

# Motivations of Chinese Outbound travellers; FIT, Group and Customised travellers

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### Abstract

Due to China's rapid economic growth in recent times, many worldwide destinations have begun to pay attention to the highly valued tourism source market for future exploration. However, there is a lack of research on Chinese tourists' preferences and the factors affecting their choices of travel which should be reviewed. As a result, a quantitative survey was conducted, reviewing 177 Chinese participants' travel preferences and factor agreements. The findings of this study reflect variables related to psychological needs that affect Chinese tourists' travel decisions. Based on the results, several recommendations are provided for worldwide destinations that can be used to attract more Chinese tourists in the future, such as holiday packages and social media posts.

Key Words: Outbound travel; China; Travel motivations; Group travel; FIT.

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#### Introduction

Increasing tourism research and industry attention is being given to new highvalue markets such as China and Russia, due to their fast development and high spending power (Chia & Liao, 2021; X. Li et al., 2011; X. Zhang et al., 2021). Because of substantial economic growth in China, improved living standards, and new openmarket policies in recent years, Chinese tourism has attracted considerable attention. Most outbound Chinese tourists favour Asian countries such as Japan, and South Korea, and Thailand accounting for 20%, 14%, and 11%, respectively (Nielsen, 2020). Outbound tourism from China was estimated to be growing at a rate of 14% year-onyear (Nielsen, 2020), prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 when China's borders effectively shut (J. Wen et al., 2021),. Chinese tourism is particularly influential because Chinese travellers frequently partake in 'Daiguo', making purchases for friends and family in China, which increasing their spending propensity and power (X. Zhang et al., 2021).

Besides high-value outbound tourism, domestic travel also occupies a large portion of the Chinese tourism market. By 2018, the total number of domestic Chinese tourists reached approximately 5.54 billion (Travel China Guide, 2021). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2018), Chinese domestic spending constituted 87% of the total travel and tourism's contribution to China's GDP in 2017, compared with foreign visitors' expenditure of 13%, which indicates the value of domestic tourism in China.

Given both considerable amounts and increasing rates of outbound tourism and domestic trips, China has become a popular tourist market for most destinations to target. China has also become a large provider of international tourists to other regions due to the large population base (Wee et al., 2021). Furthermore, China's domestic tourism plays an important role in the development of its tourism market. The loss of the Chinese traveller due to COVID-19 travel restrictions has reinforced this market's potential (Jin et al., 2021; J. Wen et al., 2021).

There is a large difference between Chinese tourists and non-Chinese tourists in terms of travel types. According to tourism statistics from Nielsen(Nielsen, 2018), while about 70% of non-Chinese tourists select free independent travel (FIT) as their choice, Chinese tourists tend to choose from a variety of travel options. More than 40% of them choose independent and semi-independent travel, approximately 30% of them pick travel packages, and

around 20% of them select customised travel options. Some literature sources argue that increasing incomes and a wider variety of choices are the most prevalent reasons for most Chinese tourists to choose FIT (H. Q. Zhang & Morrison, 2007), while others claim that the process of globalization and the development of networks promote this trend (Yin & Poon, 2016). With the Chinese government's encouragement and investments in tourism, the Chinese market is becoming a dominant source market and Chinese tourists' travel choices are important for worldwide destinations to consider (J. Xu et al., 2010).

The increasing attention on Chinese tourists comes with further required research on the factors behind their travel choices. Existing theories and models related to tourists' perceptions and motivations are mostly western based (Olya & Gavilyan, 2016), analysing their preferences based on cultural values or a general perspective instead of categorizing them into different travel types (S. Jiang et al., 2019). It is essential to find out what kind of factors influence Chinese tourists' travel choices.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the factors that affect Chinese tourists' travel choices, which is a topic that has not been specifically researched so far in this field (P. Jiang et al., 2015; S. Jiang et al., 2012). With a better understanding of the Chinese tourism market, overseas destinations can make appropriate strategies and provide diverse travel products accordingly. Hence, the question: What factors affect Chinese tourists' choices of travel? The answer to this can offer several benefits such as effective marketing strategies and diverse travel packages for worldwide destinations as well as China itself, which is valuable for tourism development worldwide.

#### **Literature Review**

#### **Chinese Tourism/ Tourists**

According to Statista (2018), outbound tourism from China has grown steadily since 2009, achieving almost 150 million visitors in 2018, demonstrating the rapid growth of the Chinese tourism market (Chia & Liao, 2021). Thanks to the large population base, rapid economic growth, enhanced living quality, and relaxation of restrictions, China replaced the U.S. as the world's largest international source market in 2014 and the demand of international trips is still rising, mostly driven by the middle class (Li and Lu, 2017). It is also becoming the world's largest source of international tourism revenue with

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spending exceeding US\$ 221 billion in 2017 (Business Monitor International, 2018). The significant role of Chinese outbound tourism on other economies has been keenly felt with the loss of this market due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Pham, 2020).

Despite the booming outbound tourism, the domestic tourism market plays a significant role in the development of Chinese tourism. According to Business Monitor International (BMI) (2018), domestic trips in China reached approximately 2.8 billion in 2017 and generated a total revenue of US\$680 billion. The demand for domestic travels keeps increasing due to the convenience and safety within the country, as well as visa restrictions when travelling to external destinations.

