

## Article

# China Viewed by the West before COVID-19: Spaniards' Perceptions and Knowledge of China as a Tourist Destination

Pedro Cuesta-Valiño <sup>1,\*</sup> , Antoni Serra-Cantallops <sup>2</sup> , José Ramón-Cardona <sup>3</sup>  and Rafael Ravina-Ripoll <sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Economics and Business Management, Universidad de Alcalá, 28802 Alcalá de Henares, Spain

<sup>2</sup> Department of Business Economics, University of the Balearic Islands, 07122 Palma, Spain; antoni.serra@uib.es

<sup>3</sup> Ibiza Island Council University College of Tourism, University of the Balearic Islands, 07800 Ibiza, Spain; jose.ramon@uib.es

<sup>4</sup> Department of Business Organization and INDESS, University of Cádiz, 11002 Cádiz, Spain; rafael.ravina@uca.es

\* Correspondence: pedro.cuesta@uah.es

**Abstract:** China is not only becoming a major international tourist destination, and it also has huge potential as an issuing market. Spain, meanwhile, has long ranked among the world's top tourist destinations, and as an issuing market, it is gradually growing in importance. There is high potential for an increase in tourist flows between Spain and China in both directions. This paper analyses Spaniards' perceptions of China as a country and as a tourist destination and their familiarity with the reality of this Asiatic country, before the first news about COVID-19. Likewise, it aims to identify possible factors that might inhibit Spaniards from traveling on holiday to China while also offering an initial insight into Spain's future potential as an issuing market to China. For this purpose, 1063 interviews were conducted and analyzed. The results point to a strong potential intention by Spaniards to visit China, although it also reveals very little familiarity with the reality of China as a tourist destination, except for its two major symbols, Beijing and the Great Wall. The results also seem to indicate the existence of big travel inhibitors among certain segments, mainly related to the travel costs, politics and safety, environmental issues, and a lack of awareness of the quality standards of China's tourist sector. Future studies should analyze the changes that the pandemic may have produced in China's image.

**Keywords:** Spain; China; perceptions; knowledge; tourism destination image



**Citation:** Cuesta-Valiño, P.; Serra-Cantallops, A.; Ramón-Cardona, J.; Ravina-Ripoll, R. China Viewed by the West before COVID-19: Spaniards' Perceptions and Knowledge of China as a Tourist Destination. *Land* **2021**, *10*, 950. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land10090950>

Academic Editor: Hossein Azadi

Received: 30 July 2021

Accepted: 5 September 2021

Published: 8 September 2021

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2021 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Tourism destination image (TDI) or the perception of a tourist region, is a very traditional area of study in academic literature [1–11] and a topic of great interest in the tourism sector [12], and especially in China [13]. This extensive literature on TDI is due to the importance it has for destination management organizations (DMO) and tourism companies. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that the TDI is dynamic and changes over time [14–18].

In tourism research, the definition of TDI “includes the perceptions or impressions a person has of a place” [19] (p. 9). As with many other concepts in the social sciences, there is a multitude of definitions for the TDI [20,21], although there is a certain consensus that the tourist image is the general impression [22] or perception [2] that people have of a specific region or place. Research on the TDI is fundamental [23] by allowing: understanding the level of brand awareness of the region, proposing strategies for positioning the destination, evaluating the promotion and communication plans, and trying to predict the behavior of tourists, among others [24].

This importance of TDI for destinations (cities, regions, or countries) leads to the study objective of this article: How is China, the great emerging power of the East, seen by the

population of Spain, one of the most important countries in tourism in the West? This allows us to analyze the TDI of a great emerging tourist destination from the eyes of one of the largest and most consolidated tourist destinations. It is also an example of how the East is seen from the West and how cultural distance appears in the results [25,26].

China is a colossus of almost 9.6 million square kilometers and 1398 million inhabitants [27]. In the last forty years, China has experienced very important development in multiple economic and strategic sectors, including the tourism sector. Since the beginning of the 21st century, China has been an important origin for international tourists and also a very prominent international tourist destination. The evolution as a host country led the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to foresee in 2010 that China would be the first destination in the world in international tourist arrivals. In 2010, it was the fourth country by number of international arrivals, and, in 2019, it was still the fourth country, behind France, Spain, and the United States, and closely followed by Italy [28]. This indicates that the UNWTO forecasts for China were wrong because the significant improvement in China's inbound tourism has been accompanied by a significant improvement in inbound tourism in other countries at the top of the world ranking. It should also be noted that the figures provided by China are not comparable with Western countries for various reasons that will be detailed later.

For its part, Spain has 0.5 million square kilometers and 47 million inhabitants [27]. Since the fifties of the 20th century, it has had a positive evolution in various economic parameters and has maintained a preminent position as an international tourist destination, remaining among the world's top positions. This is reflected in elements such as the fact that the UNWTO is based in Madrid. In 2019, Spain ranked second in the world in terms of international tourist arrivals, closing the gap with France, the first world destination in previous years [28]. Over the years, more and more Spaniards have traveled outside of the country, but the numbers of tourist departures are still far from the numbers of tourist arrivals.

The present study aims to ask the residents of a country about other countries as potential tourist destinations, an approach with precedents in the literature [29,30]. This type of analysis has been carried out previously, asking Spaniards about the image as a tourist destination of other countries, such as Cuba [31] or Mexico [32]. In this case, Spaniards were asked about their perception of China, a specific analysis of which there is no evidence of previous studies, and, for the first time, Spain is seen as an issuing market for China. Attempts are made to determine China's image as a country and tourist destination, and the study is conducted based on the whole potential market and not just on travelers that are already on a visit to a specific part of China.

It also has the added interest that the fieldwork was completed before the first news about COVID-19 appeared, therefore capturing the image of China before the effect of the pandemic, and can be an initial benchmark to measure changes caused by the pandemic. Such comparative analyses have been carried out in other destinations that suffered disasters [33,34].

Therefore, this paper contributes to the line of studies focusing on the analysis of the image of China abroad, one important topic that has received little research attention considering the importance of China in the global economic and political context. Moreover, it makes an additional contribution to the knowledge of how citizens in western European countries perceive China as a tourism destination, which can be considered scarce given that the number of studies focusing on the TDI of China is even more limited. Finally, by taking a pre-pandemic snapshot, the article opens up the possibility of measuring the potential effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on China's image as a country and tourist destination.

## 2. Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

Since 1978, inbound tourism in China has been constantly increasing, as has research about tourism in the country [35]. In 2018, Mainland China had 158.6 million international arrivals, including tourists (62.9 million) and excursionists (95.7 million). Chinese outbound

tourism was 149.7 million tourists, and, in addition, there were 5539 million domestic trips (many of them coinciding with the celebration of the Chinese New Year) [36]. However, it should be noted that the international arrivals figure is misleading, as 70% of international arrivals were from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, that is, the first two being cities that are part of China (although with a particular political status) and the second a territory that is considered by the Chinese government in Beijing to be part of the country. Therefore, only 47.95 million arrivals were specifically from non-Chinese countries. If the figures for Mainland China are consolidated with the autonomous regions of Hong Kong and Macau, in 2018 there were 71,317,345 arrivals of foreigners. If the figures are consolidated with Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, the arrivals of foreigners totaled 68,913,212 [37]. Even with this recalculation, China would continue to maintain the fourth position in the world ranking. Finally, China's millenary cultural heritage constitutes its main tourism attraction [38–40].

Spain has long been a major tourist destination, ranking systematically among the world's top tourist destinations in recent decades. Additionally, within a European context, Spain has seen a progressive rise in its relative importance as an issuing tourist market in recent years. This evolution goes hand in hand with a growing level of economic development and a progressive increase in the income available to its inhabitants. Regarding outbound tourism, in 2018, there were 22.4 million departures of Spaniards (19.1 million tourists and 3.3 million excursionists), figures much lower than those of inbound tourism [36].

The available official statistics show relatively low visitor numbers in both directions. In 2018, there were 167,988 Spanish tourists to China and 649,032 Chinese tourists to Spain [37]. Between 2013 and 2018, Chinese tourists in Spain increased by 156.5% and Spanish tourists in China 26.9%. Thus, there is a big potential for growth in tourism between both countries in both directions. However, from a review of existing academic literature, hardly any studies can be found aimed at boosting both markets' degree of knowledge and their mutual potential as issuing markets.

Several previous studies have analyzed Mainland Chinese's image of other tourism destinations [41,42], specifically Australia [42–45], Hong Kong [46–50], Macau [51–53], Japan [50,54,55], Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, Egypt, and Germany [54]. The volume of studies on the image of Taiwan (Republic of China) among tourists and residents of Mainland China (People's Republic of China) is striking [56–61]. They may be inspired by an interest in improving relations between both parties through tourism.

