

## Article

# Exotic or Home? Tourists' Perception of Guest Houses, Guest Houses Loyalty, and Destination Loyalty in Remote Tourist Destinations

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**Abstract:** Guest houses offer an environmentally sustainable way to travel. The guest house serves not only to accommodate but also attract tourists to experience local culture when they visit remote destinations. This study was designed to explore how tourists' multiple perceptions of guest houses in remote destinations affect their behavioral intention toward guest houses and destinations. Results demonstrated that both tourists' perception of exotic local culture and sense of home had a significant positive effect on tourists' loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations. In addition, tourists with high cultural distance staying in guest houses perceived a higher level of exotic local culture but lower level of sense of home compared with those with lower cultural distance. Managerial implications, limitations, and recommendations for future studies are also provided.

**Keywords:** guest house; sense of home; exotic local culture; cultural distance

## 1. Introduction

The binary structure of “home” and “away” has a long history in tourism research [1]. However, the boundary between the two sides of the structure is blurring [2,3]. Tourists not only leave and return home but seek the sense of home on the move, as well as otherness [4]. Thus, the consumption and embracing of home exists along with tourists' pursuit of exotic and extraordinary experiences in tourist destinations [5]. Guest houses in remote destinations (GHRDs) around the world are a typical space to fulfill tourists' ambivalent pursuits of both exotic local culture and a home-like shelter similar to home when they visit remote places [6]. GHRDs across different countries are usually converted from original, local, traditional residences, providing tourists a space for temporary accommodation during their visit to remote tourist destinations. Staying in guest houses provides tourists not only a chance to experience the exotic culture but also seek a place of comfort, privacy, and homeliness. To sustain the success of GHRDs, it is important to assess how tourists' perceptions of the exotic local culture and sense of home influence their visitor loyalty. To the best of our knowledge, limited attention has been paid to these issues. Thus, the first objective of this study was to investigate how tourists' perceptions of two vital and ambivalent dimensions (local culture and sense of home) of the guest house affect their loyalty to guest houses in remote tourist destinations.

A steady flow of tourists is important for the sustainable development of remote tourist destinations [7–10]. Identifying the factors that significantly influence destination loyalty in remote areas will assist remote destinations in obtaining regular tourists and sustainability. Recently, the crucial role of destination loyalty in remote areas has been scrutinized. Tourists' perception of memorable experiences tends to have a positive effect on their destination loyalty [11]. GHRDs are usually

recognized as a place for tourists to gain memorable experiences [12], not only for exotic local culture [13] but also for a sense of home [2]. Thus, tourists' perception of the exotic local culture and sense of home in guest houses may have further effects on their loyalty to the destination. Based on the above-mentioned factors, the second objective of this study was to examine the effect of tourists' perception of the guest house on their loyalty to the remote destination.

Cultural distance has received increasing attention from scholars, as cultural differences usually cause different outcomes in tourists' perceptions, preferences, and behaviors [14]. Various theories have been proposed to explain the complex phenomenon of cultural distance. For example, social identity theory provides a perspective for explaining the cultural distance or cultural diversity. Social identity theory posits that people are pleased when they attach themselves to groups that have positive standings, since the belonging helps reinforce their self-concept with regards to their association with the group. Social identity theory is an important theory in understanding diversity and it provides a cultural perspective on intergroup relations. Existing research on cultural distance in tourism study has mainly focused on the cultural distance between the origin and destination countries and its effect on destination selections [15]. However, few studies have paid attention to the cultural distance of different areas within one country and its effect on tourist perceptions and experience. For example, for countries with a large size and multiple ethnic groups, such as China, the cultural distance between different areas can be significant. Groups in different areas are usually different in language (or dialect), food, architecture, and clothing styles, among other aspects. Tourists visiting the same destination are usually from different areas with different cultural distances, and this may affect their perception of exotic local culture or sense of home in guest houses. Based on the above mentioned, the third objective of the study was to explore whether the effect of tourists' perception of exotic local culture and sense of home on tourist behavioral intentions regarding guest houses would be significantly different between tourists with a different cultural distance from remote destinations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Guest House in Remote Tourist Destination

The guest house is a space where local residents share rooms of their private houses with tourists for temporary lodging [16]. It is normally recognized as a type of small-scale or specialist accommodation that is different from standard hotels [17,18]. Guest houses have been extended to all small-scale accommodation offered by hosts to provide tourists a chance to experience local cultures and lifestyles. Bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), homestay inns, and Airbnb, which provides local accommodation services through an emerging online system, are prominent guest house platforms. Differing from regular hotels, guest houses offer tourists not only food and services but also a place for additional experiences, such as interaction with local people [19,20], experience of local culture [21], and a sense of home [2,18]. For example, GHRDs are a typical space for tourists experiencing the exotic local culture of remote destinations, in which remote destinations are usually linked with descriptions of "wildness" or of being "exotic" and have consumption value for tourists owing to their geographical and cultural distance from tourists' areas of origin [22–24].

### 2.2. Relationship between Tourist Perception of Exotic Local Culture, Sense of Home, and Loyalty in Guest Houses

Guest houses present an alternative to the traditional hotels and are gaining increasing attention in tourism studies. Existing literature has identified some main characteristics of guest houses, focused on two types: the first type is on the traditional salient attributes, including comfort of bed, privacy, cleanliness [20], economic value [25], location [18], efficiency [26], facilities, and employees' empathy [13,26]; the second type contains items concerned with tourists' engagement with remote destinations, such as the unique characteristics of guest houses compared with regular hotels (e.g., the sense of home and exotic local culture) [20].

Exotic local culture is one significant indicator affecting tourists' pursuit and experience in guest houses in remote destinations [21]. GHRDs are mainly converted from local traditional houses, and thus they are a part of local heritage, as well as a place for tourists to experience local exotic culture. Existing empirical studies on heritage destinations have identified the positive relation between tourists' perception of authentic culture of heritage and behavioral intention [11]. Thus, tourists' perception of local exotic culture in guest houses might have a positive influence on their loyalty to the guest house.

