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# An Evaluation of Satisfaction Levels among Chinese Tourists in Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

**This paper examines the extent to which Vietnam satisfies the various destination attributes sought by Chinese tourists. The research investigates a number of variables, including socio-demographics and travel characteristics, and compares the importance that travellers attach to various destination attributes with their associated satisfaction with Vietnam's various tourism products. By investigating the relationship between importance and satisfaction from the perspective of Chinese tourists, the paper makes a contribution to the literature. The findings should provide Vietnamese service providers with insights into the perceptions and satisfaction levels of Chinese tourists. Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.**

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**Keywords:** Vietnam; Chinese tourists; perceptions; satisfaction; destination loyalty

## INTRODUCTION

### Vietnam as a destination for Chinese tourists

Asia has recently emerged as one of the world's fastest growing destination regions. Asia's middle class is expanding rapidly and is travelling more extensively. Vietnam has considerable appeal for this market and offers further potential for development. Consumers from source markets such

as China are seeking relaxation but are often unable to afford long haul travel. There is considerable market potential from neighbouring countries including Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand as well as from China. Other Asian market sources that also offer prospects of investment include Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore and Malaysia.

It has been predicted that by 2020 China will be the world's fourth largest outbound tourism market (World Tourism Organisation (WTO), 2006). This forecast is attributed to economic growth, changing lifestyles within China and finally to the relaxation of Chinese government policies towards outbound travel. Previous studies have investigated Chinese outbound tourist behaviour (King and McVey, 2003). Qu and Li (1997) examined the characteristics and satisfaction of Chinese visitors to Hong Kong. Pan and Laws (2004) identified the Chinese preference for package tours to Australia, including sightseeing, local guides, accommodation and meals. The Chinese appear to prefer travelling in groups on well-established itineraries to famous sites and using budget hotels. Yu and Weiler (2001) have noted that Australia is attractive to Chinese visitors for its scenery, safety, famous attractions and different cultures. Ryan and Mo (2001) characterised the Chinese as a well-travelled segment with above average incomes and educational attainments, motivated by a wish for relaxation and sightseeing into unfamiliar places. They prefer safe destinations with clean and unpolluted environments and to learn more about Western history and culture.

The future for tourism to Vietnam from China appears to be bright, helped by the easy accessibility between the two countries and by the granting of Approved Destination Status. By 2007, China had confirmed its place as Vietnam's largest single source of international tourists (Vietnam National Administration of

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Table 1. Asian tourist arrivals to Vietnam by major countries of origin (2003–2007)

Ranking	Nationality	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
1	China	626 476	672 846	724 385	693 423	778 431
2	Japan	152 755	204 860	279 769	209 730	267 210
3	Taiwan	212 370	200 061	211 072	207 866	256 906
4	Korea	53 452	75 167	105 060	130 076	232 995
5	Cambodia	124 557	76 620	69 538	84 256	90 838
6	Malaysia	20 378	26 265	46 086	48 662	55 717
7	Thailand	26 366	31 789	40 999	40 123	53 682
8	Singapore	39 100	32 110	35 261	36 870	50 942
9	Laos	27 918	40 696	37 237	75 396	34 215
10	Philippines	18 760	20 035	25 306	22 983	24 542
11	Indonesia	7 062	11 116	13 456	16 799	18 500
12	Myanmar	839	1 837	1 131	1 369	1 441
13	Brunei	359	415	434	592	532
Total		1 310 392	1 393 817	1 589 734	1 568 145	1 624 951
Grand total		2 140 100	2 330 050	2 627 988	2 073 433	2 927 876

Source: VNAT (2007).

Tourism (VNAT), 2007). While 14 other Asia Pacific countries have recorded annual increases of over 10% for travel to Vietnam since 1997, China will continue to be the largest single source market with arrivals having increased from 62 460 in 1995 to 778 431 in 2007. Table 1 tracks the arrivals from selected Asian countries over the period 2002–2007.