At the same time, papers that explore visitors' image or perceptions of China [62–67] tend to concentrate on particular places, for example, Beijing [68–73], the Four Great Buddhist Mountains [74], Hainan [75], Luoyang [72], Nanjing [72], Qingdao [76], Shanghai [77,78], Xi'an [72], and Xinjiang [79], or very specific tourist products, for example, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games [69,80–82].

Some studies have analyzed the image of China in North America [14,22,24,80–84], Taiwan [85], and Singapore [86]. Studies of issuing tourist markets regard Europe as a single entity, and, if they enter into greater detail, they just take into consideration certain European outbound markets (United Kingdom, France, Germany, or Italy), systematically ignoring Spain as an issuing market [40,87]. Only Seguí and Capellà [88] study certain aspects of Spanish tourism to China.

The present article tries to continue and deepen the line started by Seguí and Capellà [88]. For this purpose, the country and the destination image of China among Spaniards are analyzed. The country image is an antecedent of the destination image, the latter being a direct antecedent of the intention to visit [73]. However, among the people who have not visited the destination, there is a greater overlap between the country and the destination image, particularly in the case of little-known tourism destinations [85], as is the case of China for Spaniards. For this reason, in this article, there is a strong overlap between the destination image and the country image. Therefore, this article poses five main research questions to which it will attempt to provide answers:

1. What was the country image of China among Spaniards before the COVID-19 outbreak?

2. What was the perception of China as a tourism destination among Spaniards before the COVID-19 outbreak?
3. What was the degree of knowledge of the main tourist attractions of China among Spaniards before the COVID-19 outbreak?
4. How interested were Spaniards in visiting China before the COVID-19 outbreak?
5. What were the main barriers or inhibitors for Spaniards to undertake a holiday trip to China before the COVID-19 outbreak?

### 3. Methods

Almost from its origins, TDI studies have focused the analysis on two approaches: structured with closed questions or unstructured with open questions or interview scripts [24,89–96]. The structured approach is much more used than the unstructured [97,98] because it allows quantitative analysis since the responses are easily coded and analyzed [96]. In studies with a structured approach, two components of TDI are proposed, the cognitive image [7,97–99] and the affective image [1,99], which are specified in an interview with lists of items on which individuals are questioned [89]. These items are grouped in dimensions through factorial analysis [100], allowing greater ease of interpretation of the results.

The items used in studies with a structured approach are easy to code and analyze [96] but they do not allow individualized and spontaneous responses from the interviewees [62,89,90,92,96], and thus do not provide descriptions that can be of great value. The absence of this type of response can hide the reality of what attracts potential visitors [92,96,101,102]. The structured approach is a simplification of the heterogeneous reality that normally inhabits below and implies the assumption of a homogeneous image among the respondents [103]. This leads some researchers to propose unstructured approaches, for example through in-depth interviews or surveys with open-ended free-response questions [59], to provide a richer vision and reduce the bias that can be committed in the structured approach when determining the questions to be asked.

On the other hand, in studies with an unstructured approach, there is the enormous challenge of managing the semantics and lexicon of the responses. This implies the intervention of the researcher and the entry into play of the researcher's subjectivity being an enormous methodological challenge the content analysis in these cases [104]. Therefore, some researchers have combined both approaches (structured and unstructured) to better capture the nuances of TDI and partially neutralize the problems of both approaches [63,89–96].

The methodology followed in this study combines both structured and unstructured techniques and shares much in common with other studies [45,89,91–95,104,105] and with the reference literature [12]. The study was supported by a questionnaire with various types of questions: with a closed answer option and with a free and open answer option. The first part, made up of 22 items, consisted of statements about China in general and as a tourist destination, based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, with a sixth option “do not know/no reply”. The second part, made up of 16 items, asked for assessments of different aspects of the Chinese tourism supply, also using a Likert scale. The items in these two sections were drawn up from theoretical studies [106,107] and practical studies of specific destinations [45,63,65,67,87,96], although certain peculiarities—such as studying a potential market's general image of China as opposed to that of visitors to a specific place—forced us to create a scale of our own, which contains features of importance from studies like those of Sparks and Pan [45] or Yang et al. [40]. The third part, a set of open-ended questions aimed at measuring the interviewees' general image of China, their knowledge of Chinese attractions and tourist activities, and the main inhibitors to visits to this Asian country, without the distortion that the use of closed-ended questions can cause. The last part, made up of eight closed-ended questions, focused on the interviewees' socio-demographic characteristics and a visit or intended visit by them to China.

Once the questionnaire had been prepared, several pre-tests were carried out with a small sample to verify the understanding of all the questions, and this required making small adjustments. For the fieldwork, a convenience sample was used, and the questionnaires were self-completed by the interviewees, avoiding transcription biases of the open questions. These questionnaires were distributed and collected by a team of university students previously trained.

The fieldwork was performed in different parts of Spain, and a total of 1063 valid interviews (Table 1) were gathered and processed using the DYANE 4.0 statistical package [108]. In the sample, young people with low income and university studies predominate. A total of 96.4% of the sample had not visited China, and the aforementioned presumption of treating the country image and the TDI as the same entity is acceptable [85].

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of the sample used.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender:		
Male.	472	44.4%
Female.	578	54.4%
No Answer.	13	1.2%
Age:		
Less than 25.	426	40.1%
25–34.	213	20.0%
35–44.	114	10.7%
45–54.	191	18.0%
55–64.	77	7.2%
65 or more.	40	3.8%
No Answer.	2	0.2%
Level of Education:		
No education.	28	2.6%
Primary.	137	12.9%
Secondary.	384	36.1%
University.	478	45.0%
No Answer.	36	3.4%
Annual family net income:		
Less than 15,000 €.	220	20.7%
Between 15,001 € to 30,000 €.	386	36.3%
Between 30,001 € a 45,000 €.	206	19.4%
Between 45,001 € a 60,000 €.	92	8.7%
Between 60,001 € a 75,000 €.	40	3.8%
More than 75,000 €.	28	2.6%
No Answer.	91	8.6%
Visit China:		
Yes.	38	3.6%
No.	1023	96.2%
No Answer.	2	0.2%

Using the questions in the first and second parts of the interview, the means were calculated, and the *t*-test for sample means was used to test whether they could be considered different from 3; that is, “indifferent”. The open-ended questions were coded and grouped, ready for univariate analysis. Subsequently, a cross-tabulation was performed with the demographic variables to analyze different patterns in the inhibitors. As there was a certain response bias towards the youngest ages (Table 1), a cross-tabulation of mean values was carried out, concerning the age groups, for all closed-response questions, and the existence of statistical differences was contrasted using Snedecor’s F-test. The results of this analysis appear in Appendix A, and there were only significant differences in 5 of the 38 questions (Tables A1–A4), in particular: a greater intention to travel to China among



young people (Table A1) and different views between people over 65 and under 65 about the attractiveness of China for its gastronomy and beaches (Table A3).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Spaniards' Perceptions of China as a Country

China is considered by the Spanish to be a country with important historic and cultural heritage (84.2%), seen as no doubt becoming a major power in the future (81.1%), both at an economic and political level. In economic terms, for most of the interviewees (66.9%), China can already be considered a developed country, although a significant percentage (24.1%) declared that they disagreed with this statement. Although only a small percentage of respondents mentioned 'environmental pollution' as a feature of China in open-ended questions, when asking about the main factors inhibiting the visit to China in close-ended questions, three out of every four interviewees held the view that China's fast process of economic development has had a big negative impact on the country's environment (as detailed in Section 4.4.). This seems to indicate that the high level of pollution is clearly a negative component in people's image of the country.

To try and ascertain what springs to Spaniards' minds when they think about China, they were asked the following open-ended question: "Define in a few short words what springs to your mind when you think about China as a country". Answered by 1024 (96.3%) individuals, the categorized answers are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** What springs to Spaniards' minds when they think about China?

Definition	Frequency	Percent
Big population.	334	32.6%
Age-old culture.	182	17.8%
Big economic development.	170	16.6%
Gastronomy (characteristic cuisine).	156	15.2%
Country very different to Spain.	143	14.0%
Industry and commerce (Chinese shops).	141	13.8%
Political and legal system.	129	12.6%
Workers and their employment conditions.	125	12.2%
Great Wall.	118	11.5%
Very big country.	103	10.1%
Technology.	95	9.3%
Social inequalities.	92	9.0%
Historic Heritage.	87	8.5%
Oriental exoticism.	50	4.9%
Environmental pollution.	49	4.8%
Natural Heritage.	46	4.5%
Rice and rice fields.	35	3.4%
Major building projects (skyscrapers).	27	2.6%
Tourism.	16	1.6%
Martial arts.	11	1.1%

The most common answer was that China is a very heavily populated country (32.6%) with huge cities. Furthermore, China is seen as a very big country (10.1%) that is unlike Spain (14%), mainly because of its language (1.6%), with an age-old culture (17.8%) and characteristic cuisine (15.2%). A total of 8.5% mention the historic heritage and 4.5% the natural heritage, although these aspects tended to revolve particularly around the Great Wall (11.5%) and the cultivation and consumption of rice (3.4%).