Sense of home has been identified as one of the most distinctive factors of guest houses in contrast with regular hotels [18]. The sense of home is the feeling of home, which is an intangible quality of a place with a strong, invisible, attractive pull for consumers in the service industry. Sense of home is not only about the physical environment but also related with human interactions. In societies marked with increasing mobility, sense of home is constructed and perceived not only in their own homes but also during the trip and in remote destinations [2]. A positive relation has been found between tourists' perception of sense of home and their behavioral intentions in their utilization of guest houses in remote destinations [18]. Based on the above argument, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**H1.** *Perceptions of exotic local culture has a positive relation with tourist loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations.*

**H2.** *Perceptions of sense of home has a positive relation with tourist loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations.*

### *2.3. Relationship between Tourists' Perception of Exotic Local Culture, Sense of Home, Loyalty to Guest House, and Loyalty of Tourist Destinations*

Destination loyalty is one of the central issues for academics and professionals in tourism destination marketing and management [27], as it affects tourists' tendency to revisit or recommend destinations [28] and further affects the profit generation in those destinations. Antecedents of tourists' destination loyalty have been identified, including not only the traditional salient attributes, such as service quality, but also new emerging items, such as perception of culture [11] and sense of home [2].

Experiencing exotic local culture is a main motivation for tourists staying in guest houses in remote destinations [21]. Indeed, tourists' perception of authentic culture has a positive effect on tourist behavioral intentions regarding the destination [11]. Thus, tourists' perception of exotic local culture may have a positive effect on tourist loyalty to remote destinations. Sense of home is another unique trait of guest houses that could affect tourist behavioral intentions for remote destinations [18]. Thus, tourists' perception of sense of home in guest houses may have a positive influence on destination loyalty. In addition, staying in a guest house is an important component for a memorable experience in remote destinations, as the guest house is considered a place for tourists to gain cultural experience and a sense of home [13]. Thus, tourists' perception of staying in guest houses may have an effect on their further consumption intention regarding the overall tourism product, or the entire experience of the tourist in the destination. Therefore, tourist behavioral intention regarding guest houses may affect their behavioral intention toward the overall destination. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed:

**H3.** *Perceptions of exotic local culture in guest houses has a positive relation with tourist loyalty to remote destination.*

**H4.** *Perceptions of sense of home in guest houses has a positive relation with tourist loyalty to remote destination.*

**H5.** *Guest house loyalty has a positive relation with destination loyalty.*

### *2.4. Moderating Effect of Cultural Distance*

Cultural distance is recognized as the cultural difference between the areas of origin and tourist destinations. For tourists coming from areas far from their destinations, the remote destination represents a large distance, not only geographically but also culturally. Pursuing exotic culture is one of the main motivations for tourists visiting remote destinations [21,23]. Exotic local culture in

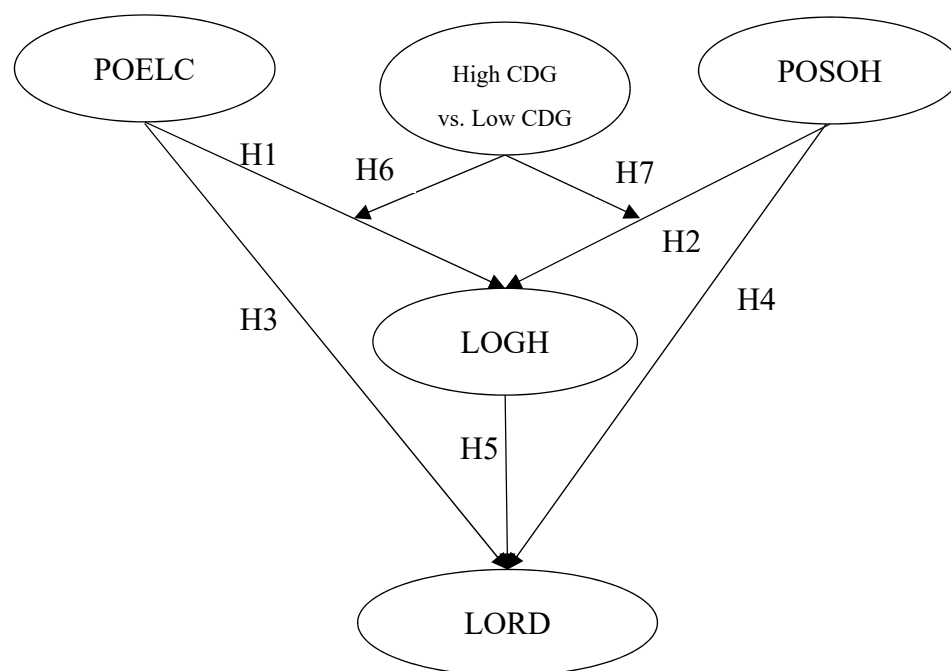
remote tourist destinations usually means the difference between the destination and the tourists' area of origin [24]. Cultural difference is considered an important attraction for tourists to visit destinations [21]. Larger cultural distance means higher level of being "different" and "exotic," and might be an attractive element for tourists. Guest houses in remote tourist destinations of one country serve a place that provides exoticism and uniqueness with respect to the areas of origin of tourists that are far from the destinations [21]; the larger the cultural distance between the origin and the remote destination, the more attractiveness to tourists. Thus, the cultural distance between the remote destination and the areas of origin may have a positive effect on tourist preference of the destination. This effect may not only occur during destination selection but continue during tourist experiences in remote destinations.