Initially, the relative inexperience of Chinese outbound travellers meant that they sought the safety and security of scheduled group travel (Meng, 2010). However, with fast economic growth, technological developments, and more international businesses offering Mandarin information sources, potential travellers are more able to conduct independent research and arrange for independent travel (Huang & Xu, 2018). They have become more adventurous about the world and look for relatively flexible travel types (Jang et al., 2009). For international trips, visa accessibility is a noteworthy concern among Chinese tourists (Huang & Xu, 2018).

# **Travel Types**

Chinese outbound travellers frequently consider adopting one of three types of travel; package travel, free independent travel (FIT) and customised travel (Wang et al., 2000). These different travel patterns can influence or be used to categorise tourists' choice of destination and travel behaviour.

# Package Travel

Package travel refers to a trip arranged by an operator; the individual travels together with a group of people experiencing the same itinerary choices (Wang et al., 2010). This type of tour offers more convenience but less freedom for tourists. The advantage is that the travel agency can provide all kinds of travel services, such as accommodation and transport bookings, or searching for sightseeing information, potentially saving time and money (Quiroga, 1990). Moreover, travellers have the opportunity to meet other

travellers from around the world and make new friends during the trip, which brings additional pleasure to the journey. They are also able to visit more sites during one trip compared with other types of travel due to the scheduled plans (Meng, 2010). Most people choose group travel because they feel such a travel type offers elements of safety and security. However, this kind of travel also has shortcomings, such as a lack of flexibility and the absence of in-depth travel (Heung & Chu, 2000). Due to the complete travel plan given by the tour guide, all tourists have to work together. There is less time for them to do extra activities, and they are not able to adjust the schedule themselves (X. Xu, 2018).

#### Free Independent Travel (FIT)

Free independent travel (FIT) refers to individuals who travel independently, designing the route and booking the travel services and activities by themselves (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). The biggest advantage of such travel is flexibility to explore a wider variety of sites on their own schedules. They can change plans whenever they find new interests or want to stay longer in certain places, which is relatively comfortable and pleasant. Compared with package travel, there is no tour guide forcing them into certain shopping places (Yin & Poon, 2016). Independent travellers have no pressure from a group, forcing them to choose group activities. Nevertheless, people need to spend more time on planning every event by themselves, which is quite time-consuming.While online sources are frequently used to research their trip, the information online is not always accurate, which may cause confusion. Furthermore, the costs and risks involved are usually higher when compared with a group tour because the latter usually enjoys group discounts and compulsory insurance coverage (H. Q. Zhang et al., 2009).

#### **Customised Travel**

The third kind of travel is a new travel trend that is becoming more popular; customised travel. Customised travel refers to tailored, usually luxurious, trips designed based on individuals' requirements or characteristics (Bhati et al., 2013). For example, there is an 'F.C. Barcelona Group' for football lovers who can watch football games in Camp Nou and join the parades in Barcelona; or 'Antarctic Adventure' for keen skiers to enjoy the world of ice and snow. One thing to be noticed is that there are lots ofChinese

Tourists' disruptive innovations involved in personalised travel services, such as artificial intelligence and augmented reality (Morgan, 2018). These kinds of technology improve the quality and unique appeal of personalised experiences. For tourists, it is desirable to develop customised travel plans when they look forward to high-value private services and special experiences. However, this kind of trip usually comes with high costs due to the complicated designing process and luxury bookings (P. Jiang et al., 2015). Additionally, individuals probably need to research more for the preparation because they must decide what kind of requirements they want for the trips before departure.

#### **Chinese Tourists Choices of Travel**

Package travel has remained popular for Chinese tourists, especially for overseas trips (Wang et al., 2010). The prevalent cultural values of Asians, such as collectivism and a high level of uncertainty avoidance can, somewhat, explain this preference (Hsu et al., 2007). Chinese prefer to do group activities and participate in low-risk events (Meng, 2010). However, according to tourism statistics from (2018) and BMI (2018), FIT has become a more popular travel choice among Chinese tourists, due to its high flexibility and enjoyment. Chinese tourists want to pursue high-quality independent travel experiences instead of plain mass tourism. They enjoy the opportunity to design the trips by themselves and plan their own travel activities (Morgan, 2018; Wang et al., 2010)(Morgan, 2018. Besides these two travel choices, customised travel is regarded as the emerging and rising trend in the Chinese tourists choose FIT and around 30% of them pick group travel, 20% of travellers prefer customised travel.

# **Travel Motivation**

Motivation is a need or a reason that drives an individual to certain behaviours (Kimmm, 2012). In the tourism aspect, travel motivation refers to the factors behind certain tourism behaviours, explaining why people travel to the destinations (González & Bello, 2002). Being knowledgeable about different kinds of travel motivators can build a basic understanding of why tourists make certain travel choices, allowing travel operators to develop specific strategies to be used in the tourism market. A variety of theories can be applied to understanding travel motivation based on different factors.

# **Push and Pull Theory**

Dann's (1977) frequently cited "push and pull theory" explains the factors of why and how people travel. Push factors are the internal needs that make people want to travel, such as relaxation or escape, whereas pull factors are those external factors that affect traveller's destination choices, like natural beauty or special events (Baniya et al., 2017). According to Baloglu and Uysal (1996), these two kinds of factors are related to each other. Push factors tell why people travel and it reflects certain attributes that pull factors describe. Pull factors can be regarded as the motivators or boosters of push factors that strengthen people's choices about where to travel.