More modern features that were highlighted include China's big economic development (16.6%), which marks it out as a future world power; industry and commerce (13.8%), mainly involving cheap products and imitation products; Chinese technology (9.3%); environmental pollution (4.8%); and major building projects (2.6%), mainly skyscrapers and infrastructure. Other aspects that were mentioned related to the political and legal system (12.6%), lack of freedom and human rights (2.6%), lack of safety (1.0%), law (0.5%), and

international adoptions (0.3%). Workers and their employment conditions (12.2%), and poverty, poor health, and social inequalities (9.0%) are the most recurrent social problems that are alluded to. Despite the Chinese political system, religion—mainly Buddhism—is mentioned in 0.9% of the replies.

Other replies allude to the Orient's exotic facets (4.9%), tourism (1.6%), martial arts (1.1%), and the 2008 Olympic Games (0.5%). No answer mentions the 2010 Shanghai Universal Expo, which would seem to indicate that the universal expos have lost much of their international appeal or repercussion and are currently for internal consumption. As for people, the only ones who are mentioned are Mao Zedong (concerning the political system), Bruce Lee (among the dead), and Yao Ming and Jackie Chan (among the living). Of all four of them, the latter is mentioned the most (0.4%), showing that he is a good choice as the protagonist of Chinese tourism marketing campaigns since he is currently the most famous Chinese person worldwide. Lastly, 1.5% of the interviewees cited something Japanese, confusing the country with China.

#### 4.2. Intention to Visit China

The great majority of the interviewees (96.4%) had not visited China. This is not surprising given the low visitor numbers of Spaniards to China reflected by the available statistics. Despite this reality, what is interesting is the future potential that can be inferred from the answers, since 36.3% declare that they do intend to visit China in the next years, almost all for leisure and tourism purposes. Over half of all those who express an intention to visit the country are university graduates. Alternatively, and taking a longer-term view, circumstances permitting, 54% of the interviewees agreeing that 'China is a really attractive country that they would one day like to visit'. Spain thus seems to have significant potential as an issuing market for China.

#### 4.3. Familiarity with the Destination

Familiarity with the destination is a very important element for the TDI and its conversion into an intention to visit [25,26,73,85]. The high number of potential visitors to China contrasts with the relative lack of familiarity with specific attractions that China offers as a tourist destination. This is reflected by the answers to the closed-ended questions, rated using a 5-point Likert scale (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Familiarity with the destination.

	Mean	Disagree	Agree	No Clear Stance
China has a lot of interesting places to visit.	4.14 **	5.1%	79.3%	15.6%
One of the greatest attractions of China is its culture and differences from the West.	4.23 **	4.3%	84.6%	11.1%
China is a very important tourism destination at an international level.	3.59 **	17.1%	57.4%	25.5%
China has an extensive and varied tourism supply.	3.06	26.3%	28.1%	45.5%
China has a tourism industry with international quality levels.	3.25 **	15.1%	27.4%	57.5%
China's transport and communication networks are modern.	3.59 **	14.1%	42.9%	43.0%
Chinese people have a good knowledge of foreign languages.	2.92 *	28.9%	24.3%	46.8%
Chinese residents show high levels of hospitality with the visitors.	3.44 **	9.4%	30.4%	60.2%
For a tourist, it is easy to travel on your own (independently) in China.	2.29 **	47.7%	9.7%	42.6%
It is better to travel to China on a package holiday.	4.08 **	5.5%	71.6%	23.0%
There is a substantial amount and good information about China's tourism supply.	2.56 **	50.9%	19.2%	29.9%

Note: \*\* The *t*-test rejects the null hypothesis of no difference from 3 (indifferent), with an alpha of 0.01; \* The *t*-test rejects the null hypothesis of no difference from 3 (indifferent), with an alpha of 0.05.

While it is clear that most of the interviewees are convinced that China is a country with many interesting places to visit and that one of its greatest attractions resides in its culture and differences with the West, only 57% agree that it is a very important tourist destination at an international level (25.5% do not know, and 17.1% state that they disagree).

Only 26.3% think that China has an extensive, varied tourism supply. In matters concerning a tourist destination's key attributes, such as the size and variety of its tourism supply, the standards of quality of the tourism industry, safety at the destination, transport and communication networks, the population's knowledge of foreign languages, and the hospitality shown by the resident population, what is most striking is the high percentage of interviewees who state that they do not know and can therefore neither clearly agree nor disagree. Only a relatively high percentage of agreement was achieved (42.9%) when it comes to the modernity of China's transport and communication networks. Other destination components or attributes (with a higher rating signifying a stronger appeal, *ceteris paribus*, as a destination) fail to achieve a higher rate of agreement than 30%. More than the percentages corresponding to disagreement with the statements, what stands out particularly are the high percentages of interviewees who have no clear stance on the issue, which seems to suggest a big lack of awareness of China's reality as a destination. This is corroborated by the fact that only 19.2% of the interviewees think that a substantial amount of good information can be found about tourism in China. What the interviewees do seem to be clear about is the fact that it is better to travel to China on a package holiday, because independent travel in China is not easy for a foreigner.

This hypothesis of a relative lack of awareness of certain components or attributes of the Chinese tourism supply was reinforced when the interviewees were asked in what respects China stands out. As Table 4 shows, according to the interviewees, using a scale ranging from 1 to 5, China stands out for its heritage; for a culture that is clearly different from Spain's; and for its natural heritage, shopping potential, the modernity of some of its cities, and its gastronomy. There seems to be little doubt in Spaniards' minds when it comes to this set of attributes. However, their lack of clarity and/or awareness is far higher, in all cases over 40%, in aspects relating to the cultural attractions on offer, the standard of service, the standard of accommodation, cleanliness, and hygiene, adventure activities, nightlife and casinos. Over 43% of the interviewees do not seem to know whether China is a destination for sexual tourism or not. We believe that the relatively low ratings that were given to issues that play a fundamental role in a destination's appeal and competitiveness are particularly worthy of mention, such as the standard of service and accommodation and, above all, the perception that China is a destination with a low level of cleanliness and hygiene.

**Table 4.** China stands out for . . . .

In My Opinion, China Stands Out for . . .	Mean	Disagree	Agree	No Clear Stance
. . . heritage.	4.37 **	2.9%	87.8%	9.3%
. . . a culture that is clearly different from Spain.	4.27 **	3.5%	85.1%	11.4%
. . . natural heritage.	4.09 **	6.7%	80.2%	13.2%
. . . possibilities for shopping.	3.94 **	10.6%	68.7%	20.7%
. . . the modernity of some of its cities.	3.92 **	9.3%	65.9%	24.8%
. . . gastronomy.	3.73 **	16.7%	65.9%	17.4%
. . . big events (festivals, competitions, etc.).	3.42 **	18.2%	43.4%	38.5%
. . . cultural attractions (art, opera, theatre, etc.).	3.33 **	19.5%	38.6%	42.0%
. . . standard of service.	3.06	20.7%	24.4%	54.9%
. . . standard of accommodation.	3.04	19.5%	20.8%	59.7%
. . . sexual tourism.	2.90 *	29.6%	26.7%	43.7%
. . . nightlife.	2.81 **	28.3%	17.4%	54.3%
. . . casinos.	2.77 **	30.1%	17.9%	52.0%
. . . adventure activities.	2.61 **	37.3%	15.3%	47.4%
. . . cleanliness and hygiene.	2.48 **	44.8%	14.1%	41.1%
. . . sun and beach offerings.	1.91 **	65.6%	5.2%	29.3%

Note: \*\* The *t*-test rejects the null hypothesis of no difference from 3 (indifferent), with an alpha of 0.01; \* The *t*-test rejects the null hypothesis of no difference from 3 (indifferent), with an alpha of 0.05.