Existing research has focused on cultural distance between countries and its effect on international tourist destination selection [29,30]. However, cultural distance within one country can be significant, especially for countries with a large size and multiple ethnic groups. Tourists visiting remote tourist destination and staying in guest houses are usually from different areas of origin in one country, which means they usually have varied geographical and cultural distances from the remote destinations. Thus, the cultural distance between different areas within the same country may have an effect on tourists' preferences and attitudes toward the tourism product. For example, tourists from areas of origin with higher cultural distances from the remote destination may be more attracted by the exotic local culture of the guest house. In contrast, tourists from areas of origin with lower cultural distances from the remote destination are more familiar with the culture, and thus, the exotic local culture of the guest house seems not so attractive for these tourists. Therefore, tourists from different cultural backgrounds may gain different perceptions of the exotic local culture of the guest house, which may further lead to varied behavioral intentions to guest houses in remote destinations. Based on these, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H6.** *The effect of tourists' perception of exotic local culture in guest houses on tourist behavioral intentions regarding guest houses in remote destinations would be significantly different between tourists with a different cultural distance from the remote destinations.*

Sense of home is the feeling of home, and usually encompasses the feeling of warmth and safety [31,32]. Tourists from different origins with varied cultural distances from remote destinations may form different perceptions of the sense of home. Cultural distance is also regarded as barriers for tourists visiting destinations with different cultures, religions, customs, or languages [29], and different cultural distances lead to varied perceptions of risk and safety by tourists [33]. This tendency has a further influence on the perception of sense of home. For instance, tourists with lower cultural distance are usually more familiar with the languages, diet, customs, and habits of their destination [34]. They perceive fewer barriers and risks, and thus, they feel safer and more familiar, which contributes to a higher perception of sense of home in guest house [21]. In contrast, tourists with higher cultural distance usually perceive more barriers and risks and feel unsafe in a guest house in a remote destination, which may further influence their perception of sense of home in the guest house. Therefore, tourists originating from different cultural distances in the remote destination may hold varied perceptions of sense of home of the guest house, which may further lead to verified behavioral intentions toward specific guest houses in the remote destinations. Based on the rationale provided above, this study proposed the following hypotheses (see Figure 1):

**H7.** *The effect of tourists' perception of sense of home in guest houses on tourist behavioral intentions regarding guest houses in remote destinations would be significantly different between tourists with different cultural distances from the remote destinations.*



**Figure 1.** Theoretical model. Note: High CDG = high cultural distance group; Low CDG = low cultural distance group; POELC = perceptions of exotic local culture; POSOH = perceptions of sense of home; LOGH = loyalty of guest houses; LORD = loyalty of remote destination.

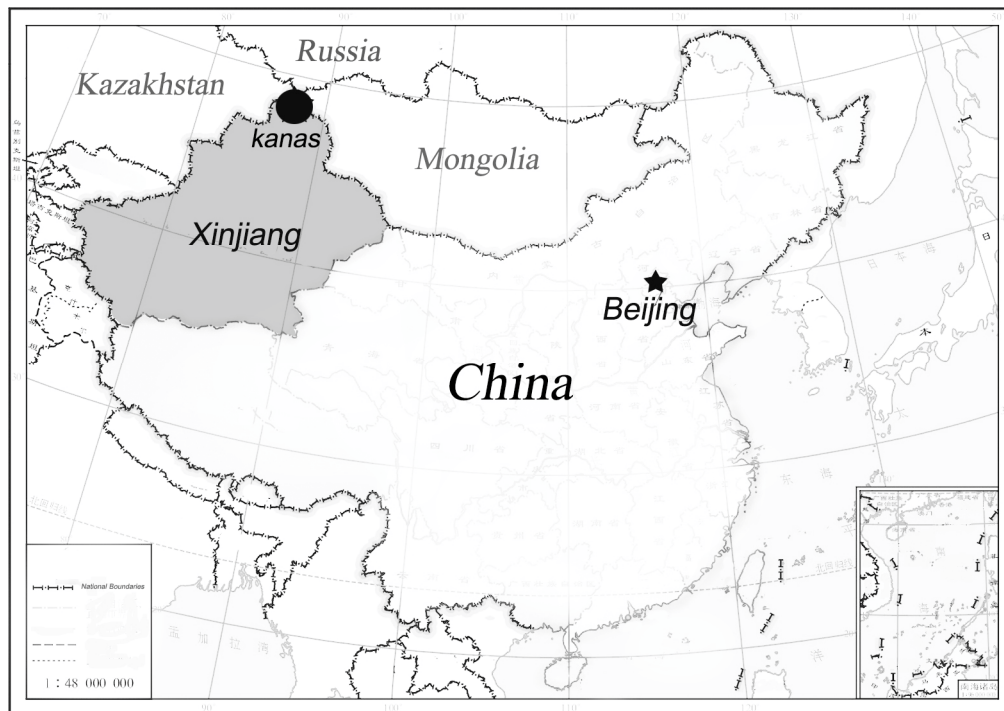
### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Samples