Understanding the cross-border relationship between China and Vietnam is critical for appreciating the nature of tourism interactions between the two countries. China's border provinces have emerged as major destinations for both Chinese and Vietnamese travellers. Yunnan Province, which is located in South-west China, borders the three Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states of Vietnam, Lao PDR and Myanmar. The Yunnan authorities have attached great importance to trade, economic cooperation and tourism with Southeast Asian countries. An area of concentrated tourism activity is also taking shape along the boundary between Vietnam and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of Southern China. Cross-border trade and tourism have been stimulated by the combined tourism appeal of diverse ethnic minority cultures, frescoes and battlefield sites. The Sino–Vietnamese border is several thousand kilometres in length. Most Chinese tourists to

Vietnam arrive by land through Ha Long Bay, which is a major sightseeing attraction. Arrivals have been stimulated by the availability of direct flights from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai. These three cities are home to many of China's most affluent households.

Vietnam offers a diverse range of destination features that appeal to the Chinese market, including natural attractions, exotic cultures and history, and the Southeast Asian cultural context is somewhat familiar to them. Other facilitating factors include travelling time, affordability and more relaxed entry procedures. According to VNAT (2007), China will contribute an increasing proportion of total inbound tourism by 2010. Despite the significance of the market, and with the exception of a single comparative study by Truong and King (2006), no researchers have undertaken any comprehensive analysis of the holiday perceptions and satisfaction of Chinese tourists in Vietnam. The present paper addresses this gap by exploring the travel consumption behaviour of Chinese tourists towards the destination products and services offered in Vietnam. It identifies the extent to which Vietnam delivers the attributes that tourists are seeking. The major purposes of the paper are:

- (1) to examine the socio-demographic and travel characteristics of Chinese tourists to Vietnam;
- (2) to analyse the destination product benefits that are sought by Chinese tourists in terms of perceived importance and satisfaction;
- (3) to investigate any evidence of destination loyalty among Chinese tourists by questioning their intention to return or willingness to recommend Vietnam to others; and
- (4) based on the benefits that are sought by tourists, to determine which themes should be emphasised in marketing strategies targeted at Chinese tourists.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Tourism products

Tourism destinations have been conceptualised in a variety of ways. Pearce (1989) proposed that a destination consists of an amalgam of products and services that are available in one location and are capable of drawing visitors from beyond its spatial confines. Other researchers have also viewed a destination as an amalgam or combination of individual products and experience opportunities which collectively provide a destination experience. Hu and Ritchie (1993) defined a tourism destination as 'a package of tourism facilities and services, which like any other consumer product, is composed of a number of multi-dimensional attributes'. Other researchers have incorporated a supply- and demand-side approach into their definition of tourism products by describing how tourists interact with components of the destination over the course of their travel. Mo *et al.* (1993) have shown that the tourist's experiential desires of an international destination combine two factors. The primary factor is the 'Destination Orientation Dimension', which incorporates society and culture. The secondary factor is the 'Travel Service Dimension', which includes transportation, food and lodging services. Kotler *et al.* (1996, 2003) have proposed a more comprehensive model of the product environment and have identified six factors which shape the destination 'macro-environment': demographic, economic, natural, technologi-

cal, political and cultural forces. Smith (1994) acknowledged the role of travel services in creating a product experience and describes how various destination 'inputs' lead to an experiential 'output' for tourists.

A number of researchers have supported Smith's (1994) contention that destination elements constitute the core of the environmental effect on visitors. Dunn and Iso-Ahola (1991) and Buckley (1994) refer to the physical elements of the destination as natural resources, a site or facility or physical conditions (weather). Machlis and Burch (1983) and Canestrelli and Costa (1991) have emphasised social factors such as the friendliness of the local people, the language spoken, urban layout and population density as important destination attributes within the macro-environment. Watson and Kopachevsky (1994) have argued that tourist service experiences can only be understood when account is taken of the wider context and setting. Previous research on consumer service experiences has also corroborated this notion. In addition to the service itself, the physical environment within which the encounter occurs plays a significant role in the consumer experience (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994; Bitner *et al.*, 1997). In the case of Vietnam, the culture, customs and traditions as well as the friendliness of the local people could be considered as draw cards for international tourists.

Other product attributes that may influence traveller experiences and destination perceptions include economic conditions such as currency exchange, market behaviour and pricing (Dieke, 1991; Stevens, 1992). Cultural dimensions have a further influence, including authentic local culture, history, institutions and customs (Cohen, 1988; Prentice, 1993). The final contributing factor is politics, including stability and government approaches towards entry and visa requirements. These characteristics may influence tourist perceptions and behaviour as well as the destination environment. The political dimension may incorporate heritage interpretation, reflective of the idea that national identities are built around the concept of 'winners' or 'survivors' (Teye, 1988; Richter, 1989; Hall, 1997).