According to the characteristics of different travel types, Chinese tourists who prefer package travel seek safety and scenic beauty (Heung & Chu, 2000). They are relatively reluctant to change compared to independent travellers (Yin & Poon, 2016). Therefore, they are likely to be more affected by push factors. In contrast, tourists choosing FIT and customised tours prefer the flexibility and enjoyment of the trip (Yin & Poon, 2016), as these groups of people tend to be more independent and calmer when facing changes. In that case, Chinese tourists who choose FIT and customised tours are more influenced by pull factors such as cultural events and special festivals (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). This divergence leads to the first hypothesis:

H1. There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for push and pull.

# **Allocentrism and Psychocentrism Theory**

Another theory that can be adapted to travel motivation is Plog's 1974 allocentrism and psychocentrism model. Psychocentrics are characterised as producing a feeling of insecurity, powerlessness, and thoughts of travelling less in one's life (Plog, 2001). This type of traveller is described as anxious and non-adventurous (Plog, 2001).

They tend to be affected by psychological factors such as insecurity rather than practical reasons like budgets. During the trips, they prefer to stay in safe places such as hotels, eat familiar dishes, and talk with people who speak the same languages as they do (George et al., 2013). In contrast, allocentrics are self-confident and seek adventure (Plog, 2001). This type of tourist is characterised as outgoing and adventurous. During the trip, the quality of

accommodation and transportation is less important to them, focusing instead on freedom and the uniqueness of the experiences (George et al., 2013). While psychocentric tourists love to visit attractions, allocentric travellers prefer to explore less-developed sites and enjoy the new experiences there. They love to chat with strangers, try different types of food, and participate in exciting events.

According to the features of these three different travel types, tourists who choose package travels are more insecure and nervous about the trip (Heung & Chu, 2000), preferring scheduled plans, visits to famous scenic spots, and enjoying well-developed tourist facilities (Meng, 2010). Therefore, it is anticipated that psychocentric Chinese tourists tend to choose group travel. People who pick FIT, conversely, prefer flexible travel (Hyde & Lawson, 2003), providing a rich and personal experience, more inkeeping with allocentrism. Like FIT, those who choose customised tours want to control the trips based on their own preferences to increase the enjoyment (Bhati et al., 2013), which also reflects the preferences of allocentric tourists. Therefore, it can be expected that allocentric Chinese tourists tend to choose FIT and customised tours, whereas psychocentric Chinese tourists tend to choose package travel. This difference leads to the second hypothesis:

H2. There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for allocentrism and psychocentrism.

#### **Hierarchy of Needs Theory**

Besides the previous two theories, Maslow (1987) presents an influential model called the hierarchy of needs to better understand people's motivations and needs (Jang & Cai, 2002). It categorises human's needs into five levels, the lowest one being physiological needs, followed by safety, belongingness and love, esteem needs, and self-actualization (Maslow & Frager, 1987). The theory claims that an individual will not enter a higher level of need if he or she doesn't fulfil the lower level (Maslow & Frager, 1987). Jiang, Scott, Tao and Ding (2019) explained different motivation levels of Chinese cultural values on a tourism scale. It revealed that self-improvement, the desire of gaining new knowledge, and intelligence can be categorised into selfenhancement, which includes the values of wisdom, dedication, and cultivation (S. Jiang et al., 2019). Those motivations are similar to the ones in Maslow's selfactualization level. Natural beauty, enjoyment, and interestingness of lives can be the motivations for nurturing individuals' spirits, which indicates people's love

of nature (S. Jiang et al., 2019). It can match esteem needs in Maslow's need theory. Moreover, it discovered that close relationships and love are the motivation for a better society, which is comparable to belongingness and love in the model (S. Jiang et al., 2019).

In general, most people travel for further happiness, which is based on the fulfilment of basic needs in Maslow's model (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). Chinese people who prefer group travel tend to aim for natural beauty and scenic spots, placing them in the psychological needs level (Wang et al., 2010), while those who choose FIT target high-level travel experiences and self-improvement, thus pursuing the selfactualization level (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). Those who like customised travel have higher expectations for the trips to reach their personal enhancement and activity richness, so it focuses on self-fulfilment needs (P. Jiang et al., 2015). This divergence leads to the third hypothesis:

H3. There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for self-fulfilment and psychological needs.

# **Other Factors**

Besides the factors illustrated previously, there are some confounding variables that may influence the test results of Chinese tourists' travel choices, such as duration of the trip, perceived value for money, and co-travellers (Jang et al., 2009). According to the different travel types, travellers who are concerned about costs may choose package travel due to the economic savings (Meng, 2010); those who think about duration may pick FIT due to its high flexibility (Yin & Poon, 2016); and those who look for accompanying travellers probably prefer customised travel due to its privacy and high control of the trip (Bhati et al., 2013).

These confounding variables will also be included in the testing process and be analysed later by its influences on Chinese tourists to choose different travel types.