To try and gather more information about how familiar the interviewees were with China's tourist attractions, an open-ended question was asked, wherein the interviewees could answer in their own words what specific monuments or places they knew. The open-ended question "Name China's foremost attractions (monuments, places, available attractions, etc.)" was answered by 1002 individuals (94.3%). What stands out is the high percentage of generalities that were cited in reply (using the terms monasteries and pagodas, nature and scenery, cities, etc.), instead of naming specific tourist attractions, thus demonstrating a low level of knowledge or familiarity. Broadly speaking, the attractions that were mentioned can be grouped into monuments (94.1%), cities (29.5%), landscapes and natural spaces (15.4%), Chinese culture (11.7%), technology (2.2%), and others (0.4%), revealing that China's main attractions are its historic heritage and its big cities. To be more precise, the replies mention two types of attractions: general ones and ones specific to a particular place in China. Among the generic ones, mention can be made of (Table 5):

- Monuments in general (23.1%), with 5.6% of the replies simply using the generic term 'monument' and, more particularly, temples, monasteries, and pagodas (16.9%), palaces (1.8%), and museums (0.4%). Specific examples that were cited include Shaolin Temple (0.5%).
- Chinese culture in general (11.4%), with 4.9% of the replies using the generic expression 'Chinese culture', followed, more specifically, by the cuisine (6.2%), Chinese festivals and celebrations (2%), and the opera (0.4%).
- Nature and the landscape in general (12.7%), with 9.2% of the replies using the generic term 'nature and the landscape' and most replies referring to emblematic features like paddy fields (1.8%), panda bears (1.2%), and bamboo (0.4%). Specific examples that were cited include rivers (Yellow River, Yangtze River, Li River, and Pearl River), the Longmen Grottoes, Gobi Desert, Inner Mongolia, Silk Road, etc.
- Cities in general (7%) and trading products (5.5%) were features mentioned as complementing the tourism supply. Other attractions that were mentioned were technology (2.2%) and porcelain (0.3%).

**Table 5.** Generic attractions mentioned.

Attraction	Frequency	Percent
Monuments:	231	23.1%
• Temples	169	16.9%
• Palaces	18	1.8%
China Culture:	114	11.4%
• Gastronomy	62	6.2%
• Chinese celebrations	20	2.0%
Landscape:	127	12.7%
• Paddy fields	18	1.8%
• Giant panda	12	1.2%
Shopping	55	5.5%
Cities	70	7.0%
Technology	22	2.2%
Porcelain	3	0.3%

The following stand out among those places in China whose attractions were explicitly mentioned (Figure 1 and Table 6):

- Beijing (88.8%), for the city itself (11.7%) and attractions in the vicinity like the Great Wall (88.8%), Forbidden City (8.8%), Olympic Village (2.4%) with the Beijing National Stadium (1%), Summer Palace (1.6%), Tiananmen Square (3.9%) and Temple of Heaven (0.8%). This predominant role played by the capital is reflected in package holidays to China as the study by Seguí and Capellà [88] shows.

- Xi'an (8.2%), particularly the Terracotta Army (7.9%) and Great Mosque (0.3%). It should be noted that the success of Xi'an has generated problems of tourist overcrowding in the city [109].
- Other places that are mentioned are Shanghai (6.8%), Hong Kong (5.1%), the Tibet region (3.4%), Nanjing (0.9%) with Sun Yat-Sen's Mausoleum (0.3%), and Macau (0.5%). A lack of familiarity with many of the country's big cities is particularly noticeable.



**Figure 1.** Places in China whose attractions were explicitly mentioned.

Lastly, it is important to add that 1.8% of the interviewees mention attractions in Japan (Mount Fuji, etc.) or India (the Golden Temple, etc.), thinking that they are Chinese. The results of this open-ended question are similar to the study of Pan and Li [24].

The open-ended question “List the most interesting activities that you think you can do on a trip to China” was answered by 932 individuals (87.7%). The proposed activities can be classified into different groups (Table 7):

- Cultural tourism (79.9%). Visiting monuments (61.9%), tasting typical Chinese food (21.6%), learning about Chinese culture in general (21.5%), attending typical Chi-

- nese festivities (2%), and learning Chinese (0.8%) are some of the activities that the interviewees think visitors can do to get to know China's culture and history.
- Urban tourism (39.7%). They believe that Chinese cities offer a range of activities, such as shopping for products of all kinds (25.2%), from food to electronics, including imitations, as well as visiting the town center (14.4%) and enjoying the nightlife (1.6%) and shows (1.8%). Other activities that might fit into this category are business (0.6%), technological learning activities (0.9%), casinos (0.5%), and sexual tourism (0.6%).
  - Nature tourism (31%). Foremost activities in the countryside include visits to natural spaces, towns, villages, and agricultural areas (21.6%), and hikes and excursions (11.5%).
  - Sports (3.7%). Only martial arts are explicitly mentioned (2%), together with tai chi (1.6%).

**Table 6.** Particular attractions explicitly mentioned.

Attraction	Frequency	Percent
Beijing city and area:	890	88.8%
• City	117	11.7%
• Great Wall	886	88.4%
• Forbidden City	88	8.8%
• Tiananmen Square	39	3.9%
• Olympic Village	24	2.4%
• Summer Palace	16	1.6%
Xi'an city and area:	82	8.2%
• Terracotta Army	79	7.9%
Shanghai city and area	68	6.8%
Hong Kong city and area	51	5.1%
Tibet region	34	3.4%
Nanjing city and area	9	0.9%
Macau city and area	5	0.5%

**Table 7.** Most interesting activities.

Concept	Frequency	Percent
Cultural Tourism:	745	79.9%
• Visiting museums.	577	61.9%
• Tasting typical Chinese food.	201	21.6%
• Learning about Chinese culture.	200	21.5%
• Attending typical Chinese festivities.	19	2.0%
Urban Tourism:	370	39.7%
• Shopping.	235	25.2%
• Visiting towns.	134	14.4%
• Shows.	17	1.8%
• Nightlife.	15	1.6%
Nature tourism:	289	31.0%
• Nature and rural tourism.	201	21.6%
• Hikes and excursions.	107	11.5%
• Adventure tourism.	13	1.4%
• Relax and health.	10	1.1%
Sports:	40	4.3%
• Sports in general.	15	1.6%
• Martial arts.	19	2.0%
• Tai chi.	15	1.6%

Finally, 1.2% of the interviewees cite activities typical of Japan (karate, watching sumo wrestling, eating raw fish, etc.) or India (yoga), in the belief that they are Chinese.

#### 4.4. Factors Inhibiting Visits to China

Potential factors inhibiting visits to China were identified by combining the statements with which the interviewees were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement, using a 5-point Likert scale, with an open-ended question. Although it was harder to process statistically, this last question is of substantial interest in terms of the information that can be gathered by not limiting replies and by allowing the interviewees to answer in their own words.

The results that were obtained from the closed-ended questions (Table 8) seem to clearly indicate that the greatest inhibitor to potential trips to China is the high cost of the trip, followed by the physical distance between both countries (which, in turn, affects the cost of the trip in terms of money and time). The clear perception that China's economic development has been achieved at the expense of a high level of environmental degradation might also act as an inhibitor, given the growing concern that all western Europe's population has with environmental issues. Chinese socio-political conditions also seem to have a certain relative importance as inhibitors, together with the fact that, once in China, visitors have to travel long distances to get to its foremost tourist attractions. The final possible inhibitor is a concern as to whether China is a safe place for tourists, an aspect that has already been commented on concerning the interviewees' lack of familiarity with Mainland China as a tourist destination.

**Table 8.** Factors inhibiting visits to China (close-ended questions).

	Mean	Disagree	Agree	No Clear Stance
The cost of a trip to China is high.	4.40 *	3.3%	83.3%	13.5%
China's economic development has been achieved at the expense of a high level of environmental degradation.	4.22 *	4.2%	75.4%	20.4%
The physical distance between Spain and China is not a real problem when deciding to travel to this country.	2.53 *	59.9%	27.6%	12.5%
Chinese socio-political conditions do not influence the decision to travel to China.	2.85 *	42.5%	32.2%	25.3%
I don't like that, once in China, I have to travel long distances to visit its foremost tourist attractions.	3.66 *	8.0%	43.3%	48.7%
China is a safe place for tourists.	2.97	29.9%	28.0%	42.1%

Note: \* The *t*-test rejects the null hypothesis of no difference from 3 (indifferent), with an alpha of 0.01.

The open-ended question "What factors might discourage or even prevent you from making a possible trip to China for tourism purposes?" was answered by 974 interviewees (91.6%), and the results seem to confirm the above. The main drawback for the interviewees is the huge distance between both countries. This big distance pushes the cost up substantially (49%), in addition to the inconvenience of such a long trip and the fact that more time must be made available (39%). It should be added that tourists tend to take longer holidays when the distance between the issuing and destination countries is longer. Other factors that act as a possible inhibitor are (Table 9):

- Politics and safety (28%). Fear of encountering problems due to the Chinese political regime and its laws (19%), and citizen insecurity (9.1%), or a lack of freedom (2.1%).
- The huge difference between the Chinese and Spanish languages, when spoken and written, also puts people off traveling to China (16.8%), partly due to the belief that very few Chinese people know a foreign language.
- The cultural gap (16.3%). Cultural differences (7.9%), Chinese cuisine (5.3%), and overcrowding in such a heavily populated country (3.8%) can deter less adventurous people, while they constitute an attraction for the rest.
- The tourism supply (9.4%). A possible lack of hygiene and suitable medical care (5.3%), the risk of poor tourism services (accommodation, transport, tourist guides, etc.) (2.6%), and a lack of available tourist information (2%). A concern for the standards of the tourism supply and, above all, for hygiene and healthcare among potential

tourists from countries at a physical and cultural distance from the destination country has already been identified in some studies related to China, both as a destination market [40] and issuing market [45]. The study by Yang et al. [40] shows that tourists from Asian countries are less concerned than tourists from the rest of the world about hygiene and healthcare in China.