Murphy and Pritchard (1997) supported the notion that multiple attributes may contribute to

the environmental effect and have characterised destination products as the environmental impact of a destination setting plus the effect of service infrastructure on the visitor experience (Murphy *et al.*, 2000). Truong (2002) has proposed the five 'A's' (attractions, activities, accommodation, amenity and accessibility) as a holistic approach towards tourism products and services in her application of the Holiday Satisfaction (HOLSAT) model to measure satisfaction levels of among Australian tourists to Vietnam.

The foregoing review has provided a range of perspectives about destinations and the destination-related elements that contribute to the tourism 'product'. However, according to Um and Crompton (1992), tourists who have not previously visited a destination will generally have limited knowledge about the destination or the products on offer. In these circumstances, tourists find it difficult to evaluate the salient destination attributes. To the extent that evaluations are possible, destination image occupies an important and determining role in the mind of the tourists. Since international tourism consumption is by definition multinational, tourists must build a mental picture of the foreign setting that they expect to experience. Most academic analyses of the tourism product environment have been limited to the study of Western markets and have lacked the necessary complexity to take full account of the diversity experienced by different nationalities in multiple destination settings. This is notably the case in the context of the perceptions and satisfaction of Chinese tourists travelling in Vietnam. For the purposes of the current study, the destination product is viewed as a holistic concept focused around the Chinese perspective and incorporating six elements: cultural, social, economic, political, geographical and physical.

### **The role of destination image in holiday satisfaction**

Tourist perceptions influence destination choice and are important for destination marketing (Ahmed, 1991), consumption and intention to revisit (Stevens, 1992). Most tourists have experienced other destinations, and their perceptions are influenced by the comparisons that they make with facilities, attractions, and

service standards that they have encountered elsewhere (Laws, 1995). As contemporary tourists become increasingly discriminating, the importance of perceptions has increased. Tourists are becoming more experienced and value-conscious. To remain competitive, destinations must be perceived as relatively safe and secure. Tourism products and services must also be attractive, eye-catching and of a quality similar to or better than those offered by other countries. Service providers at the destination have to be perceived as capable, professional and friendly. It is important to have comprehensive information about how tourists perceive a destination in terms of host products and services, and about the role that these components play in tourist behaviour and satisfaction. Other concepts may also be correlated to the concept of perception such as stereotype, attribute and attitude. These concepts also impact on tourist satisfaction. However, they have not been investigated in the current paper study given the limited scope of the research. This section restricts its coverage to the concept of destination image because it is more applicable to the evaluation of tourist perceptions and satisfaction.

To accumulate tourism experiences, travellers have to visit a place and take in the 'atmosphere' (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). Atmosphere plays a prominent role in the formulation of destination image and has been defined by Kotler *et al.* (1993) as 'the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a people have of a place'. Image involves the sum of associations and information connected to a destination, including multiple destination components and personal perception. Image research has produced a variety of complex patterns, some of them contradictory, which require further analysis (Ross, 1993).

The importance of destination image has been widely recognised. Image has been incorporated as a powerful factor within a variety of travel decision making and behaviour models, particularly at the anticipation stage (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Dimanche and Moody, 1998). While potential tourists form a destination image from their perception of vacation attributes, they may also develop these perceived attributes into destination impressions. As the destination image is a



tourist's mental picture or subjective (perceived) reality of a particular destination, it affects tourist decision making and behaviour (Bordas and Rubio, 1993; Cooper *et al.*, 1993). Destinations with stronger positive images will have a higher probability of being included and chosen in the process of decision making (Alhemoud and Armstrong, 1996); Telisman-Kosuka, 1994). Tourists must eventually base their destination choice on a combination of perceived destination images, attitudes formed from the available information sources, the positioning of this relative to the alternatives and ability to meet perceived needs. An accurate assessment of product image is a prerequisite to designing an effective marketing strategy (Reilly, 1990). According to Ashworth and Goodall (1988) and Mansfeld (1992), tourism image influences consumer behaviour and will also influence quality as perceived by tourists and satisfaction obtained from the holiday experience. Tourism image exercises a positive influence on perceived quality and satisfaction, because it moulds the expectations that the individual forms before the visit, and these variables depend on the comparison of such expectations with experience (Phelps, 1986; Font, 1997) as suggested by Grönroos (1984).