According to the three theories and based on the previous research done by Dann (1981) and Yiamjanya and Wongleedee (2014), 28 factors are developed under each theory category, and are used for testing the four listed hypotheses and finding out how the factors affect Chinese tourists' different travel choices (Table 1).

customised travel routes

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#### Push & Pull Allocentrism & Psychocentrism Maslow's Needs Model Factors Self-fulfilment Psychological Basic Push Pull Allocentrism Psychocentrism Needs Needs Needs 1. Natural beauty of the $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ destination 2. Tourist's attractions $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ available in the destination 3. Special events in the $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ destination $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 4. Sports activities/adventures $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 5. Cultural activities 6. Historical activities $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 7. Beach-related activities $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 8. Relaxation activities $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 9. The language spoken by $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ the locals 10. Friendliness of the locals $\sqrt{}$ 11. Family or friends living $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ in the destination 12. Safety of the trip $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 13. The climate of the $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ destination 14. The culture of the $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ destination 15. The reputation of the $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ local cuisine 16. The availability of other $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ types of cuisines $\sqrt{}$ 17. The quality of accommodation $\sqrt{}$ 18. Perceived value for $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ money in the destination 19. People that travel with you $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 20. The feeling of escaping $\sqrt{}$ from the place I live $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 21. The desire of relaxation 22. The desire of gaining $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ new knowledge $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ 23. A structured itinerary 24. The flexibility of the trip $\sqrt{}$ 25. The development of the $\sqrt{}$ destination 26. The development of $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ public utilities 27. Availability of holiday packages/discounts 28. Availability of

### Table 1. Factors Based on Motivation Theories (Dann, 1981; Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014)

#### Methodology

A quantitative research methodology was adopted to thoroughly explore the hypothesised relationships present between the travel motivations of Chinese tourists (Apuke, 2017). This type of methodology was appropriate for the study since it facilitated a generalisable analysis of previous theories in a Chinese context (Lehaney & Vinten, 1994). A questionnaire with 10 closed-ended and open-ended questions was designed online at wenjuan.com, for testing the three listed hypotheses regarding the factors influencing Chinese tourists' choices of travel. The questionnaire aimed to discover the links between 28 variables and different travel decisions and come up with generalizations that can be applied to Chinese tourists (Apuke, 2017). The questionnaire was translated into Mandarin and backwards translated by a neutral third party to ensure the accuracy of the translation.

#### **Instrument Design**

The questionnaire contained six demographic questions (4 closed ended, 2 open-ended) at the beginning, involving gender, age, education, household income, geographic location, and foreign languages that can be spoken. It also included four travel-related questions (3 closed-ended, 1 open-ended), including travel destination, duration of the trip, travel choices, and level of agreement for the influences of 28 factors on travel decisions. The participants chose the travel type based on their most recent experiences and then completed the travel-related questions. As for the level of agreement question, the 28 variables adopted a Likert scale with 'strongly agree' as 1 and 'strongly disagree' as 5, which was able to reflect the importance of factors for each travel choice. The validity of the questionnaire was checked by native English speakers at first for accurate language use and then back translated to ensure an appropriate translation. Several adjustments were made by adding examples which were familiar to Chinese people, such as Qigong in the relaxation activities. Finally, the Chinese version was created on wenjuan. com, and distributed through China's most popular social media sites; Weibo and Wechat (Kim, 2018). The questionnaire adopted a convenience sampling followed by a snowball sampling approach, with participants asked to refer the questionnaire to friends and family who would be in a position to complete the questionnaire. In total, 200 surveys were originally submitted, with 177 usable responses obtained, providing an estimated response rate of 88.5%.

### **Research Findings**

#### 4.1 Demographics

Out of 177 participants, 52.54% of them were female (n=93) and 47.46% of them were male (n=84). Most of the respondents were between 21 to 30 years, which accounted for 42.94% (n=76); 91 participants held a bachelor's degree, which occupied 51.41%. 31.07% of the participants (n=55) had a monthly household income above 50,000 RMB (about \$7,227), but there was still around 35% (n=64) who had a monthly household income less than 20,000 RMB (about \$2,890), which reflected a gap between rich and poor. Out of 177 participants, 62.7% of them (n=111) lived in Southern China and 37.3% of them (n=66) lived in Northern China. For the question 'Can you speak a foreign language?', 127 respondents replied 'yes' (71.75%) and 50 of them replied 'no' (28.25\%). Among those 127 respondents, other languages spoken were English, Japanese (12), Korean (7), German (3), Russian (2), and Arabic (2). It could be seen that learning foreign languages was prevalent among Chinese tourists nowadays.

Variables		Frequency	%
Gender			
	Female	93	52.5
	Male	84	47.4
	Total	177	100
Age			
	≤20	11	6.2
	21-30	76	42.9
	31-40	38	21.4
	41-50	30	16.9
	51-60	19	10.7
	< 60	3	1.6
	Total	177	100
Highest Education Completed			
	Less than a high school diploma	7	3.9
	High school diploma or equivalent	21	11.6

