain or a river | 0.73 | | | | |
| Beautiful countryside | 0.725 | | | | |
| Natural heritage | 0.557 | | | | |
| Natural environment of fresh air and blue sky | 0.541 | | | | |
| Sunshine and beach | 0.51 | | | | |
| **Interactions with locals** | | 8.673 | 0.712 | 2.831 (1.075) | 3.341 (1.011) |
| Easy to make new friends | 0.573 | | | | |
| Language that I can understand | 0.768 | | | | |
| Ease of communication with locals | 0.827 | | | | |
| **Cost and Convenience** | | 6.095 | 0.708 | 3.508 (0.924) | 3.977 (0.838) |
| Cost of trip | 0.659 | | | | |
| Easy access to destination | 0.64 | | | | |
| Local transportation | 0.485 | | | | |
| Having good restaurants | 0.513 | | | | |
| Clean and safe local food | 0.675 | | | | |
| **Infrastructure and safety** | | 5.826 | 0.752 | 3.584 (0.882) | 4.05 (0.856) |
| Quality of accommodation facilities | 0.781 | | | | |
| Quality of services provided at tourist sites and hotels | 0.858 | | | | |
| Safety of the place you visiting | 0.618 | | | | |
| **Leisure** | | 4.613 | 0.704 | 3.383 (1.091) | 2.539 (1.103) |
| Casinos | 0.777 | | | | |
| Nightlife and evening entertainment | 0.768 | | | | |
| Shopping | 0.528 | | | | |

KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) = 0.792; Bartlett's test = 4455.972; df (degrees of freedom) = 276; Sig (Significance) = 0.000.

To test which of the factors of views about mainland China as a tourist destination were important, a predicted intention to visit China was conducted using multiple regression with the six belief scales used as predictors (shown in Table 6). According to the *p*-value, sightseeing (0.000), natural beauty and climate (0.000), cost and convenience (0.000), and infrastructure and safety (0.000) have a significant impact on intention to visit.

**Table 6.** Regression analysis of six important destination attributes.

| Main Factors of Destination Attributes | B | β | T | *P* | F | $R^2$ | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 6.068 | | 75.98 | 0.000 | | | |
| Sightseeing | 0.316 | 0.162 | 3.948 | 0.000 ** | | | |
| Natural beauty and climate | 0.45 | 0.231 | 5.636 | 0.000 ** | 17.323 | 0.174 | 1.0 |
| Interactions with locals | 0.078 | 0.04 | 0.976 | 0.329 | | | |
| Cost & Convenience | 0.335 | 0.171 | 4.183 | 0.000 ** | | | |
| Infrastructure and safety | 0.493 | 0.253 | 6.176 | 0.000 ** | | | |
| Leisure | 0.014 | 0.007 | 0.176 | 0.861 | | | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ = 0.164; $p$ = 0.000 ** | | | | | | | |

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; B: Beta, β: standardized Beta, T: T-value, *P*: *P*-value, F: F-value, $R^2$: mathematically describe the strength of a correlation between two variables, VIF: Variance Inflation Factor.

The constraints identified for each of the four groups were clustered by descriptive analysis (Table 7). We chose the top five constraints for each group and undertook a comparison analysis. For G1-1 respondents, the top five constraints were pollution, air quality, water quality, language barriers, and food quality. For G1-2 respondents, the main concerns were pollution, air quality, water quality, language barrier, and security and safety. For G2-1 respondents, pollution, air quality, food quality, water quality, and security and safety were considered as the top constraints factors. For G2-1 respondents, pollution, air quality, visa regulation and cost, food quality, and water quality were the factors most likely to prevent them from a future return visit. It is clear that the three constraint factors of pollution, air quality, and water quality apply to all groups and indicates that for all Australian respondents, pollution, air quality, and water quality are considered as the most negative factors when considering travel to China.