Pike (2002) undertook a review of 142 papers in the destination image literature over the period 1973–2000. He found that North America was the most popular region of study (58 papers). This was followed by UK/Europe (45), Asia (25), Australasia (19), Africa (14), Central America/Caribbean (9), South Pacific (5) and South America (1). Of the various Asian studies, none has investigated the destination image of Vietnam. An understanding of tourist destination images from various cultural backgrounds is particularly important because tourist perceptions of reality will affect their travel decision making and country selection. This in turn affects Vietnam's tourism management and marketing activities. Since image is similar to perceptions, the two concepts will be used interchangeably in the present study. Assuming that this is the case, tourists will make their ultimate destination choices based on perceived destination images. Tourist destination images are important because they influence both the decision-making behaviour

of international tourists and their levels of satisfaction regarding their Vietnam holiday experiences. Understanding tourist perceptions of Vietnam from the Chinese perspectives is valuable, enabling the incorporation of salient attributes and the re-evaluated image into tourism marketing planning and successful tourism development in the country.

### **Tourist satisfaction**

Satisfaction is primarily a function of the relationship between pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences (Moutinho, 1987). Oliver and Desarbo (1988) have indicated that an individual's expectations are confirmed when a service performs according to expectations. Expectations are negatively disconfirmed in cases where the service performs worse than expected and are positively disconfirmed when the service performs better than expected. This definition has been criticised for its assumption that expectations are adequate predictors of satisfaction, following evidence that the most satisfactory experiences may be those that are least expected (Arnould and Price, 1993). Weber (1996) has proposed consumer satisfaction as a fundamental pillar of marketing theory and as a key influence over future purchase intentions, market share and word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. She argues that product competitiveness is strengthened when consumers are satisfied. Based on these perspectives, tourist expectations and experiences may be expected to influence holiday satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Given that satisfaction is a multifaceted concept, it is important to undertake an evaluation that takes account of the multiple dimensions of the holiday encounter, including products, services and facilities. In the study of travel behaviours, tourist needs should be considered as well as the outcomes of such needs, namely the extent to which needs are met and whether tourists are satisfied with their services and/or product experiences. Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) have stressed the importance of considering questions relating to perceptions of both needs and outcomes. Although many researchers have examined tourist needs, fewer have focused on levels of satisfaction with destination area attributes (Weber, 1996; Cho, 1998) or

the perceived needs of tourists and their satisfaction with the outcome of such needs. To date, no researchers have examined tourist satisfaction with Vietnam's tourism products, with the exception of Truong (2002) and Truong and King (2005). The present study addresses this gap by investigating the incidence of satisfaction among Chinese tourists towards the products and services encountered in Vietnam.

### Destination loyalty (behavioural intentions)

Past research has suggested that satisfaction is an excellent predictor of repurchase intentions (Tam 2000; Choi and Chu, 2001; Petrick and Backman 2002). The importance of repeat visitation in international tourism has been widely acknowledged at the level of both the overall economy and of the individual attraction. The lower costs associated with marketing to repeat consumers have been frequently observed (Rosenberg and Czepiel, 1983; Haywood, 1989). The 'earning potential' of reducing consumer attrition has also been noted (Reicheld and Sasse, 1990). Relying on intuition, operators and destination managers have commonly used repeat visitation as an indicator of positive product perceptions.

Alongside intention to revisit, WOM communication has been identified as a significant market phenomenon and as a means by which tourists express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with products (Murray, 1991; Gremler, 1994). It has been suggested that informal information obtained through WOM has a strong impact on customer evaluations of products and sellers and on future purchase decisions (Richins, 1983; Bolcn, 1994). Other researchers, including Pizam *et al.* (1978) and Danaher and Arweiler (1996), have shown the importance of satisfaction as a way of understanding destination performance. Various studies have examined the impact of destination attributes on intentions to revisit and to recommend (Ross, 1993; Baker and Crompton, 2000; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). An investigation of each attribute's impact on future intentions might assess levels of performance and any feedback received from customers, and highlights various destination strengths and weaknesses. To date, examination of the influence of overall

satisfaction and satisfaction with specific attributes on repeat visitation to Vietnam has been confined to a single study by Truong (2002). The present study contributes to the relevant literature by examining the relationship between perceptions, satisfaction and destination loyalty.