Table 2. Demographics and Travel Information Data

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	Associate degree	14	7.91
	Bachelor's degree	91	51.41
	Master's degree	39	22.03
	Doctorate or above	5	2.82
	Total	177	100
Household Income per Month (RMB)			
	Below 10000 (~\$1,445)	26	14.69
	10001-20000	38	21.47
	20001-30000	30	16.95
	30001-40000	16	9.04
	40001-50000	12	6.78
	Above 50000 (~\$7,227)	55	31.07
	Total	177	100
Living Region			
	North China	66	37.39
	South China	111	62.71
	Total	177	100
Can Speak Foreign Language(s)			
	Yes	127	71.75
	No	50	28.25
	Total	177	100
Travel Destination			
	Overseas destination	113	63.84
	Domestic destination	64	36.16
	Total	177	100
Duration of the Trip			
	1 to 5 days	69	38.98
	6 to 10 days	65	36.72
	11 to 15 days	23	12.99
	More than 15 days	19	10.73
	Missing values	1	0.56
	Total		100
Travel Types			KA
	I bought a package from a travel agency.	35	19.77
	I arranged and booked the travel by myself.	101	57.06
	I used a travel agency to build a customised package.	41	24.29
A A KAN	Total	177	100

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# **4.2 Travel Information**

Among those who chose to travel outside of China, about half (n=54) visited Asian destinations such as Japan and Thailand; 26% of them (n=29) went to Europe, like Spain and Italy; 17% of them (n=19) visited North America; only 6 participants chose South America, and 5 participants chose Africa. For those who travelled domestically (n=64), around 61% of participants (n= 39) visited Southern China and 39% of them (n=25) went to Northern China. Proportionally, this matches the participant's place of residence. In terms of the duration of the trip, most participants travelled between '1 to 5 days' (39%, n=69) and '6 to 10 days' (37%, n=66).

For the travel types, more than half of participants (n=101, 57.06%) selected 'I arranged and booked the travel by myself', which referred to free independent travellers; 23% of respondents (n=41) chose 'I used a travel agency to build a customised package', which was defined as customised travellers; and 20% of participants (n=35) chose 'I bought a package from a travel agency', that represented group travellers. Overall, the number of respondents who selected FIT was larger than the sum of the participants who chose the other two travel types.

# 4.3 Hypotheses Testing

To test the four hypotheses, 28 variables were run using an ANOVA test.

#### **Hypothesis 1**

For Hypothesis 1, 'There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for push and pull', the variables related to push and pull theories were explored.

From the three push variables, statistically significant differences were found between 'the desire of relaxation' and travel choices (p=0.03 < 0.05, F=3.726), and 'the desire of gaining new knowledge' (p=0.041 < 0.05, F=3.370). For 'the desire of relaxation', a significant difference existed between FIT (M=3.63) and customised travellers (M=4.61); for 'the desire of gaining new knowledge', a significant difference was also found between FIT (M=4.07) and customised travellers (M=3.10).

From the ten pull variables, significant differences were found for 'special

events in destination' (p=0.04<0.05, F=3.20), 'the culture of the destination' (p=0.02<0.05, F=3.57), and 'perceived value for money in the destination' (p=0.000<0.05, F=9.17). For the 'special events in the destination', a significant difference existed between group travellers (M=5.77) and customised travellers (M=4.71); for 'the culture of the destination', a significant difference was found between Group travellers (M=4.80) and FIT (M=3.07); for the 'perceived value for money', a significant difference was found between group travellers (M=5.07), and also between FIT (M=3.56) and customised travellers.

Overall, five out of thirteen factors had statistically significant differences between travel choices in terms of preferences for push and pull. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was partially rejected. It would seem a significant difference did exist in push factors, whereas overall, there is no statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for push and pull. FIT considered the relaxed nature of the trip and the culture of the destination, but they were not concerned about perceived value in the destination.

The summarised results were presented in Table 3 as below.

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/ariables		Significant	F	Between	
		Difference	-	2000000	
Push					
	The feeling of escaping from the place I live	/	/	/	
	The desire of relaxation	р=0.03	3.726	FIT (M=3.63) and Customised (M=4.61)	
	The desire of gaining new knowledge	p=0.041	3.370	FIT (M=4.07) and Customised (M=3.10)	
Pull					
	Natural beauty of the destination	/	/	/	
	Tourists' attractions available in the destination	/	/	/	
	Special events in the destination	р=0.04	3.200	Group (M=5.77) and Customised (M=4.71)	
	Sports activities/ adventures	/	/	/	
	Cultural activities	/	/	/	
	Historical activities	/	/	/	
	Beach-related activities	/	/	/	
	Relaxation activities	/	/	/	
	The culture of the destination	p=0.02	3.570	Group (M=4.80) and FIT (M=3.07)	
	Perceived value for money in the destination	p=0.000	9.170	Group (M=3.09) and Customised (M=5.07), FIT (M=3.56) and Customised	
Result					
	Hypothesis 1 was partially rejected.				

# Table 3. Summarised Information of Hypothesis 1

# **Hypothesis 2**

For Hypothesis 2, 'There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for allocentrism and psychocentrism', the variables related to allocentrism and psychocentrism were focused on.

Of the eight variables related to allocentrism, three variables had statistically significant differences between choices of travel: 'special events in the destination' (p=0.04<0.05, F=3.20), 'the culture of the destination' (p=0.02<0.05, F=3.57) and 'the flexibility of the trip (p=0.000<0.05, F=12.232). The specific differences between the first two variables were already presented in H1. For the third variable 'the flexibility of the trip', a significant difference was found between three travel types, which were group travel (M=4.49) and FIT (M=3.44), and also group travel (M=4.49) and customised travel (M=2.12).