**Table 7.** Description of Tourists' Constraints Based on the Segmentation of Australian Residents.

| Feature | Constraints of Intention to Visit for Different Groups | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Group 1-1 | | Group 1-2 | | Group 2-1 | | Group 2-2 | |
| | Mean | StDev | Mean | StDev | Mean | StDev | Mean | StDev |
| Pollution | 3.76 | 0.93 | 4.33 | 0.82 | 4.08 | 1.04 | 3.84 | 1.17 |
| Air quality | 3.69 | 1.02 | 4.32 | 0.84 | 4.08 | 1.00 | 3.85 | 1.16 |
| Visa regulations and cost | 3.32 | 0.95 | 3.32 | 0.95 | 3.36 | 1.38 | 3.46 | 1.23 |
| Food quality | 3.39 | 1.02 | 3.40 | 1.09 | 3.44 | 1.19 | 3.49 | 1.18 |
| Transportation in China | 3.18 | 1.04 | 3.14 | 1.09 | 3.32 | 1.11 | 2.93 | 1.12 |
| No one to go with | 2.74 | 1.14 | 3.29 | 1.19 | 3.24 | 1.36 | 2.69 | 1.22 |
| Water quality | 3.63 | 0.95 | 3.81 | 1.05 | 4.08 | 1.32 | 3.64 | 1.08 |
| Language barriers | 3.44 | 1.05 | 3.79 | 1.17 | 2.88 | 1.20 | 2.81 | 1.14 |
| Trip Cost | 3.32 | 1.08 | 3.49 | 0.90 | 2.84 | 1.25 | 3.04 | 1.15 |
| Political reasons | 2.75 | 1.24 | 3.25 | 1.16 | 3.16 | 1.03 | 2.46 | 1.21 |
| Security and safety | 3.33 | 1.21 | 3.71 | 1.15 | 3.56 | 1.33 | 3.09 | 1.35 |
| I might be a victim of terrorism | 2.71 | 1.25 | 2.85 | 1.37 | 2.56 | 1.16 | 2.49 | 1.30 |
| Climate and weather | 2.93 | 1.01 | 3.05 | 1.07 | 2.88 | 0.88 | 2.76 | 1.17 |
| Quality of goods and souvenirs | 2.78 | 1.00 | 2.78 | 1.28 | 2.72 | 0.98 | 2.66 | 0.95 |

**Table 7.** *Cont.*

| Feature | Constraints of Intention to Visit for Different Groups | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Group 1-1 | | Group 1-2 | | Group 2-1 | | Group 2-2 | |
| | Mean | StDev | Mean | StDev | Mean | StDev | Mean | StDev |
| Convenient access to China | 3.05 | 1.07 | 2.77 | 1.10 | 3.12 | 1.05 | 2.71 | 1.09 |
| Currency exchange | 2.93 | 1.01 | 2.76 | 1.07 | 2.92 | 1.08 | 2.64 | 1.15 |
| Accommodation in China | 3.05 | 1.02 | 3.08 | 1.12 | 3.04 | 1.06 | 2.65 | 1.09 |
| Risk of a natural disaster | 2.95 | 1.12 | 3.03 | 1.26 | 3.36 | 1.32 | 3.04 | 1.16 |
| Risk of a tourism accident | 3.27 | 1.19 | 2.89 | 1.29 | 3.4 | 1.19 | 3.09 | 1.09 |
| I have no enough time | 3.05 | 1.05 | 3.16 | 1.09 | 3.4 | 1.08 | 3.09 | 1.10 |
| Service level provided | 3.11 | 0.98 | 2.98 | 0.93 | 3.56 | 1.16 | 2.98 | 0.97 |
| Country reputation | 2.93 | 1.01 | 3.32 | 1.23 | 3.52 | 1.16 | 2.54 | 1.02 |
| It might be overcrowded | 3.21 | 1.01 | 3.34 | 1.09 | 3.12 | 1.20 | 3.04 | 1.28 |
| Local people's behaviors | 2.90 | 0.98 | 3.19 | 1.06 | 3 | 1.04 | 2.80 | 1.10 |
| I might get poor value for money | 2.78 | 0.93 | 2.82 | 1.01 | 2.84 | 0.69 | 2.40 | 1.09 |
| I might get sick | 2.90 | 1.01 | 2.98 | 1.14 | 2.92 | 1.38 | 2.69 | 0.96 |
| I might feel socially uncomfortable | 2.72 | 0.96 | 2.90 | 1.13 | 2.52 | 0.92 | 2.23 | 1.08 |
| I might travel to exotic and unusual places | 2.93 | 1.15 | 2.71 | 1.20 | 2.64 | 1.35 | 2.50 | 1.24 |
| I might injure myself | 2.69 | 1.07 | 2.53 | 1.11 | 2.24 | 1.05 | 2.43 | 1.06 |
| People might have a bad opinion of me | 2.53 | 0.96 | 2.13 | 1.02 | 2.4 | 1.29 | 1.98 | 1.16 |
| I might not have a great time | 2.55 | 0.94 | 2.42 | 0.96 | 2.6 | 1.04 | 2.28 | 1.18 |
| It might be a waste of time | 2.35 | 1.03 | 2.31 | 1.01 | 2.36 | 0.86 | 2.05 | 1.05 |
| Travel partners not interested | 2.43 | 1.08 | 2.73 | 1.28 | 2.36 | 0.86 | 2.36 | 1.08 |
| Travel partners do not have time | 2.61 | 1.00 | 2.67 | 1.12 | 2.44 | 0.77 | 2.55 | 0.99 |
| Travel partners cannot afford it | 2.66 | 1.02 | 2.67 | 1.11 | 2.72 | 0.89 | 2.58 | 1.03 |

Note: StDev means Standard Deviation.