The literature review conducted in the previous sections has demonstrated the existence of a relationship between destination products, perceptions and satisfaction and destination loyalty. In the present paper, it is hypothesised that tourist perceptions of destination products will assist the prediction of satisfaction and destination loyalty, including the intention to return to the destination and the willingness to recommend it. As is outlined in Figure 1, there is a strong link between perception, satisfaction and destination loyalty concerning the consumption of tourism products. These elements are proposed as indicators of travel behaviour.

### RESEARCH METHODS

The sample population consisted of mainland China residents visiting Vietnam as part of an organised tour or as free independent travellers. A field survey was undertaken in Vietnam between 2003 and 2004, with respondents being approached randomly in major attractions, restaurants, shops, hotels and bars located in major cities in Vietnam such as Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, Hoi An, Hue, Hai Phong and Hanoi. Some 250 responses were received, of which 235 were considered to be complete and useable. Version 16 of SPSS (SPSS Inc, Chicago, Illinois) was used for data input purposes. A five-part questionnaire was used for administration of the survey and incorporated a series of closed questions as follows:

- (1) The first section investigated respondent socio-demographic profiles.
- (2) The second section investigated respondent travel characteristics.
- (3) The third and fourth sections focused on respondent satisfaction with their experiences of products and services in Vietnam and the importance that they attached to the various elements. Each section consisted of 31 attributes and incorporated

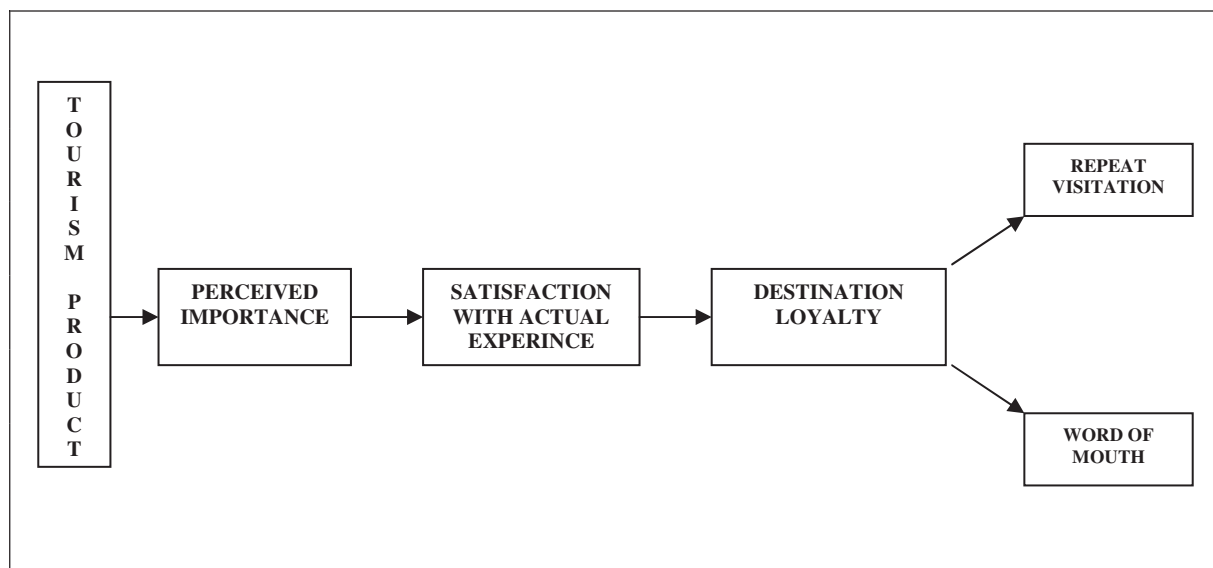


Figure 1. Interrelationship model of perception, satisfaction and destination loyalty (developed by researchers).

variables covering destination attractiveness, amenities, variety, price, quality of tourism products and services and safety. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of the various attributes using a six-point Likert-type scale with 1 indicating 'Completely Unimportant' and 6 indicating 'Extremely Important'. Respondents were then asked to indicate their satisfaction with the same holiday attributes on a six-point Likert-type scale with 1 indicating 'Completely Unsatisfied' and 6 meaning 'Extremely Satisfied'.