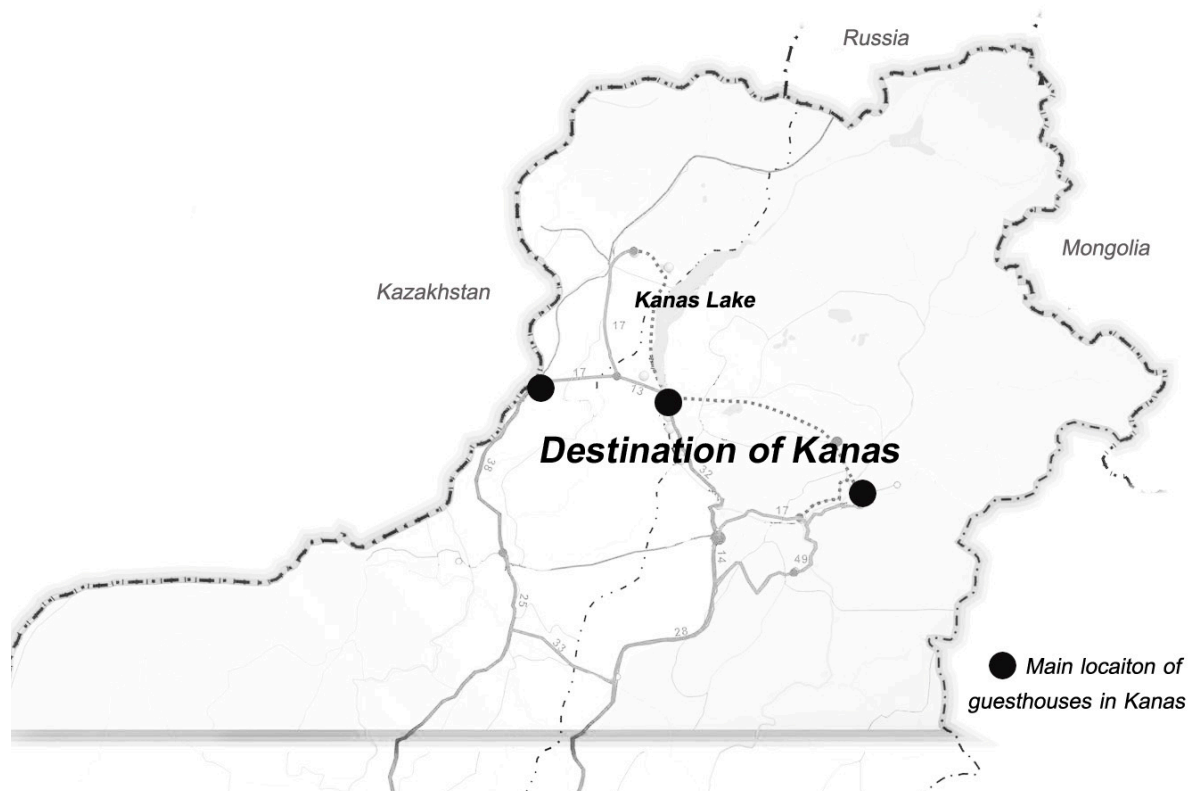
China is one of the largest countries in terms of size and population; it has a total of 56 ethnic groups. The cultural differences across areas are significant, especially between the capital and some remote provinces where the timing system, ethnic composition, and natural environment are quite distinctive. For example, Xinjiang is the largest autonomous region in China, equivalent to one-sixth of the total area of the country, located in arid and semi-arid areas covered by mountains, forests, deserts, and meadows. Xinjiang is recognized as a distinctive cultural area in China that has significant differences in terms of regional characteristics from other provinces and regions in China, such as regional environment, culture, and timing system. For this reason, Xinjiang was chosen as the subject of this study.

A mixed method was applied in this study. First, a pilot study was conducted to identify the key items of tourists' perception of guest houses in remote tourist destination. Second, data were collected using self-administered structured questionnaire approach within guest houses in Kanas, a remote tourist destination in Xinjiang autonomous region, China. Kanas Scenic Area is one of the most popular tourist sites in Xinjiang, China, and receives the highest attention in terms of tourist site investment and sustainable development (See Figures 2 and 3). It is a typical remote tourist destination. Chinese tourists from and outside the Xinjiang autonomous region are the primary tourists of Kanas Scenic Area. According to Kanas Scenic Area's tourist statistics, in the last 10 years (2009–2018), tourists from Xinjiang comprised 28.97% of all tourists, and those from provinces out of Xinjiang comprised 70.72%; international tourists accounted for only 0.31%. When visiting Kanas Scenic Area, tourists from Xinjiang usually encounter a different cultural and geographical perception, compared with tourists from origins outside Xinjiang.





**Figure 2.** Location of remote destination of Kanas in Xinjiang, China.



**Figure 3.** Location of guest houses in Kanas.

The primary data was obtained by face-to-face interviews by using a self-administered questionnaire with a convenience sampling procedure. Questionnaires were distributed by a research team to two groups of tourists from origins with different cultural distances from the remote destination of Kanas: tourists from Xinjiang, and from outside of Xinjiang. Most of the questionnaires were

completed in public spaces at the guest houses, such as the yard and dining room. A total of 288 respondents were retained for research after removing cases that had missing values—139 respondents were from Xinjiang (48%), and 149 respondents were from areas outside Xinjiang (52%). Xinjiang is considered as one of the most diverse linguistic and cultural communities in China, with a number of ethnic groups. Natural scenery and ethnic culture attract numerous domestic tourists to Xinjiang.

### 3.2. Measures

Direct measures were used in the assessment of these five latent constructs: perception on exotic local culture in guest houses, perception on sense of home in guest houses, loyalty to guest houses, destination loyalty, and demographic profile (including items of gender, age, education level, past experience, and length of stay in the guest house).

*Perception on exotic local culture in guest houses.* Four items were drawn from relevant prior research to better fit it within the context of guest house in remote destinations. These four items were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, and 7 = strongly agree. Items included the following: “I perceived the exotic local culture in the guest house from its local exterior architecture,” “I perceived the exotic local culture in the guest house from its local interior decorations,” “I perceived the exotic local culture in the guest house from the clothing of its reception staff,” and “I perceived the exotic local culture in the guest house from the accents of its reception staff.”

*Perception on sense of home in guest houses.* Four items were modified from prior relevant research to make the questionnaire fit the context of guest houses in remote destinations. Tourists’ perceptions of sense of home was assessed using seven-point response scales. The scales used anchors of 1 = strongly disagree, and 7 = strongly agree. Items included the following: “I perceived the sense of home in the guest house from the time spent eating,” “I perceived the sense of home in the guest house from time spent chatting with other tourists in the guest house,” “I perceived the sense of home in the guest house from the familiar environment,” and “I perceived the sense of home in the guest house from my feeling of being safe while staying there.”

*Loyalty of guest house.* Four items were taken from prior studies. Respondents were asked to respond to each statement in terms of their own degree of agreement or disagreement based on a seven-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, and 7 = strongly agree). Items included the following: “I will stay in this guest house again next time when visiting this destination,” “I will speak positively about the guest house,” “I will recommend this guest house to my friends and relatives,” and “I am satisfied with my stay in this guest house.”