The results from the exploratory factor analysis are shown in Table 8, together with the reliability test for each factor. After deleting two high cross-loading factors, two rounds of factor analysis were conducted. This process resulted in a five-factor solution explaining 65.32% of the total variance. The reliability coefficients ranged from 0.667 to 0.871, indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency. The factors were labeled as "structural constraint", "interpersonal constraint", "safety constraint", "intrapersonal constraint", and "cost constraint".

The first factor explained 34.065% of the total variance and included 11 items. Since all the items loaded in this dimension are related to material or physical constraints, this factor was labeled "structural constraint". The second factor labeled "interpersonal constraint" included 4 items, which accounted for 9.079% of the total variance. All the indicators reflect the difficulties caused by interaction with others. The third factor explained 7.27% of the construct variance and consists of 4 items. This dimension is related to perceptions of safety resulting in this factor being labeled as "safety constraint". The fourth factor contained 5 items and explained 5.051% of variance of this construct. Items loaded in this dimension are concerned with the psychological conditions of individuals. Therefore, this factor was labeled as "intrapersonal constraint". The last factor explained 4.168% of the total variance and includes two items that were loaded on this dimension and related to the cost of a visit. This factor was labeled as "cost constraint".

**Table 8.** Reliability and Validity of Constraint Factors.

| Constraint Factors | Factor Loading | Eign-Value | Variance Explained % | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Structural constraint | | 8.857 | 34.065 | 0.871 |
| Air quality | 0.899 | | | |
| Pollution | 0.884 | | | |
| Quality of goods and souvenirs | 0.756 | | | |
| Convenient access to China | 0.692 | | | |
| Currency exchange | 0.675 | | | |
| Transportation in China | 0.644 | | | |
| Accommodation in China | 0.63 | | | |
| Climate and weather | 0.619 | | | |
| Water quality | 0.634 | | | |
| Food quality | 0.559 | | | |
| Service level provided | 0.532 | | | |
| **Interpersonal constraint** | | 2.36 | 9.079 | 0.869 |
| Travel partners do not have time | 0.916 | | | |
| Travel partners cannot afford it | 0.88 | | | |
| People might have a bad opinion of me | 0.776 | | | |
| Travel partners not interested | 0.771 | | | |
| **Safety constraint** | | 1.89 | 7.27 | 0.821 |
| Risk of a tourism accident | 0.822 | | | |
| Risk of a natural disaster | 0.794 | | | |
| I might be a victim of terrorism | 0.622 | | | |
| Security and safety | 0.561 | | | |
| **Intrapersonal constraint** | | 1.313 | 5.051 | 0.795 |
| I might not have a great time | 0.759 | | | |
| It might be a waste of time | 0.742 | | | |
| I might feel socially uncomfortable | 0.689 | | | |
| I might injure myself | 0.699 | | | |
| I might get sick | 0.605 | | | |
| **Cost constraint** | | 1.084 | 4.168 | 0.667 |
| Trip Cost | 0.823 | | | |
| Visa regulations and cost | 0.756 | | | |

KMO = 0.89; Bartlett's = 6856.166; df = 325; Sig. = 0.000.

To test which of the constraint dimensions was a factor preventing travel, a multiple regression analysis using the five constraint scales as predictors was undertaken (shown as Table 9). According to *p*-values, interpersonal constraint (0.002), intrapersonal constraint (0.000), and cost constraint (0.007) have significant impacts on intention to visit.

**Table 9.** Regression Analysis of Travel Constraints.

| Variable | B | β | t | P | F | $R^2$ | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constraints | 6.067 | | 71.571 | 0.000 | 6.457 | 0.073 | 1.0 |
| Structural constraint | 0.005 | 0.003 | 0.060 | 0.952 | | | |
| Interpersonal constraint | −0.264 | −0.136 | −3.121 | 0.002 ** | | | |
| Safety constraint | −0.102 | −0.052 | −1.201 | 0.230 | | | |
| Intrapersonal constraint | −0.374 | −0.192 | −4.421 | 0.000 ** | | | |
| Cost constraint | 0.229 | 0.117 | 2.702 | 0.007 ** | | | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ = 0.062; $p$ = 0.000 ** | | | | | | | |

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

To further understand the factors that influence Australians' perceptions of China, the study also surveyed information sources used by respondents in their travel decision-making. As illustrated in Figure 1, the Internet was the most important information source for all four groups, followed by friends' and families' viewpoints. Specially, if their friends and family had been to China before, their past experiences and recommendations were an important source of information. For G1-2 respondents, TV and radio, newspapers and magazines, and school and university were major sources of information. For G2-2 respondents, Facebook, newspapers, and magazines were the most important sources of information compared to G2-1 respondents. Based on this finding it can be reasoned that negative reports in these media are likely to have a negative impact on perceptions of China and intentions to visit.