- The environment (6.3%). Environmental pollution (3.9%) and extreme climatic phenomena (2.5%), hurricanes, storms, earthquakes, heavy snow, and heatwaves.
- Pockets of poverty and social gaps among different parts of the country (2.5%) can generate a sensation of guilt among possible tourists.
- Age or individual's health (1.5%), mainly in the case of the elderly and those with chronic illnesses. While China is a destination for third-age tourism from countries like Japan [40], Spain's potential market does not regard it as such, probably due to the very long journey that such trips entail.

**Table 9.** Factors inhibiting visits to China (open-ended questions).

Concept	Frequency	Percent
Cost.	477	49.0%
Distance and Time.	380	39.0%
Politics and Safety:	273	28.0%
• Chinese political regime.	185	19.0%
• Unsafe place.	89	9.1%
• Lack of freedom.	20	2.1%
Language.	164	16.8%
Cultural Gap:	159	16.3%
• Cultural differences.	77	7.9%
• Chinese cuisine.	52	5.3%
• Overcrowded place.	37	3.8%
Tourism Supply:	92	9.4%
• Lack of hygiene and suitable medical care.	52	5.3%
• Poor tourism services.	25	2.6%
• Lack of information.	19	2.0%
Environment:	61	6.3%
• Environment pollution.	38	3.9%
• Climate.	24	2.5%
Poverty and Social Gaps.	24	2.5%
Age and Health.	15	1.5%

These results largely coincide with the study by Yang et al. [40]. Aside from the above, some surveys show that some individuals simply turn down the idea of visiting China (1.5%) without stating why, while some say that other destinations are more of a priority for them (1%).

The results of this question were cross-tabulated with the subjects' demographic variables, and a chi-squared test was calculated. Significant differences could only be observed in relation to age, the level of education, and employment. With the help of the Student's *t*-test and Snedecor's *F*-test with a level of significance of 0.01, the main differences were determined within the significant cross tabulations. It only remains to highlight that:

- The importance lent to the financial cost as a travel inhibitor is greater among the younger sector of the population and lower among those interviewees occupying more important employment posts, which would seem to be related to income.
- The higher the level of education, the more concern for politics in China. University graduates are three times more worried about the political and legal situation in China than people with no formal studies.



- Lastly, people over 55 years old and, more particularly, over 65 years old cite age or the fact that they suffer from an illness as an impediment.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, five research questions were raised and the results discussed above shed light on the answers to these questions.

To summarize and concerning the first research question centered on the country's image of China, which is very important to attract tourists to any destination [9,73,85], China is seen by Spaniards as a future major power and as an economically developed country with important historic and cultural heritage, a similar result as a previous study carried out in the USA [84], although it pays little attention to looking after the environment, something analyzed by some previous literature [68,71]. Spaniards are particularly struck by components associated with size (the big population, immense size of the country), culture (an age-old, exotic, very different culture, with a rich heritage), and certain components associated with political and economic aspects (economic growth rates, trade, and the peculiarities of its political and legal system and labor market), an image dominated by a few very popular phrases [24].

In regards to the perception and degree of knowledge of China as a tourism destination among Spaniards, China is a big unknown, but at the same time, it holds an appeal. Spaniards have a fairly widespread lack of knowledge of China as a tourist destination, it being essential to increase this knowledge to improve the destination image [22,104]. Interestingly, Gorostidi-Martinez et al. [110] reached a similar conclusion when outlining the overall contemporary Chinese product-country image among Spanish consumers; thus, it seems that what is occurring with Chinese products can be extended to the Chinese TDI. Although Spaniards acknowledge that China is a country with abundant tourism resources and major historic, cultural, and natural heritage [38,40], their precise knowledge of its main attractions is relatively low, with the clear exception of Beijing and the Great Wall. In the case of China's outbound tourism, there is similar ignorance and confusion about the most distant destinations [54].

Spaniards are very unclear about tourism components that play a fundamental role in a destination's ability to compete internationally (quality, the level of safety at the destination, transport networks, the hospitality shown by the people, cleanliness and hygiene, etc.), these being aspects essential for tourist decision-making [8,40,43,45,49,54,80,86,91]. They do not have a negative opinion. They simply do not have sufficient information.

On the other hand, there is a certain degree of confusion regarding tourist attractions and activities in China, being mentioned as Chinese aspects corresponding to other Oriental countries, like Japan or India. Our results are, thus, aligned to some extent with the findings of Seguí and Capellà [88], who indicated that the Spanish outbound tourism market to China was still at the involvement-development stage. Although more than a decade has passed, it seems that there has been little change in this respect as the range of tourist attractions well-known by the Spaniards remain at a limited level.

Regarding the fourth and fifth research questions, Spain seems to have high potential as an issuing market if we assess this in terms of Spaniards' intention to visit the country. Big potential is offered by cultural and urban tourism, although nature tourism also offers significant possibilities. However, certain aspects inhibit people from visiting China. The main one is the cost, in monetary terms and in time. However, there are also other factors that might discourage visits, like issues related to the political situation and tourist safety. Many of these doubts are due to the lack of cultural similarity, a very important aspect when trying to promote tourism between two countries [25,26,57,59,73,85]. The cost of traveling to China was also pointed out by Yang et al. [40] as a key determinant for Europeans when thinking of traveling to China for holiday purposes, but it seems that it plays a more important role as an inhibitor factor in the case of the Spanish market.

When examining the US tourist's perceived image of China as a tourism destination, Cai and Wang [14] noticed a drastic shift of the U.S. tourists' affective image of China

from being favorable and positive in the period 1980–1989 to being unfavorable and negative in the more recent period 2005–2015. The authors point out that, paradoxically, such a sentimental shift occurred while the US tourist's perception of China's destination attributes either did not change or grew more positive. One possible explanation might be due to some slightly negative influence of political aspects on the image as our study on the Spanish market reveals.

Our results also seem to indicate that one of the major negative influences on China's image as a tourist destination, as well as one of the main inhibitors to visit the country, are environmental issues, suggesting that the progressive introduction of more sustainable environmental policies in the future would enhance the country's appeal as a tourist destination. The negative impact of pollution and sustainability issues on the image of China was also identified by Becken et al. [111] and Chen et al. [112]; thus, their results aligned with the results of this study.

### *5.1. Managerial Implications*

The results seem to suggest that China would benefit from an increased effort in marketing and communication campaigns in Spain in all matters concerning China as a tourist destination: the tourism resources, available activities, and, above all, issues that might make potential Spanish visitors feel less insecure when faced with such a long journey, such as the standard of accommodation, the standard of service, the hospitality of the resident population, safety at the destination and freedom of movement, the standard of healthcare (if required), language skills of staff in contact with visitors, etc. In the case of certain inhibitors, like the cost and distance, the potential for tackling these issues is more limited (although increased flight connections might help to reduce the cost). In the case of other inhibitors stemming from a relative lack of awareness of reality, communication initiatives can be very effective.

Overall, the results of the study seem to point to the fact that, if the right measures are taken, the prospects of promoting tourism to China are good.

### *5.2. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research*

This study is intended to be an initial analysis of Spaniards' perceptions and familiarity with China as a country and as a tourist destination. It is thus an exploratory study. In this respect, we are aware of the study's limitations. Determining aspects concerning people's perceived image, perceptions and their level of knowledge or awareness of a country is a complex matter, and, in this sense, in future research, the analyzed variables could probably be complemented with others and the measurement tools improved on. Additionally, this research study should be complemented by exploring sources of information that make an impact on Spaniards' perceived image of China and the ones Spaniards tend to consult to find out information about China's tourist attractions.

The results of this study refer to China's image in the West before COVID-19. The appearance of the pandemic in China and the various actions taken by the government, companies, and individuals of that country have been able to cause a series of negative and positive effects on the perception of the Asian country, as indicated by studies in other disaster contexts [33,34]. This leads us to propose, as a future line of research, a repetition of the analysis to determine if there are changes in the TDI and the country's image and if this change is positive or negative.