Of the fifteen variables related to psychocentrism, statistically significant differences were found between five in terms of the different travel types; 'special events in the destination' (p=0.04<0.05, F=3.20), 'the language spoken by the locals' (p=0.000<0.05, F=37.102), 'family or friends living in the destination' (p=0.01<0.05, F=4.97), 'the availability of other types of cuisines' (p=0.03<0.05, F=3.43), and 'people that travel with you' (p=0.02<0.05, F=3.81).

The nature of these differences are presented in Table 4 and suggested that group travellers tended to disagree more than FIT or customised travellers in terms of the allocentric variables and disagreed less in terms of the psychocentric variables.

In summary, out of twenty-three allocentric and psychocentric variables, eight of them returned statistically significant differences between choice of travel in terms of preferences of allocentrism and psychocentrism. Even though psychocentric variables owned quite a few significant differences, from the overall perspective, H2 was partially rejected. There is no statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for allocentrism and psychocentrism. FIT wanted the flexibility of the trip, cared about cultures, and accompanying travellers, but they did not mind about the language spoken by the locals and the availability of other types of cuisines.

The summarised results were presented in Table 4 as below.

Variables		Significant Difference	F	Between
Allocentric		Difference		
	Natural beauty of the destination	/	/	/
	Special events in the destination	p=0.04	3.200	Group (M=5.77) ar Customised (M=4.7
	Sports activities/adventures	/	/	1
	Cultural activities	/	/	/
	Historical activities	/	/	/
	The culture of the destination	p=0.02	3.570	Group (M=4.80) ar FIT (M=3.07)
	The reputation of the local cuisine	/	/	/
	A structured itinerary	/	/	/
Psychocentric				
	Tourists' attractions available in the destination	/	/	/
	Special events in the destination	p=0.04	3.200	Group (M=5.77) an Customised (M=4.7
	Beach-related activities	/	/	/
	Relaxation activities	/	/	1
	The language spoken by the locals	p=0.000		Group (M=4.11) ar FIT (M=6.57), Grou and Customised (M=5.27)
	Friendliness of the locals	/	/	/
	Family or friends living in the destination	p=0.01	4.970	FIT (M=4.88) and Customised (M=6.0
	Safety of the trip	/	/	/
	The climate of the destination	/	/	/
	The availability of other types of cuisines	p=0.03	3.430	Group (M=4.54) an FIT (M=5.41)
	The quality of accommodation	/	/	/
	People that travel with you	p=0.02	3.810	Group (M=3.46) ar FIT (M=2.39)
	A structured itinerary	/	/	1
	The development of the destination	/	/	/
	The development of public utilities	/	/	/
Result				

# Table 4. Summarised Information of Hypothesis 2

# **Hypothesis 3**

As for Hypothesis 3, 'There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for selffulfilment and psychological needs', the variables categorised to self-fulfilment needs and psychological needs were focused on.

Eight variables were associated with self-fulfilment needs, of which three returned statistically significant differences between choices of travel; these were 'special events in the destination' (p=0.04<0.05, F=3.20), 'the culture of the destination' (p=0.02<0.05, F=3.57) and 'the desire of gaining new knowledge' (p=0.041<0.05, F=3.370). The specific differences between travel groups were previously discussed and are available in Table 5.

By contrast, four of the five psychological needs variables returned statistically significant differences, which were 'the language spoken by the locals' (p=0.000<0.05, F=37.102), 'family or friends living in the destination' (p=0.01<0.05, F=4.97), 'people that travel with you' (p=0.02<0.05, F=3.81) and 'the desire of relaxation' (p=0.03<0.05, F=3.726). The specific differences between different travel groups were explained before and are available in Table 5.

In total, seven out of thirteen variables had statistically significant differences between choices of travel in terms of self-fulfilment needs and psychological needs. In that case, Hypothesis 3 was accepted. There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for self-fulfilment and psychological needs. FIT considered the culture of the destination and their co-travellers but were less affected by family or friends living in the destination or the language spoken by the locals.

The summarised results were presented in Table 5 as below.

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Hypothesis 3 - S	elf-fulfilment and Psycho	logical Needs	5	
Variables		Significant Difference	F	Between
Self-fulfilment				
	Special events in the destination	p=0.04	3.200	Group (M=5.77) and Customised (M=4.71)
	Sports activities/ adventures	/	/	/
	Cultural activities	/	/	/
	Historical activities	/	/	/
	Beach-related activities	/	/	/
	Relaxation activities	/	/	1
	The culture of the destination	p=0.02	3.570	Group (M=4.80) and FIT (M=3.07)
	The desire of gaining new knowledge	p=0.041	3.370	FIT (M=4.07) and Customised (M=3.10)
Psychological				
	The language spoken by the locals	p=0.000	37.102	Group (M=4.11) and FIT (M=6.57), Group and Customised (M=5.27)
	Family or friends living in the destination	p=0.01	4.970	FIT (M=4.88) and Customised (M=6.02)
	People that travel with you	p=0.02	3.810	Group (M=3.46) and FIT (M=2.39)
	The feeling of escaping from the place I live	/	/	1
	The desire of relaxation	p=0.03	3.726	FIT (M=3.63) and Customised (M=4.61)
Result	·			
	Hypothesis 3 was accepted.			