*Loyalty of the remote destination.* Four items were taken from prior studies. A seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) was used to indicate responses. Items included the following: “I will visit this destination again next time,” “I will speak positively about the destination,” “I will recommend this tourist destination to my friends and relatives,” and “I am satisfied with my visit to this destination.”

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Comparison the Profile Distribution of High and Low Cultural Distance Tourists

Table 1 presents the basic information of the respondents. Apart from sex, a significant difference was observed between the two types of cultural distance tourists in terms of demographic characteristics. Low cultural distance tourists’ age was concentrated in the 19–29 years range (37.1%), whereas high cultural distance tourists’ age was in the range of 30–39 years (29.5%). Most of the high cultural distance tourists had a college or higher education. For almost all of the high cultural distance tourists, it was their first time to travel in Kanas area (90.7%), compared with the low cultural distance tourists (62.9%). In terms of the length of stay, 80% of low cultural distance tourists’ visits lasted for less than one night or one night, whereas 20% of them stayed for two nights. For high cultural distance tourists, 68.1% stayed less than one night or for a one night stay, and 19.6% of them stayed for two night stays.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of respondents.

	Low Distance Cultural Tourist (N = 139)		High Distance Cultural Tourist (N = 149)	
	Frequencies	%	Frequencies	%
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	67	48.4	72	48.2
Female	72	51.6	77	51.8
<i>Age</i>				
<19	7	4.8	17	11.6
19–29	52	37.1	35	23.7
30–39	29	21	44	29.5
40–49	40	29	38	25.4
50–59	7	4.8	13	8.9
60 or over	4	3.2	1	0.9
<i>Education level</i>				
Pre-high school	11	8.1	7	4.9
High school	25	17.7	15	10.2
Vocational training	38	27.4	29	19.6
University	60	43.5	74	49.8
Postgraduate or over	4	3.2	23	15.6
<i>Past experience</i>				
First-time visit	87	62.9	135	90.7
Repeated visit	52	37.1	14	9.3
<i>Length of stay (nights)</i>				
Less than 1 night or 1 night	111	80	101	68.1
2 Nights	28	20	29	19.6
3–4 Nights	0	0	16	10.6
5 Nights or over	0	0	3	1.7

#### 4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was implemented to validate the internal and external consistency of the study's constructs. Four competing measurement models were directly compared to estimate the appropriate model. The results of the four model comparison are given in Table 2. The proposed measurement model with a four-dimensional structure was first specified (Model 1:  $\chi^2 = 129.05$ ;  $df = 98$ ;  $GFI = 0.95$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.03$ ;  $CFI = 0.99$ ) and compared with alternative models. Incorporating POELC and POSOH into one single factor, a three-factor model was specified (Model 2:  $\chi^2 = 1232.70$ ;  $df = 101$ ;  $GFI = 0.62$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.20$ ;  $CFI = 0.81$ ). A two-factor model, where POELC, POSOH, and LOGH statements were constrained on a single construct was then specified (Model 3:  $\chi^2 = 2333.55$ ;  $df = 103$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.27$ ;  $CFI = 0.46$ ;  $GFI = 0.63$ ). The four-factor model with a one-factor model, in which all attributes were joined together (Model 4:  $\chi^2 = 3285.99$ ;  $df = 104$ ;  $GFI = 0.48$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.33$ ;  $CFI = 0.38$ ), was finally identified. Compared with the other competing models, the proposed four-factor model provided a good fit to the given data and indicated clear superiority.

The results of the measurement model are shown in detail in Table 3. The model provided an adequate fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 129.05$ ,  $df = 98$ ,  $CFI = 0.99$ ,  $GFI = 0.95$ ,  $NFI = 0.98$ ). Root mean square error of approximation ( $RMSEA$ ) = 0.03, less than the recommended 0.08 threshold. The item loadings were also examined to estimate convergent validity. The item loadings in our proposed model were significant and surpassed 0.50. Discriminant validity was further validated as the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor exceeded the squared correlation between any pair of factors (e.g., ranging from 0.83 to 0.92).



**Table 2.** Model comparisons.

Models	Factors	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	Comparison	$\Delta^2$	$\Delta df$
Model 1	Four factors	129.05	98	0.99	0.95	0.03			
Model 2	Three factors, based on Model 1, POELC. and POSOH, were combined into one factor	1232.70	101	0.81	0.62	0.20	1 vs. 2	1103.65 **	3
Model 3	Two factors, based on model 1, POELC, POSOH, and LOGH, were combined into one factor	2333.55	103	0.46	0.63	0.27	1 vs. 3	1100.85 **	2
Model 4	One factor; all four factors were combined into one factor.	3285.99	104	0.38	0.48	0.33	1 vs. 4	952.44 **	1

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .**Table 3.** Measurement model.

Paths	Loadings (t-Value)	Reliability	Skewness; Kurtosis	Error Variance	Item R-Square
loyalty of guest houses		CR = 0.98, AVE = 0.92			
LOGH→LOGH1	0.98 ***		−0.58; −0.48	0.04	0.96
LOGH→LOGH2	0.98 ***(56.40)		−0.64; −0.30	0.04	0.96
LOGH→LOGH3	0.97 ***(51.96)		−0.64; −0.43	0.06	0.94
LOGH→LOGH4	0.90 *** (32.35)		−0.67; −0.35	0.19	0.82
perceptions of sense of home		CR = 0.96, AVE = 0.86			
POSOH→POSOH1	0.89 ***		−0.46; −0.53	0.21	0.79
POSOH→POSOH2	0.97 ***(28.32)		−0.57; −0.32	0.07	0.94
POSOH→POSOH3	0.93 *** (25.20)		−0.68; −0.27	0.14	0.86
POSOH→POSOH4	0.93 *** (25.75)		−0.45; −0.54	0.13	0.87
perceptions of exotic local culture		CR = 0.95, AVE = 0.84			
POELC→POELC1	0.90 ***		−0.47; −0.64	0.20	0.80
POELC→POELC2	0.90 *** (23.92)		−0.38; −0.46	0.19	0.81
POELC→POELC3	0.89 *** (23.12)		−0.40; −0.46	0.21	0.79
POELC→POELC4	0.98 *** (29.54)		−0.41; −0.53	0.05	0.95
loyalty of remote destination		CR = 0.95, AVE = 0.83			
LORD→LORD1	0.90 ***		−0.56; −0.33	0.19	0.81
LORD→LORD2	0.90 *** (24.19)		−0.43; −0.42	0.19	0.81
LORD→LORD3	0.89 *** (23.09)		−0.49; −0.39	0.22	0.78
LORD→LORD4	0.96 *** (28.77)		−0.59; −0.25	0.08	0.93
Fit indices of the reflective measurement model: $\chi^2(d.f.) = 129.05 (98)$ , $p < 0.00$ ( $\chi^2/d.f. = 1.32$ ); CFI = 0.99; GFI = 0.95; NFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.03; SRMR = 0.03					