Nevertheless, this study can constitute a first step to develop a methodology that could allow reproducing similar studies about China in other countries to increase the knowledge of how the reality of today's modern China is perceived by the rest of the world. This could be of help for the better management of the country that will soon become one of the major tourist destinations worldwide and a major economic player. Moreover, we think the methodology could be replicated in other studies trying to measure the country's image and the TDI in other countries.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, and writing, P.C.-V., A.S.-C., J.R.-C. and R.R.-R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors want to thank the collaboration to the Instituto Universitario de Desarrollo Social y Sostenible (INDESS) of the University of Cádiz from Spain.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Spaniards' perceptions of China as a country (differences by age).

	<25	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	≥65	Snedecor's F
China is a developed country.	3.71	3.68	3.66	3.42	3.64	3.73	1.83 <sup>ns</sup>
China is the major power of the future.	4.18	4.22	4.17	4.14	4.12	3.63	2.53 *
China has a great heritage, both historical and cultural.	4.32	4.50	4.33	4.38	4.34	4.50	1.48 <sup>ns</sup>
China is a really attractive country that I would like to visit.	3.67	3.69	3.52	3.47	3.45	2.98	2.69 *

Note: \* Significant at 0.05; <sup>ns</sup> Not significant.

**Table A2.** Familiarity with the destination (differences by age).

	<25	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	≥65	Snedecor's F
China has a lot of interesting places to visit.	4.19	4.32	4.29	4.36	4.22	3.90	2.17 <sup>ns</sup>
One of the greatest attractions of China is its culture and differences with the West.	4.29	4.32	4.29	4.26	4.23	4.13	0.47 <sup>ns</sup>
China is a very important tourism destination at an international level.	3.66	3.78	3.75	3.72	3.62	4.00	0.97 <sup>ns</sup>
China has an extensive and varied tourism supply.	3.73	3.74	3.64	3.62	3.73	3.69	0.19 <sup>ns</sup>
China has a tourism industry with international quality levels.	4.30	4.23	4.27	4.24	3.95	3.68	1.72 <sup>ns</sup>
China's transport and communication networks are modern.	4.36	4.31	4.20	4.28	4.25	3.80	1.27 <sup>ns</sup>
Chinese people have a good knowledge of foreign languages.	4.01	3.80	3.82	3.82	3.95	4.49	1.51 <sup>ns</sup>
Chinese residents show high levels of hospitality with the visitors.	4.48	4.65	4.42	4.53	4.35	4.18	1.06 <sup>ns</sup>
For a tourist, it is easy to travel on your own (independently) in China.	3.30	3.56	3.61	3.38	3.14	3.38	1.14 <sup>ns</sup>
It is better to travel to China on a package holiday.	4.45	4.20	4.40	4.24	4.38	4.43	2.16 <sup>ns</sup>
There is a substantial amount and good information about China's tourism supply.	2.92	2.97	2.98	2.93	3.19	3.08	0.50 <sup>ns</sup>

Note: <sup>ns</sup> Not significant.

**Table A3.** China stands out for ... (differences by age).

In My Opinion, China Stands Out for ...	<25	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	≥65	Snedecor's F
... heritage.	4.45	4.53	4.46	4.34	4.34	4.43	1.42 <sup>ns</sup>
... a culture that is clearly different from Spain.	4.37	4.34	4.22	4.35	4.25	4.15	1.08 <sup>ns</sup>
... natural heritage.	4.17	4.28	4.13	4.16	4.01	4.00	1.31 <sup>ns</sup>
... possibilities for shopping.	4.12	4.15	3.89	4.01	4.04	4.38	1.75 <sup>ns</sup>
... the modernity of some of its cities.	4.25	4.11	4.24	4.07	4.05	4.05	1.17 <sup>ns</sup>
... gastronomy.	3.95	3.92	4.11	3.63	3.77	3.43	3.94 **
... big events (festivals, competitions, etc.).	3.85	3.86	3.90	3.69	3.70	4.08	0.92 <sup>ns</sup>

Table A3. Cont.

In My Opinion, China Stands Out for ...	<25	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	≥65	Snedecor's F
... cultural attractions (art, opera, theatre, etc.).	3.86	3.85	3.96	3.81	3.84	3.68	0.27 <sup>ns</sup>
... standard of service.	3.87	3.97	4.00	3.92	4.00	3.98	0.23 <sup>ns</sup>
... standard of accommodation.	4.02	4.02	4.09	4.13	3.97	4.25	0.30 <sup>ns</sup>
... sexual tourism.	3.70	3.74	3.57	3.51	3.69	4.20	1.25 <sup>ns</sup>
... nightlife.	3.77	3.87	3.90	3.75	3.66	3.90	0.33 <sup>ns</sup>
... casinos.	3.70	3.58	3.71	3.45	3.69	4.18	1.47 <sup>ns</sup>
... adventure activities.	3.38	3.49	3.57	3.52	3.43	4.00	1.10 <sup>ns</sup>
... cleanliness and hygiene.	3.34	3.20	3.12	3.40	3.31	3.20	0.57 <sup>ns</sup>
... sun and beach offer.	2.44	2.58	2.52	2.77	2.32	3.80	5.43 <sup>***</sup>

Note: \*\* Significant at 0.01; \*\*\* Significant at 0.001; <sup>ns</sup> Not significant.

Table A4. Factors inhibiting visits to China (differences by age).

	<25	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	≥65	Snedecor's F
The cost of a trip to China is high.	4.58	4.51	4.49	4.57	4.53	4.30	0.95 <sup>ns</sup>
China's economic development has been achieved at the expense of a high level of environmental degradation.	4.37	4.55	4.35	4.41	4.32	4.55	1.30 <sup>ns</sup>
The physical distance between Spain and China is not a real problem when deciding to travel to this country.	2.60	2.75	2.66	2.79	2.56	2.73	0.70 <sup>ns</sup>
Chinese socio-political conditions have no influence on the decision to travel to China.	3.15	3.16	3.15	3.28	3.12	3.23	0.24 <sup>ns</sup>
I don't like that, once in China, I have to travel long distances to visit its foremost tourist attractions.	4.28	4.34	4.44	4.32	4.47	4.53	0.64 <sup>ns</sup>
China is a safe place for tourists.	3.58	3.88	3.46	3.94	3.52	3.10	3.73 <sup>**</sup>

Note: \*\* Significant at 0.01; <sup>ns</sup> Not significant.

## References

- Baloglu, S.; Brinberg, D. Affective images of tourism destinations. *J. Travel Res.* **1997**, *35*, 11–15. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Baloglu, S.; McCleary, K.W. A model of destination image formation. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **1999**, *26*, 868–897. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Carballo, M.M.; Araña, J.E.; León, C.J.; Moreno-Gil, S. Economic valuation of tourism destination image. *Tour. Econ.* **2015**, *21*, 741–759. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Iordanova, E. Tourism destination image as an antecedent of destination loyalty: The case of Linz, Austria. *Eur. J. Tour. Res.* **2017**, *16*, 214–432.
- Lojo, A.; Li, M.; Xu, H. Online tourism destination image: Components, information sources, and incongruence. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2020**, *37*, 495–509. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Pan, L.; Lu, L.; Zhang, T. Destination gender: Scale development and cross-cultural validation. *Tour. Manag.* **2021**, *83*, e104225. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Stylos, N.; Andronikidis, A. Exploring the cognitive image of a tourism destination. *Tourismos* **2013**, *8*, 77–98.
- Van Dyk, A.; Tkaczynski, A.; Slabbert, E. Repeat tourism, destination image and behavioural intentions: Implications for sustainable development in South Africa. *Tour. Recreat. Res.* **2019**, *44*, 392–398. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Wang, C.; Hsu, M.K. The relationships of destination image, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions: An integrated model. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2010**, *27*, 829–843. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Zain, N.A.M.; Zahari, M.S.M.; Hanafiah, M.H. Food and tourism destination image: Moderating effect of local food consumption. *E-Rev. Tour. Res.* **2018**, *15*, 21–36.
- Zhou, L. Online rural destination images: Tourism and rurality. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2014**, *3*, 227–240. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Tasci, A.D.A.; Gartner, W.C.; Tamer Cavusgil, S. Conceptualization and operationalization of destination image. *J. Hosp. Tour. Res.* **2007**, *31*, 194–223. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Huang, S.S.; Chen, G. Current state of tourism research in China. *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2016**, *20*, 10–18. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Cai, L.; Wang, S. The U.S. tourists' perceptions of destination China over two transformative periods. *Asia Pacific. J. Tour. Res.* **2018**, *23*, 217–230. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chon, K. Tourism destination image modification process. Marketing implications. *Tour. Manag.* **1991**, *12*, 68–72. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Guerreiro, M.; Mendes, J.; Fortuna, C.; Pinto, P. The dynamic nature of the city image: Do image components evolve over time? *Tour. Int. Interdiscip. J.* **2020**, *68*, 83–99. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kim, H.; Chen, J.S. Destination image formation process: A holistic model. *J. Vacat. Mark.* **2016**, *22*, 154–166. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