- (4) The final section investigated destination loyalty. Respondents were asked to indicate their intention to revisit Vietnam and their likelihood of recommending Vietnam to others on a scale from low to high, with 1 being 'Definitely Not' and 6 being 'Definitely Yes'.

The quantitative data were the primary method for elaborating the findings and for providing a clearer picture of perceptions and satisfaction levels. Descriptive analysis was the chosen method for analysing respondent socio-demographic profiles and travel characteristics, their satisfaction with Vietnam's destination attributes and the importance that they attached to the various contributing factors.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-demographic profiles and travel characteristics

The socio-demographic and travel characteristic profiles of the respondents are shown in Tables 2 and 3. There were more male respondents than females, and there was a higher proportion of younger respondents (more than 67% were under 38 years old). A high proportion of respondents possessed a university or post-graduate degree (44.7%). There was a wide occupational spread ranging from tradespersons (21.3%) to technicians (19.1%) and professionals (18.3%), labourer or worker (16.6%), manager/administrator (14%) and student (9.4%). Retirees constituted only 1.3% of the responses, perhaps suggestive that it is mainly younger employed Chinese who are traveling to Vietnam.

Most respondents were travelling to Vietnam for pleasure (50.6%) or business (46.4%). A high proportion was undertaking an escorted tour (88.9%), while 11.1% were travelling as free and independent travellers. On this basis, it is unsurprising that respondents expressed a strong preference for escorted tours. The tendency to travel as part of a group rather than as individuals is prevalent among other Asian outbound markets to Vietnam (VNAT, 2005).



Table 2. Socio-demographics of Chinese tourists

Chinese tourists ( <i>n</i> = 235)	Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	126	53.6
Female	109	46.4
<b>Age (years)</b>		
18–24	38	16.2
25–31	61	26.0
32–38	59	25.1
39–45	37	15.7
46–52	32	13.6
53–59	4	1.70
More than 60	4	1.70
<b>Education</b>		
Primary School	13	5.50
High school	53	22.6
Non-degree (College)	64	27.2
University degree	77	32.8
Post-graduate	28	11.9
<b>Occupation</b>		
Manager/administrator	33	14.0
Professional	43	18.3
Student	22	9.40
Tradesperson	50	21.3
Technician	45	19.1
Labourer/worker	39	16.6
Retired	3	1.30

Source: Survey Results 2004.

The reasons for this approach include affordability, convenience and a desire to minimise hassles. When promoting their product range, Chinese tour operators may wish to emphasise the benefits of fewer hassles, greater convenience and reasonable price. The provision of quality service and varied tour options also appeared to appeal to respondents.

With regard to party composition, 57.5% of respondents were travelling with four, five and six persons, typically friends or colleagues, while 19.6% of respondents travelled as a party of two and 14.9% in a party of three persons (typically with family). The interpersonal relationship that respondents enjoyed with family and friends during their trip and interactions with others were noted key experiences by respondents.

Most respondents (60%) were first time visitors. The duration of travel was predominantly

one week (71.9%), with only 7.8% indicating a stay of two to four weeks. In view of China's proximity to Vietnam and easy accessibility by bus or train, it was not surprising that many respondents were travelling to Vietnam briefly and were returning for a second or third time. Most respondents (64.7%) had made use of information that had been provided by their families and relatives, though most also used other sources. The results indicate that Chinese travellers access a wide range of information when preparing for a holiday in Vietnam. These findings are consistent with the literature, which has indicated that most of the tourists who plan their travel in advance search for detailed information. These outcomes also confirm the findings of Telisman-Kosuta (1989), Butler (1990), Bojanic (1991) and Gartner (1986), who concluded that the sources of information and types of promotional tool influence destination image.

The present research has confirmed that information obtained from family, relatives and friends, media, travel agents and previous experience were the most prominent influences on the formation of Chinese tourist perceptions towards Vietnam. This may have been influenced by the lack of alternatives. According to Biles *et al.* (1999), Vietnam's overseas promotional activity has been very limited. Vietnam's tourism authorities may need to develop segmented marketing strategies instead of relying on the more traditional and less targeted approach to overseas awareness raising. It may also be worth considering electronic and media information sources to generate interest among prospective tourists. Finally, there may be merit in enhancing the knowledge and skills of travel agents and other service providers to help them provide their customers with higher quality products and services. It is widely accepted that positive reports from satisfied clients can play an important role in determining the success of tourism businesses.