Note. \*\*\*  $p < 0.00$ . The average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) appear in the reflective scales to evidence reliability.

### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

Maximum likelihood estimation of the structural equation model (SEM) was adopted to test the proposed conceptual model in Figure 1. SEM provides appropriate measures that allow the statistical evaluation of overall model fit. The model indicated acceptable fit, except for the chi-square values, owing to the sample size. Other fit indices for the proposed model were above the criterion levels. Tourists' perceptions of exotic local culture and sense of home significantly influenced tourists' loyalty to guest houses in remote tourist destinations ( $\gamma = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\gamma = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , respectively), thus supporting H1 and H2. The results indicated that tourists' perceptions of exotic local culture would have a significantly positive effect on their loyalty to the remote destination ( $\gamma = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), thus supporting H3. However, tourists' perceptions of sense of home did not have a significant relation with loyalty to remote destination ( $\gamma = 0.07$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ); H4 was not supported. Intuitively, if a place invokes a sense of belonging to a home, tourists could derive more loyalty from that travel experience. However, additional factors, such as overall satisfaction, place attachment, and personality traits, may intervene in this path, providing an adequate explanation for this non-significant finding. Finally, tourist's loyalty to guest houses was also positively correlated with loyalty to remote destinations, and H5 was significantly supported ( $\gamma = 0.51$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (See Figure 4).

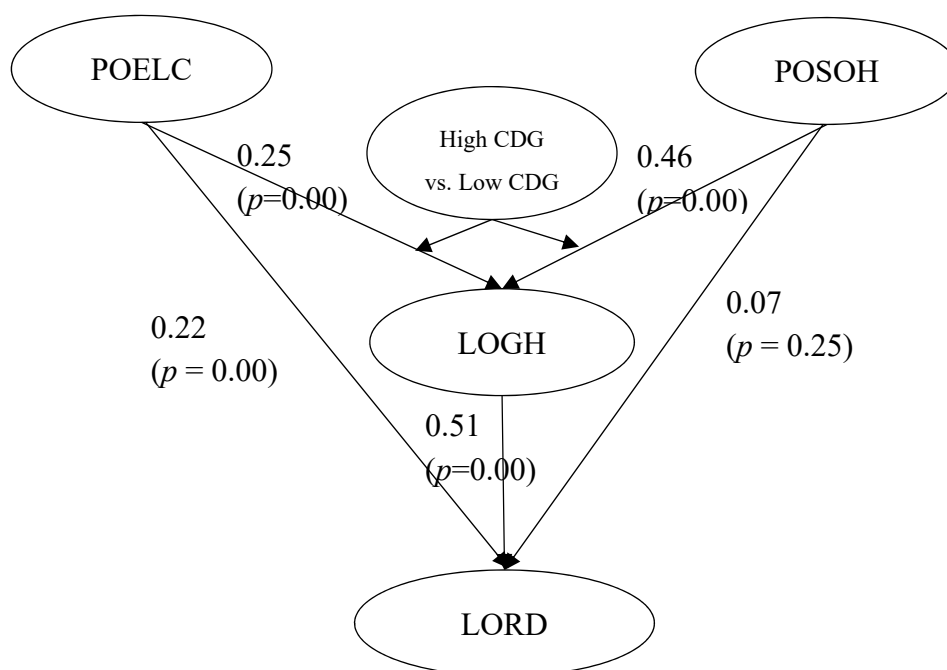


Figure 4. Results of SEM.

### 4.4. Invariance Test of Measurement Model

The respondents were divided into two groups according to cultural distance. The high and low cultural distance groups included 149 and 139 participants, respectively. The equality constraints for item loadings across two groups were examined (see Table 4). The unconstrained model was identified by conducting CFA for these two groups without loadings. A full metric invariance model was then specified by conducting CFA for the two groups with fixed loadings. The unconstrained model and full-metric invariance model were subsequently compared. The results showed no statistically significant difference between the two models ( $\chi^2(12) = 12.98$ ,  $p = 0.370$ ). Thus, the measurement structure was unaffected by changes in different cultural distance groups.

**Table 4.** Measurement invariance test.

Group	Models	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	$\Delta\chi^2$	Full-Metric Invariance
Cultural	Non-restricted mode	147.04	102	0.04	0.99	0.97	$\Delta\chi^2 (12) = 12.98$ $p = 0.370$ (insignificant)	Supported
	Full-metric invariance	160.02	114	0.04	0.99	0.97		

#### 4.5. Invariance Test of Structural Model

Table 5 shows the results of the invariance test. The baseline models for the two cultural distance groups were consistent with the data ( $\chi^2 = 147.0$ , CFI = 0.991; GFI = 0.922, IFI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.039). Parameters were estimated as sequentially equal to evaluate the equality of the specific paths of these two groups. The baseline and other nested models were compared by a chi-square difference test. A certain parameter constraint in the different cultural distance groups was first specified. The results indicated statistically significant differences between the two groups. The relation between perceptions of exotic local culture and tourists' loyalty to guest houses was significantly affected by cultural distance ( $\chi^2 (1) = 9.8$ ;  $p = 0.0017$ ). Perceptions of exotic local culture had a larger impact on high cultural distance tourists' loyalty to guest houses ( $\gamma = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) compared with low cultural distance tourists ( $\gamma = 0.19$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ); thus, H6 was supported. Regarding the relation between tourists' perceptions of sense of home and their loyalty to guest houses, the relations in the high and low cultural distance groups were significantly different ( $\chi^2 (1) = 5.4$ ,  $p = 0.0201$ ) for low cultural distance tourists; their perceptions of sense of home had a greater impact on their loyalty to guest houses ( $\gamma = 0.54$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) compared with high cultural distance tourists ( $\gamma = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, H7 was supported.