18. Kong, W.H.; Du Cros, H.; Ong, C. Tourism destination image development: A lesson from Macau. *Int. J. Tour. Cities* **2015**, *1*, 299–316. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
19. McClinchey, K.A. Rural Images Tourism and Sustainability: Perceptions of Rural Accommodation Operators and Their Visitors in Waterloo-Wellington Region, Ontario. Master's Thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON, Canada, 1999.
20. Lai, K.; Li, X. Tourism destination image: Conceptual problems and definitional solutions. *J. Travel Res.* **2016**, *55*, 1065–1080. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
21. Li, X.; Vogelsong, H. Comparing methods of measuring image change: A case study of a small-scale community festival. *Tour. Anal.* **2006**, *10*, 349–360. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
22. Li, X.; Pan, B.; Zhang, L.G.; Smith, W.W. The effect of online information search on image development: Insights from a mixed-methods study. *J. Travel Res.* **2009**, *48*, 45–57. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
23. Hunt, J.D. Image as a factor in tourism development. *J. Travel Res.* **1975**, *13*, 1–7. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
24. Pan, B.; Li, X. The long tail of destination image and online marketing. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2011**, *38*, 132–152. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
25. Sudigdo, A.; Khalifa, G.S.A. The impact of Islamic destination attributes on Saudi Arabians' decision to visit Jakarta: Tourism destination image as a mediating variable. *Int. J. Relig. Tour. Pilgr.* **2020**, *8*, 15–30.
26. Yang, J.; Yuan, B.; Hu, P. Tourism destination image and visit intention: Examining the role of familiarity. *J. China Tour. Res.* **2009**, *5*, 174–187. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
27. CIA. The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency. Available online: <https://www.cia.gov/> (accessed on 17 March 2021).
28. UNWTO. *International Tourism Highlights*, 2020 ed.; World Tourism Organization: Madrid, Spain, 2021.
29. Govers, R.; Go, F.M.; Kumar, K. Promoting tourism destination image. *J. Travel Res.* **2007**, *46*, 15–23. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
30. Okumus, A.; Yasin, B. Images of Italy, France and Morocco as tourist destinations. *Int. J. Tour. Policy* **2009**, *2*, 306–318. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
31. Calderón, H.; Gil, I.; Pons, R.C.; Gallarza, M.G. The “Sun and beach” tourism destination image: An application to the case of Cuba from the Spanish tourist-origin market. *Tour. Rev.* **2004**, *59*, 16–24. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
32. Esper, F.S.; Rateike, J.Á. Tourism destination image and motivations: The Spanish perspective of Mexico. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2010**, *27*, 349–360. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
33. Pearlman, D.; Melnik, O. Hurricane Katrina's effect on the perception of New Orleans leisure tourists. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2008**, *25*, 58–67. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
34. Wu, L.; Shimizu, T. Analyzing dynamic change of tourism destination image under the occurrence of a natural disaster: Evidence from Japan. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2020**, *23*, 2042–2058. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
35. Tsang, N.K.F.; Hsu, C.H.C. Thirty years of research on tourism and hospitality management in China: A review and analysis of journal publications. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2011**, *30*, 886–896. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
36. UNWTO. *Compendium of Tourism Statistics Dataset, Data 2014–2018*, 2020 ed.; World Tourism Organization: Madrid, Spain, 2020.
37. UNWTO. *Yearbook of Tourism Statistics, Data 2014–2018*, 2020 ed.; World Tourism Organization: Madrid, Spain, 2020.
38. Li, F.M.S. Culture as a major determinant on tourism development on China. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2008**, *11*, 492–513. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
39. Xie, Z.; Altman, Y. The panacea of culture: The changing fortunes and careers of China's Dongba priests. *Cross Cult. Manag.* **2015**, *22*, 649–660. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
40. Yang, C.H.; Lin, H.L.; Han, C.C. Analysis of international tourist arrivals in China: The role of World Heritage Sites. *Tour. Manag.* **2010**, *31*, 827–837. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
41. Guo, Y.; Kim, S.S. Timothy D.J. Development characteristics and implications of Mainland Chinese outbound tourism. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2007**, *12*, 313–332. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
42. Van der Veen, R.; Song, H. Exploratory study of the measurement scales for the perceived image and advertising effectiveness of celebrity endorsers in a tourism context. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2010**, *27*, 460–473. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
43. Assaker, G. Examining a hierarchical model of Australia's destination image. *J. Vacat. Mark.* **2014**, *20*, 195–210. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
44. Lee, R.; Lockshin, L. Halo effects of tourists' destination image on domestic product perceptions. *Australas. Mark. J.* **2011**, *19*, 7–13. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
45. Sparks, B.; Pan, G.W. Chinese outbound tourists: Understanding their attitudes, constraints and use of information sources. *Tour. Manag.* **2009**, *30*, 483–494. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
46. Huang, S.; Hsu, C.H.C. Effects of travel motivation, past experience, perceived constraint, and attitude on revisit intention. *J. Travel Res.* **2009**, *48*, 29–44. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
47. Law, R.; Cheung, S. The perceived destination image of Hong Kong as revealed in the travel blogs of mainland Chinese tourists. *Int. J. Hosp. Tour. Admin.* **2010**, *11*, 303–327. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
48. Leung, D.; Law, R.; Lee, H.A. The perceived destination image of Hong Kong on Ctrip.com. *Int. J. Tour. Res.* **2011**, *13*, 124–140. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
49. Mimi, L.; Tong, W.; Ariel, L. An exploratory study of the travel motivation of Chinese female outbound tourists. *J. China Tour. Res.* **2011**, *7*, 411–424. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
50. Yang, J.; He, J.; Gu, Y. The implicit measurement of destination image: The application of Implicit Association Tests. *Tour. Manag.* **2012**, *33*, 50–52. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
51. Li, J.; Kim, W.G.; Wong, I.A. Does destination perception differ based on traveler type? A case of the world gambling capital: Macau. *Tour. Plan. Dev.* **2017**, *14*, 15–30. [\[CrossRef\]](#)