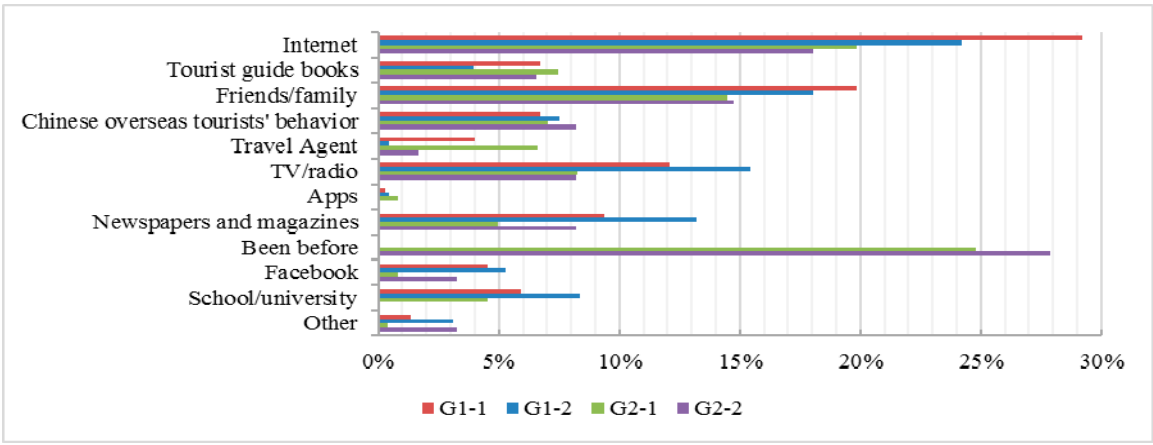


**Figure 1.** Use of Information Sources to Find out Information about China by four Groups.

## 5. Discussion

This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding to how perception and beliefs of destination attributes, constraints, and information sources influenced the intentions of Australian residents towards travel to mainland China. The results help to explain why the numbers of international arrivals to mainland China have declined in recent years. The findings indicate that the key elements influencing China's inbound tourism market are past experience, perception, and beliefs about China, constraints, and information sources.

The number of international arrivals to China started to decrease significantly after 2012. The results showed that after 2012, the mean of overall satisfaction of travel was lower than before 2012. Only one of the eleven attributes of satisfaction slightly increased after 2012. This indicates an urgent need for Chinese tourism organizations to reconsider the type of products and experiences offered to foreign tourists.

For Australian respondents, 40% of G1 respondents are willing to visit China, while 76% of Group 2 respondents indicated an intention to revisit China. Based on this finding, past travel experience positively influenced the intention to visit. Further, friends' and family's past travel experiences was also an important influence factor.

China is generally recognized as a popular destination, however, there remain a number of problems in relation to perceptions about the quality of the natural environment, air quality, safety, and communication with locals. Respondents viewed "natural environment of fresh air and blue sky" (−) as their most preferred attribute. Importantly, most respondents who treated this item as the most important factor when choosing an overseas destination were not convinced that China could offer a good natural environment. Respondents also viewed skyscrapers and modern cities (+) as the dimension that China can offer. Ease of communication with locals (−) and safety (−) were also important influence factors, however, respondents did not believe that China could satisfy their needs, although respondents who had been to China were less worried about communication issues.

The factor analysis identified six factors that were labeled as sightseeing, natural beauty and climate, interactions with locals, cost and convenience, infrastructure, and safety and leisure. Sightseeing, natural beauty and climate, cost and convenience, and infrastructure and safety were found to have a significant impact on respondents' intentions to visit.

Constraints were compared between the four groups of respondents (G1-1, G1-2, G2-1, and G2-2). Pollution, air quality, and water quality were the items of most concern for respondents in all four groups. Australian respondents view China as heavily polluted, which may encourage them to select other destinations over China. Factor analysis revealed five constraint factors that most influenced respondent's intention to return: interpersonal constraint, intrapersonal constraint, and cost constraints.