# Table 5. Summarised Information of Hypothesis 3

Overall, the test results of three hypotheses were shown in Table 6 below.

Hypotheses Testing Results			
	Contents	Results	
Hypothesis 1	There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for push and pull.	Partially rejected	
Hypothesis 2	There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for allocentrism and psychocentrism.	Partially rejected	
Hypothesis 3	There is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choices of travel in terms of their preferences for self-fulfilment and psychological needs.	Accepted	

#### Table 6. Testing Results of Three Hypotheses

#### Discussion

#### **Chinese Tourists' Travel Experiences**

Around two-thirds of respondents visited destinations outside China, which was defined as overseas travel; one-third of them chose to travel domestically, suggesting that outbound travel is a popular trend among Chinese tourists nowadays. For those who chose overseas travel, Asian cities like Japan and Singapore were the places respondents liked most, possibly due to the cultural and geographic proximity (Truong & King, 2009). For domestic trips, cities in South China such as Kunming and Chongqing were the most visited destinations, which might be due to their long historical backgrounds (Keating & Kriz, 2008).

Regarding the duration of the trip, the most frequent choices were '1 to 5 days' and "6 to 10 days". In terms of types of travellers, it was also the duration time that FIT liked most, accounting for 68% of the total of the two most frequent answers. In contrast, most of the customised travellers chose '11 to 15 days' and 'more than 15 days', which might imply this groups' special requirements for travelling.

For the travel types, more than half of the respondents chose FIT, which reflected the popularity of such travel among Chinese tourists, compared

with package travel and customised travel (Yin & Poon, 2016). However, the number of participants who chose customised travel was greater than that of package travel, which showed the increasing tendency of this new travel type among Chinese tourists.

# What Influences Chinese Tourists' Choices of Travel Influences of Push Factors

Although Hypothesis 1 was partially rejected, statistically significant differences did exist in push variables like 'the desire for relaxation' and 'the desire of gaining new knowledge', specifically between FIT and customised travellers. FIT demonstrated greater desire for relaxation and relieving stress while customised travellers focused less on it (Fu & Lam, 2018); Customised travellers were affected by the desire of absorbing new knowledge, whereas FIT were less interested (Yoo et al., 2018). It could be explained by FIT's high flexibility to adjust the plans (Hyde & Lawson, 2003), along with customised travellers' high desire of experiencing novel activities (S. Jiang et al., 2019).

Compared with Dann (1977)'s push and pull theory, this study suggested that there is a statistically significant difference between Chinese tourists' choice of travel in terms of their preferences for push variables, especially between FIT and customised travellers. Push factors had a greater influence on Chinese tourists, compared with pull factors. However, from the overall perspective, the significant differences were not obvious.

# **Influences of Psychocentric Factors**

Hypothesis 2 was also rejected from the overall data results, but quite a few significant differences were noticed in psychocentric variables. For example, a significant difference existed between package travellers and customised travellers in terms of 'special events in the destination', reflecting that customised travellers were influenced more by special events such as sports games because they pursued the speciality of the trips, while group travellers were not usually interested in those events (Heung & Chu, 2000). Another instance could be 'the language spoken by the locals'; a significant difference was found between group travel and FIT, and also group travel and customised trips. Group travellers were more likely to be affected, which could be due to their reluctance to explore new environments (Heung & Chu, 2000), whereas FIT and customised travellers were less likely to be influenced because they



love to experience new things (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). Similarly, FIT and customised travellers were more influenced by allocentric traits.

Overall, although Hypothesis 2 was rejected, some psychocentric variables brought different influences for three travel groups. Psychocentrism could be regarded as an important travel motivation in terms of factors affecting Chinese tourists' choices of travel. Such results hold significant marketing implications, bringing focus to Chinese tourists' desires for more familiarity in language, for example. Marketing to Chinese tourists undertaking group travel should allay travellers' concerns by presenting the available of Mandarin or Cantonese support in destinations or with tour guides.

# Influences of Self-fulfilment Needs and Psychological Needs

Hypothesis 3 was accepted because there were many statistically significant differences found between self-fulfilment needs factors and psychological needs factors.

Besides the factors explained before, the significant difference was found between group travel and FIT in terms of 'the culture of the destination'. It highlighted that FIT focused more on the culture because they had to do research by themselves and experienced more, while group travellers just needed to follow the schedule during the trips (P. Jiang et al., 2015; J. Li & Lu, 2016).

From that, Maslow's (1987) theory still works today for explaining the travel motivations of non-western people such as Chinese tourists (Olya & Gavilyan, 2016).

The self-fulfilment needs and psychological needs indeed affect the different choices of travel, like the culture of the destination and people traveling with you.

# **Recommendations for Travel Destinations**

From the previous findings, several recommendations can be made for worldwide destinations regarding Chinese tourists' choices of travel.

First, it is important for Chinese cities to create some travel-related activities and events to boost domestic travel. Some famous destinations can work

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with travel agencies to come out with new travel packages to attract group travellers; they can generate more advertising on social media to bring in FIT and customised travels because most of the travellers have to research online to organise the trip; also, they can renovate ancient, historical sites to prolong their lifetime and prepare the better quality of views for local tourists, which is good for local tourism development.