52. McCartney, G.; Butler, R.; Bennett, M. A strategic use of the communication mix in the destination image-formation process. *J. Travel Res.* **2008**, *47*, 183–196. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
53. Pang, L.; Law, R.; Fong, D.K.C. Mainland Chinese visitors' perceptions of Macau as a travel destination. *J. China Tour. Res.* **2021**, *17*, 33–56. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
54. Kim, S.S.; Guo, Y.; Agrusa, J. Preference and positioning analyses of overseas destinations by Mainland Chinese outbound pleasure tourists. *J. Travel Res.* **2005**, *44*, 212–220. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
55. Qiu, S.; Cai, L.; Zhang, Y.; Chen, Z. Destination image of Japan and social reform generation of China: Role of consumer products. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2017**, *22*, 233–244. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
56. Chang, H. Cross-cultural comparison of international tourist destination images. *Tour. Cult. Commun.* **2012**, *11*, 183–199. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
57. Lee, C.; King, B. International students in Asia: Travel behaviors and destination perceptions. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2016**, *21*, 457–476. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
58. Li, Y.R.; Lin, Y.C.; Tsai, P.H.; Wang, Y.Y. Traveller-generated contents for destination image formation: Mainland China travellers to Taiwan as a case study. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2015**, *32*, 518–533. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
59. Lin, Y.; Chen, C.; Park, C.W. The salient and organic images of Taiwan as perceived by Mainland Chinese tourists. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2012**, *17*, 381–393. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
60. Song, H.; Hsu, C.H.C. The image of Taiwan as a travel destination: Perspectives from Mainland China. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2013**, *30*, 253–271. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
61. Sun, Y.; Liang, C.; Chang, C. Online social construction of Taiwan's rural image: Comparison between Taiwanese self-representation and Chinese perception. *Tour. Manag.* **2020**, *76*, e103968. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
62. Choi, S.; Lehto, X.Y.; Morrison, A.M. Destination image representation on the web: Content analysis of Macau travel related websites. *Tour. Manag.* **2007**, *28*, 118–129. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
63. Choi, W.M.; Chan, A.; Wu, J. A qualitative and quantitative assessment of Hong Kong's image as a tourist destination. *Tour. Manag.* **1999**, *20*, 361–365. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
64. Lu, T.Y.; Cai, L.A. An analysis of image and loyalty in convention and exhibition tourism in China. *Event Manag.* **2011**, *15*, 37–48. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
65. Su, M.M.; Wall, G. The Qinghai-Tibet railway and Tibetan tourism: Travelers' perspectives. *Tour. Manag.* **2009**, *30*, 650–657. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
66. Xiao, H.; Mair, H.L. "A paradox of images": Representation of China as a tourist destination. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2006**, *20*, 1–14. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
67. Zhang, H.Q.; Chow, I. Application of importance-performance model in tour guides' performance: Evidence from Mainland Chinese outbound visitors in Hong Kong. *Tour. Manag.* **2004**, *25*, 81–91. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
68. Peng, J.; Xiao, H. How does smog influence domestic tourism in China? A case study of Beijing. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2018**, *23*, 1115–1128. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
69. Singh, N.; Zhou, H. Transformation of tourism in Beijing after the 2008 Summer Olympics: An analysis of the impacts in 2014. *Int. J. Tour. Res.* **2016**, *18*, 277–285. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
70. Su, M.M.; Wall, G.; Ma, Z. A multi-stakeholder examination of destination image: Nanluoguxiang heritage street, Beijing, China. *Tour. Geogr.* **2019**, *21*, 2–23. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
71. Tang, J.; Yuan, X.; Ramos, V.; Sriboonchitta, S. Does air pollution decrease inbound tourist arrivals? The case of Beijing. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2019**, *24*, 597–605. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
72. Wang, F.; Lu, L.; Xu, L.; Wu, B.; Wu, Y. Alike but different: Four ancient capitals in China and their destination images. *Int. J. Tour. Cities* **2019**, *6*, 415–429. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
73. Zhang, J.; Wu, B.; Morrison, A.M.; Tseng, C.; Chen, Y. How country image affects tourists' destination evaluations: A moderated mediation approach. *J. Hosp. Tour. Res.* **2018**, *42*, 904–930. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
74. Huang, K.; Pearce, P. Visitors' perceptions of religious tourism destinations. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2019**, *14*, e100371. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
75. Song, H.; Kim, K.; Yim, B.H. The mediating effect of place attachment on the relationship between golf tourism destination image and revisit intention. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2017**, *22*, 1182–1193. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
76. Ji, S.; Wall, G. Visitor and resident images of Qingdao, China, as a tourism destination. *J. China Tour. Res.* **2011**, *7*, 207–228. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
77. Lee, S.W.; Xue, K. A model of destination loyalty: Integrating destination image and sustainable tourism. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2020**, *25*, 393–408. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
78. Mou, N.; Yuan, R.; Yang, T.; Zhang, H.; Tang, J.; Makkonen, T. Exploring spatio-temporal changes of city inbound tourism flow: The case of Shanghai, China. *Tour. Manag.* **2020**, *76*, e103955. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
79. Xie, C.; Huang, Q.; Lin, Z.; Chen, Y. Destination risk perception, image and satisfaction: The moderating effects of public opinion climate of risk. *J. Hosp. Tour. Manag.* **2020**, *44*, 122–130. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
80. Gibson, H.J.; Qi, C.X.; Zhang, J.J. Destination image and intent to visit China and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. *J. Sport Manag.* **2008**, *22*, 427–450. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
81. Green, B.C.; Lim, S.Y.; Seo, W.J.; Sung, Y. Effects of cultural exposure through pre-event media. *J. Sport Tour.* **2010**, *15*, 89–102. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

82. Heslop, L.A.; Nadeau, J.; O'Reilly, N. China and the Olympics: Views of insiders and outsiders. *Int. Mark. Rev.* **2010**, *27*, 404–433. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
83. Li, X. Examining the 'relative image' of tourism destinations: A case study. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2012**, *15*, 741–757. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
84. Shani, A.; Chen, P.J.; Wang, Y.; Hua, N. Testing the impact of a promotional video on destination image change: Application of China as a tourism destination. *Int. J. Tour. Res.* **2010**, *12*, 116–133. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
85. Chen, C.; Chung, J.Y.; Gao, J.; Lin, Y. Destination familiarity and favorability in a country-image context: Examining Taiwanese travelers' perceptions of China. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2017**, *34*, 1211–1223. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
86. Lim, C.; Chew, S.L.; Lim, Z.Y.; Liu, W. Pre- and post-visit perceptions of youth tourists to China. *J. China Tour. Res.* **2014**, *10*, 236–255. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
87. Jeffrey, D.; Xie, Y. The UK market for tourism in China. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **1995**, *22*, 857–876. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
88. Seguí, M.; Capellà, J.E. Spanish package holiday tourism to China: Spatial patterns and tourist attractions. *Tour. Geogr.* **2006**, *8*, 233–252. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
89. Baloglu, S.; Mangaloglu, M. Tourism destination images of Turkey, Egypt, Greece, and Italy as perceived by US-based tour operators and travel agents. *Tour. Manag.* **2001**, *22*, 1–9. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
90. Echtner, C.M.; Ritchie, J.R. The measurement of destination image: An empirical assessment. *J. Travel Res.* **1993**, *31*, 3–13. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
91. Grosspietsch, M. Perceived and projected images of Rwanda: Visitor and international tour operator perspectives. *Tour. Manag.* **2006**, *27*, 225–234. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
92. Gudlaugsson, T.; Magnússon, G. North Atlantic island destinations in tourists' minds. *Int. J. Cult. Tour. Hosp. Res.* **2012**, *6*, 114–123. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
93. Hsu, C.H.C.; Wolfe, K.; Kang, S.K. Image assessment for a destination with limited comparative advantages. *Tour. Manag.* **2004**, *25*, 121–126. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
94. Murphy, L. Australia's image as a holiday destination- perceptions of backpacker visitors. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2000**, *8*, 21–45. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
95. Prayag, G. Brand image assessment: International visitors' perceptions of Cape Town. *Mark. Intell. Plan.* **2010**, *28*, 462–485. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
96. Selby, M.; Morgan, N.J. Reconstructing place image: A case study of its role in destination market research. *Tour. Manag.* **1996**, *17*, 287–294. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
97. Bigné, J.E.; Sánchez, M.I.; Sanz, S. The functional-psychological continuum in the cognitive image of a destination: A confirmatory analysis. *Tour. Manag.* **2009**, *30*, 715–723. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
98. Kokkali, P.; Koutsouris, A.; Chrysochou, P. Cognitive components of rural tourism destination images: The case of Lake Plastiras, Greece. *Tourismos* **2009**, *4*, 273–291.
99. Nicoletta, R.; Servidio, R. Tourists' opinions and their selection of tourism destination images: An affective and motivational evaluation. *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2012**, *4*, 19–27. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
100. Gallarza, M.G.; Gil, I.; Calderón, H. Destination image towards a conceptual framework. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2002**, *29*, 56–78. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
101. Coshall, J.T. Measurement of tourists' images: The repertory grid approach. *J. Travel Res.* **2000**, *39*, 85–89. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
102. Embacher, J.; Buttle, F. A repertory grid analysis of Austria's image as a summer vacation destination. *J. Travel Res.* **1989**, *27*, 3–7. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
103. Dolnicar, S.; Grabler, K. Applying City Perception Analysis (CPA) for destination positioning decisions. *J. Travel Res.* **2004**, *16*, 99–111. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
104. Stepchenkova, S.; Morrison, A.M. Russia's destination image among American pleasure travelers: Revisiting Echtner and Ritchie. *Tour. Manag.* **2008**, *29*, 548–560. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
105. Choi, J.G.; Tkachenko, T.; Sil, S. On the destination image of Korea by Russian tourists. *Tour. Manag.* **2011**, *32*, 193–194. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
106. Echtner, C.M.; Ritchie, J.R. The meaning and measurement of destination image. *J. Tour. Stud.* **1991**, *2*, 2–12.
107. Jenkins, O.H. Understanding and measuring tourist destination images. *Int. J. Tour. Res.* **1999**, *1*, 1–15. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
108. Santesmases, M. *DYANE Versión 4. Diseño y Análisis de Encuestas en Investigación Social y de Mercados*; Editorial Pirámide: Madrid, España, 2009.
109. Jin, Q.; Pearce, P.L. Actual use levels and perceived crowding in the peak season at tourist sites in Xi'an. *J. China Tour. Res.* **2011**, *7*, 263–281. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
110. Gorostidi-Martinez, H.; Xu, W.; Zhao, X. A review of Spanish consumers' product-country image of China. *Asia Pac. Mark. Logistics.* **2017**, *29*, 589–615. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
111. Becken, S.; Jin, X.; Zhang, C.; Gao, J. Urban air pollution in China: Destination image and risk perceptions. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2017**, *25*, 130–147. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
112. Chen, Y.; Huang, Z.J.; Cai, L.A. Image of China tourism and sustainability issues in Western media: An investigation of National Geographic. *Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manag.* **2014**, *26*, 855–878. [\[CrossRef\]](#)