**Table 5.** Invariance tests of the structural models for cultural distance groups.

Paths	Low CDG		High CDG		Baseline Model (Freely Estimated)	Nested Model (Constrained to Be Equal)
	Coefficients	t Value	Coefficients	t Value		
POELC→LOGH	0.19	2.12	0.45	5.76	$\Delta\chi^2 (102) = 147.0$	$\Delta\chi^2 (103) = 156.8^a$
POSOH→LOGH	0.54	6.47	0.33	4.38	$\Delta\chi^2 (102) = 147.0$	$\Delta\chi^2 (103) = 152.4^b$

Baseline model fit:  $\chi^2(102) = 147.037$  ( $p < 0.01$ ); CFI = 0.991; GFI = 0.922, IFI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.039

a:  $\Delta\chi^2 (1) = 9.8$ ;  $p = 0.0017 < 0.01$ (significant); b:  $\Delta\chi^2 (1) = 5.4$ ;  $p = 0.0201 < 0.05$ (significant).

## 5. Discussion

Guest houses receive increasing attention both in the academe and industry. Although tourists' complicated demands for both exotic culture and sense of home in tourist destinations have been reported by prior research, there is limited research on tourists' perception of exotic local culture and sense of home in guest houses. Using guest houses as the research context, this study attempted to develop and test empirically an integrated model of the relation among tourists' perception of exotic local culture, tourists' perception of sense of home, guest house loyalty, and destination loyalty. Results demonstrated that both tourists' perception of exotic local culture and sense of home had a significant positive effect on tourists' loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations. The current study also aimed to contribute to and extend prior research by conceptualizing and empirically testing the moderating effect of cultural distance between tourists' perceptions of exotic local culture, sense of home, and guest house loyalty. Results indicated that tourists with high cultural distance staying in guest houses perceived a higher level of exotic local culture but lower level of sense of home compared with those with lower cultural distance (See Table 6).

**Table 6.** The results of hypothesis testing.

		Paths	Proposed Direction	Results
Exotic local culture	→	Loyalty to guest houses	+	Supported
Sense of home	→	Loyalty to guest houses	+	Supported
Exotic local culture	→	Loyalty to remote destinations	+	Supported
Sense of home	→	Loyalty to remote destinations	+	Not supported
Exotic local culture	→	Loyalty to remote destinations	+	Supported
Exotic local culture	→	Loyalty to guest houses (High vs. Low)	n.a.	Supported
Sense of home	→	Loyalty to guest houses (High vs. Low)	n.a.	Supported

### 5.1. Theoretical Contributions

The current research makes three major contributions to the body of research in tourism. First, our results documented that tourists' perception of exotic local culture and sense of home during their stay in guest houses in remote destinations have a significant positive effect on their guest house loyalty. Although research has identified tourists' demand and motivation for cultural experience in guest houses and their pursuit of sense of home, which are important attributes for the successful operation of guest houses, few efforts have been directed toward measuring the effect of cultural experience and sense of home in guest houses on willingness to re-consume the experience offered at guest houses in remote destinations. This study contributes to this gap by measuring tourist perception of exotic local culture and sense of home in guest houses and examining their relation to loyalty to guest houses. This study confirmed that experiences of exotic local culture and sense of home are important attributes for guest houses to attract tourists to re-consume the guest house or recommend it to others. In addition, this study also contributes to existing literature for advancing the understanding of the ambivalence of modernity in tourism by conducting empirical studies of tourist behaviors in guest houses in remote destinations. Although research has suggested that tourists' imagination of remote destination as "exotic" is an advantage for remote tourist destinations [35], and the positive effect of tourist perception of exotic local culture on guest house loyalty echoes this, the current study also revealed the positive effect of tourist perception of sense of home on guest house loyalty. This other side sheds light on tourists' preference of sense of home also existing during their stay in guest houses in remote destinations. The results of this study implied that "home" and "away" are not strictly two separate sides; tourists staying in guest houses in remote destinations pursue both sense of "home" and the "destination far away".

Second, this study reported that tourists' perception of exotic local culture in guest houses has a significant positive effect on their behavioral intention with respect to the remote destination. Destination loyalty is an important issue for tourism destination marketing and management. Research has identified the positive effects of tourists' cultural experience and perception of cultural items on destination loyalty. Although the guest house is identified as a place to experience local culture, and thus, the guest house in a remote destination provides tourist cultural experience, to our knowledge, very few studies have paid attention to the relation between tourists' perception of cultural experiences in guest houses and their loyalty to the destination. This study has been one of the first attempts to thoroughly examine the relation between tourists' perception of exotic local culture in guest houses in remote destinations and destination loyalty. The results showed the positive effect of tourists' perception of exotic local culture of guest houses on their loyalty to the remote destination. The results also demonstrated that tourists' loyalty to guest houses significantly and positively affect their loyalty to the destination. These results imply the role of guest houses as a cultural attraction to remote destinations. Based on the outcomes, tourism and destination administration institutions should pay more attention to the regulation and sustainable development of guest houses in remote destinations. Besides, this finding also underlines the importance of tourists' perception of "exotic" culture in remote tourist destinations, which is in line with the previous literature's position that tourists visiting remote destinations are motivated by the pursuit of the "unfamiliar" and "exotic."