The Internet, individual experiences, and friends' and family's viewpoints were the most important information sources used by respondents. This result indicates that a satisfactory travel experience is the most efficient way to encourage potential tourists to visit China. Positive word-of-mouth recommendations and satisfied personal experiences should be considered as important tools to develop China's inbound tourism market.

It should be noted that a number of potentially relevant issues related to TPB were not investigated. For example, Flack and Morris [15] and Mingming et al. [8] propose that tourists' cultural environment has an important impact on final behavioral decision-making. Although respondents were asked about demographic characteristics, perceptions, and attitudes towards China, constraints on travel to China and sources of information, the respondents' attitude towards China, and the impact that Australia's cultural environment had on holiday decision making were not investigated. As a number of researchers have stated, tourism motivation is also an important factor affecting tourism decision-making [20,48], pointing to a need to investigate similarities and differences between tourist motivations and tourist preferences. While this study investigated Australian residents' preferences for overseas tourism, it did not investigate tourist motivation, which may also be an important factor in understanding the decline in China's inbound tourist market.

## 6. Conclusions

This study provided unique insights into different groups of Australian tourists by examining their perception of overseas destination attributes and belief of China as a travel destination, and the impact on their intention to visit or revisit. This study affirmed that there is a positive relationship between tourist' trip satisfaction, tourists perception and beliefs of destination attributes, and tourists' intention to travel. The results also supported Kim et al.'s [49] finding that safety and beautiful scenery were still important attributes for Australians. The results did not confirm Kim et al.'s [49] findings about the importance of equipped tourism facilities, cultural and historical resources, and good weather.

Secondly, in regard to trip satisfaction with China before 2012 and after 2012, it appears that the quality of China's inbound tourism has not improved, and in most aspects may has declined. In the

current competitive international market, it is important that the Chinese government encourages the tourism sector to offer novel, high quality, and original tourism experiences and addresses issues such as pollution and food and water quality.

Thirdly, it is apparent that pollution, air quality, water quality, and safety are significant areas of concern. China has experienced a number of problems with food and water safety, and some problems, such as the death of four babies because of contaminated milk powder, have received wide coverage in the international media [50]. These negative reports may have negatively impacted perceptions of China as a holiday destination.

### *6.1. Practical Implications of this Study*

Several practical implications arise from this research, and these may be of interest to destination managers and marketers. First, at a more general level, most of the respondents who had previously visited mainland China had a positive attitude towards China and indicated a willingness to revisit, while respondents who had never visited China had negative attitudes and indicated an unwillingness to visit China in the near future. The former group obtained their information about China from the Internet, friends' and family's viewpoints, and their past travel experience, while the latter group were more likely to use the Internet, TV and radio, and newspapers and magazines. This finding suggests that the China Tourism Organization should focus on the Internet and word-of-mouth. Internet platforms, like Facebook, could offer more information compared with TV and newspapers, which seem to be more selective in the news that they report about China.

### *6.2. Theoretical Implications of this Study*

On the one hand, this study extends the theoretical model of planned behavior at the academic level. In this study, it investigated the importance of destination attributes when Australian residents choose overseas tourism destinations, and asked them to judge whether China could meet these important destination attributes factors. The comparison between the importance of destination attributes and the residents' beliefs enriches the influencing factors of decision-making in the theory of planned behavior. On the other hand, the results of this study show that even though Australian residents do not think that China can satisfy certain important preference factors, they still choose to go, which suggests a new aspect of the theoretical understanding of constraints. This shows that constraints are not all negatively correlated with decision-making behavior.

### *6.3. Further Research*

It would be useful for future research to focus on tourism motivation and the cultural environment of foreign residents, then compare their tourism decision-making and tourism constraint factors with travel motivations and cultural environments. In addition, outbound tourism from China has developed rapidly and now greatly exceeds inbound tourism. Future research could be directed at comparing and contrasting inbound and outbound tourism markets to identify the factors that have created this imbalance. For example, it might be that China has an enormous population and is unlikely to ever achieve a tourism balance, or that there are areas of China's tourism offering that need to be upgraded to enable the country to offer a competitive tourism experience.

The findings provide some interesting results, however, like most studies, they have limitations. First, the sample was derived from only one country (Australia), and it is quite possible that international tourists in other countries could hold different views about mainland China due to various cultural considerations. Future research should attempt to obtain samples from other countries, such as tourists from South Asian countries, from the perspective of geographical and cultural distance. Secondly, the sample was biased toward young people and it would be preferable to gain the views of a broader range of age groups. In this study, concerns about safety issues were quite high, however China's safety index is high [51]. Future research could compare the perception of safety level and the destination safety level to identify the gap in the tourists' perspective.

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