Second, overseas destinations can develop long-term relationships with Chinese travel agencies like Trip.com (previously Ctrip) and Fliggy (Lai et al., 2021; T. Wen et al., 2021). To attract different travel groups, the destinations can design targeted travel routes and packages for different travel types and post them online through Chinese travel applications. For instance, for package travellers, related holiday packages and discount activities should be created and updated online; for FIT, adventures and cultural activities should be advertised and the characteristics of the destination should be presented with the related services for designing a wonderful trip based on their requirements.

Lastly, it is beneficial for worldwide destinations to hold featured festivals like food festivals or music festivals. These kinds of events not only draw the attention of Chinese tourists but also display destinations' signatures. Chinese tourists love to experience the unique atmosphere and learn the culture of the place at the same time (Huang & Xu, 2018). Such activities would leave a deep impression on Chinese tourists, bringing in more potential customers in the future.

Given the changing complex regulations around international travel to combat the spread of COVID-19, it is possible that the support afforded to travellers through group travel will encourage more individuals to consider this option to support their travel plans. However, more research is required here to explore this more, particularly given travel restrictions returning to China mean many Chinese choose not to travel internationally.

# Conclusion

In an era of vast development, China experienced fast economic growth and technological improvements, and the number of Chinese tourists has increased

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rapidly every year (Statista, 2018). The large numbers of Chinese outbound and domestic travellers have drawn global attention. It is important for worldwide destinations to know the factors that affect Chinese tourists' travel choices and come up with targeted strategies. This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of Chinese tourism markets and the factors that influence them in making different travel decisions.

Besides the increasing tendency of Chinese outbound and domestic trips, the different travel packages that China tourists choose has also changed in recent years. Unlike the past when Chinese people always went for package tours due to their convenience and cost-efficiency (Meng, 2010), nowadays more and more Chinese tourists prefer free independent travel (FIT) and customised travel because of the high flexibility and enjoyment options (Bhati et al., 2013; T. Wen et al., 2021; Yin & Poon, 2016).

The factors influencing Chinese tourists' different travel choices can be explained by several travel motivation theories, the 'push and pull theory', and the allocentrism and psychocentrism theories, and 'Maslow's Needs Theory'. Relevant hypotheses were created based on characteristics of four different theories to find out the statistically significant differences between Chinese tourists' different choices of travel, and 28 relevant factors were worked out that matched with corresponding theories for the testing.

This research adopted a quantitative methodology to use a questionnaire to collect data from Chinese tourists. In total, 177 responses were gathered and analysed. From the test results, three hypotheses were partially rejected, and one hypothesis was accepted. Hypothesis 1 was rejected from the overall perspective, but the influences of push factors could still be found from some statistically significant differences. For example, customised travellers were influenced more by the desire of self-achievement due to the pursuits of the high quality of the trip (P. Jiang et al., 2015). For Hypothesis 2, although it was partially rejected, the significant differences did exist in psychocentric variables, which revealed that psychocentric factors like 'the language spoken by locals' and 'people traveling with you' affect Chinese tourists' travel decisions. Hypothesis 3 was the only one accepted. The results showed that variables related to self-fulfilment needs and psychological needs did influence Chinese tourists' travel choices, which supported Maslow's (1987) needs theory to some extent.

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Implications

The results of the study also provide thoughts and recommendations for worldwide destinations, because understanding different factors behind Chinese tourists' choices of travel enables tourism operators to come up with targeted marketing plans for different types of travellers. According to the findings, package travellers were more likely affected by psychocentric factors such as the language spoken by locals and the availability of holiday packages. Therefore, it is important for destinations to cooperate with Chinese travel agencies, creating special holiday packages and preparing structured itineraries for Chinese tourists. Since FIT wanted to know the culture of the destination and cared about accompanying travellers, more advertisements of cultural activities and adventures could be posted on diverse travel applications in order to attract more Chinese tourists. Finally, for customised travellers, their focus on special events and customised routes suggests local events and activities need to be pointed out, along with emphasis on high-quality services for designing tailored trips.

### Limitations

Even though the study offers a variety of factors affecting Chinese tourists' choices of travel, a few limitations still exist. Firstly, although the sample size was quite large, the convenience sampling method might lead to biased sampling. Moreover, in the survey questions of travel-related information, the participants were asked to answer the questions based on their last experiences, but the answers might not be the ones they always did or preferred, which could also lead to different results. Additionally, the quantitative method resulted in the inability of the researcher to control the environments, which may cause confusion for the participants (Lehaney & Vinten, 1994).

#### **Further Research**

As for the recommendations for further research, firstly, more travel motivation theories could be considered, because this study only tested four theories, which may not be comprehensive enough. Second, the study of Chinese tourists could be divided more specifically into the South of China and North of China, since the demographic data showed that there was a large difference between the two regions, which may be another perspective to understand Chinese tourists' characteristics. Lastly, the psychological



factors that influence Chinese tourists' decision of travel could be categorised into different groups to see the extent of effect on worldwide tourists' travel choices, because in the results of this study, there were many psychological variables that affected Chinese tourists' travel types, which might be another topic for tourism research.

To sum up, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of Chinese tourists by describing its market environment, explaining different travel types and motivations, and most importantly, testing and finding out the factors that affect Chinese tourists' choices of travel. In addition, it explored the recommendation strategies of worldwide destinations targeting the Chinese tourism market.

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