Third, this study investigated the moderating effect of culture distance on the relation between tourist perception of exotic local culture or sense of home and loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations. This study extended the theories of social identity in a tourism context. Cultural distance has been reported to affect micro tourist international destination selection behaviors and macro international tourist flows. The present study contributes to knowledge of cultural distance by investigating the effect of cultural distance between tourists from areas within the same country. Indeed, cultural distance affects tourist behavior not only during transnational travel but also in domestic travel. Our results documented that domestic tourists' cultural distance has a moderating effect on both the relation of tourists' perception of exotic local culture, sense of home, and loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations. For example, for tourists with higher cultural distance from a remote destination, their perception of exotic local culture would have a greater impact on their loyalty to guest houses. For tourists originating from lower cultural distance from the destination, their perception of sense of home would have a greater effect on their loyalty to guest houses. The current work also advances our understanding of cultural distance by examining its effect on broader tourist behaviors, extending beyond destination selection, given that it moderates the relation between tourist perception and loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations.

### *5.2. Managerial Implications*

As guest houses are becoming hot spots for investment, competition is becoming increasingly fierce, especially after the boom of various online reservation platforms for guest houses, such as Airbnb and Booking.com. The findings of the current study offer three suggestions for destination marketers and operators to develop properly effective promotion and operation strategies.

First, according to the finding on the positive effect of tourist perception of exotic local culture and sense of home on loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations, many interesting and managerial implications of high utility can be derived. For example, guest house operators should reproduce the space of the guest house to maintain the exotic local culture through various methods, such as maintaining exotic local-style architecture, embedding more local symbols in decorations, inspiring the wearing of local traditional dress or hair, making local food, and living the local life style in guest houses. Guest house operators should construct an environment with a sense of home through providing more home-like interactions, comforts, relaxation, and convenience to tourists. For instance, operators should provide various food and rooms for different tourists, such as providing local snacks or rooms with local-style decorations of the remote destination, food with similar flavors from origin home, and room decorations and facilities that provide a sense of modern similarity to home (e.g., sheets with popular drawings and design). Further, the complementary toiletries should be replaced by reusable items with more modern design, similar to those used at home, which also embraces the idea of environmental protection in many tourists' ordinary lives.

Second, this study found that tourists' perceptions of local exotic culture has a positive effect on loyalty to the destination where the guest house is located. This finding confirmed that staying in guest houses is an important component of the tourism product of remote destinations; thus, tourism and destination administration institutions should pay more attention to the regulation and sustainable development of guest houses in remote destinations. Our finding also underlines the importance of tourists' perception of the "exotic" culture in remote tourist destinations. These findings provide notable information for tourist administrations in remote destinations, highlighting the significance of tourists' experience and perception of the local exotic culture in guest houses. For instance, pictures and positive comments of the guest houses with local-style decorations should be added in tourist destination marketing materials; more pictures of destinations could be hung in the sitting room or reception of guest houses to strengthen ties between the guest house and the destination.

Third, this study identified the moderating role of cultural distance in the relation between tourists' perception of exotic culture, sense of home, and loyalty to guest houses in remote destinations. According to these findings, several important implications are provided, both for the marketing and

operation of guest houses in remote destinations. For instance, customized marketing materials of guest houses in remote destinations should be made according to the groups' cultural distance from the destination. Marketing materials distributed to potential tourists with higher cultural distance from the destination (such as provinces out of Xinjiang in this study) should leave more space for the introduction of the exotic local culture of guest houses, such as the local building, local food, and local attire. Meanwhile, the marketing materials distributed to tourists with lower cultural distances from the destination should pay more attention to the narration of the guest houses' sense of home, such as providing more pictures to demonstrate the comfort, decorations, and environment of the guest house resembling a home. Guest house can also provide alternative types of rooms according to tourists with different cultural distances. Higher cultural distance tourists can be allocated rooms with more sense of home, in terms of decorations and facilities that may be similar to their ordinary lifestyle. Lower cultural distance tourists may appreciate rooms with more decoration and furniture that represent the exotic local culture of remote destinations.

## 6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Several limitations to this study need to be recognized, as they point to future research directions. First, the targeted respondents of this study were Chinese tourists. Tourists from different countries may have different behaviors, characteristics, and preferences. For instance, tourists from the United States, who would have cultural practices or values different to those in China, may behave in different ways and have varied preferences and perception of exotic local culture and sense of home when staying in guest houses in remote destinations. The moderating effect of cultural distance for tourists from other countries staying in guest houses may evoke a different result if studied in the context of other countries. Future studies could include Westerners and explore the potential difference of their perceptions on guest houses in remote destinations.

Second, there is a lack of generalizability in the sample of this study. The data were collected from only one typical remote tourist area in northwest China during summer, which may have led to non-response bias and posed a potential risk to the interpretation of study outcomes. For instance, there are more cultural festivals in winter, which may attract tourists with more sensibility to exotic cultures and those who are from areas with low and high cultural distances. Therefore, participants may have reported different attitudes if the research was conducted in a different season. Future studies could take into consideration the seasonal changes and collect more reliable data across different time periods to further validate the current conclusive model.

Third, we only included cultural distance as the moderating variable. However, there are numerous variables, such as age, education, and sex, which might also affect the relation between tourists' perception of exotic local culture, sense of home, and loyalty to guest houses. Future studies could use them to validate further the relation between tourists' perception of exotic local culture, sense of home, and guest house loyalty.

**Author Contributions:** The three authors made substantial contributions to conception and design and participated in drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content. They made the broadest range of different contributions. For example, T.(T.)S. developed the theoretical framework and quantitative research design. As the principal investigator, T.(T.)S. provided conceptual and technical guidance for aspects of the project. B.H. provided a critical revision of the manuscript. J.(J.)L. performed and analyzed the data. These three authors gave final approval of the version to be submitted.

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