### Comparing satisfaction and perceived importance

The following section summarises the descriptive analysis of the survey findings, focusing on two aspects of destination attributes,

Table 3. The travel characteristics of Chinese tourists

Chinese tourists ( <i>n</i> = 235)	Number	Percentage
Purpose of trip to Vietnam		
Holiday	119	50.6
Education	0	0.00
Conference	0	0.00
Business	109	46.4
Visiting friends and relatives	14	6.00
Sources of information about Vietnam		
Family/relatives/friends	152	64.7
Media	125	53.2
Previous experience	73	31.1
Guide books	41	17.4
Travel agents	75	31.9
Newspaper	52	22.1
Internet	42	17.9
Number of trips to Vietnam		
First time	141	60.0
Second time	55	23.4
Third time	30	12.8
Fourth time	4	1.70
Fifth time	4	1.70
Sixth time and more	1	0.40
Length of holiday in Vietnam		
Less than one week	169	71.9
From one week to two weeks	48	20.4
More than two weeks	6	2.60
From two weeks to three weeks	6	2.60
From three weeks to four weeks	2	0.90
More than four weeks	4	1.70
Travel mode to Vietnam		
Escorted tour	209	88.9
Independently	26	11.1
Travel companion		
Alone	19	8.10
Two persons	46	19.6
Three persons	35	14.9
Four persons	31	13.2
Five persons	42	17.9
Six persons	62	26.4

Source: Survey Results 2004.

namely degree of importance and degree of satisfaction.

*Destination attributes: degree of importance.* Mean scores were obtained for the perceived importance attached to each attribute. Drawing from a list of 31 variables, respondents were asked to assess the importance of each attribute with

1 being least important and 6 being most important. The mean results highlight the destination attributes viewed as most important by respondents. Of the 31 variables, the 15 that scored highest in terms of importance are 'value of goods and services for prices charged', 'overall value for money', 'prices of food and beverages', 'prices of souvenirs and gifts',

'Chinese language spoken at destination', 'perception about variety of beautiful natural scenery', 'availability of brochure in my own language', 'availability of shopping facilities', 'overall feeling of safety and security', 'political stability of destination', 'sign posting to attractions and facilities in your own language', 'friendliness and hospitality of local people', 'availability of nightlife and entertainment facilities', 'efficiency of services at tourist facilities', and 'social and educational value of tour'. The 15 most important attributes and their means are listed in Table 4.

*Destination attributes: degree of satisfaction.* The mean scores for respondent satisfaction were calculated. Drawing from a list of 31 attributes, respondents were asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction, with 1 signifying least satisfied, and 6 very satisfied on a scale of 1–6. An analysis of the means allows the identification of the attribute recognised as most satisfactory by respondents. Of the 31 variables, the 15 which scored highest for satisfaction were 'perception about variety of beautiful natural scenery', 'variety of activities', 'quality and variety of restaurants', 'prices of food and beverages', 'quality standard of accommodation/resort', 'safety at tourist sites/accommodations/restaurants', 'friendliness and hospitality of local people', 'availability of shopping facilities', 'availability of nightlife and entertainment facilities (e.g. karaoke)', 'prices of souvenirs and gifts', 'service levels of immigration and customs clearance', 'overall feeling of safety and security', 'political stability of destination', 'social and educational value of tour', and 'variety of cultural event and festival'. The 15 most satisfied attributes and their means are listed in Table 4.

Table 4 provides a listing of the top destination attributes from the respondent perspective, with those attributes assessed in order of importance listed on the left and assessed in terms of satisfaction on the right. In each case, the mean is also reported and the differences in ranking are reported. The results indicate that there is a close match between importance and satisfaction in the case of 'variety of beautiful natural scenery', 'prices of food and beverages', 'availability of shopping facilities', 'availability of nightlife and entertainment facilities', 'prices of souvenirs and gifts', 'overall

feeling of safety and security', 'political stability of destination', 'friendliness and hospitality of local people', and 'social and educational value of tour'.

The above results indicate that respondents were generally satisfied with their experience of travel to Vietnam. In terms of destination attractiveness, they expressed particular satisfaction in the case of scenic beauty and with the range of cultural events and festivals. In terms of value, respondents were satisfied with the quality and variety of restaurants, accommodation, shopping facilities and entertainment facilities (e.g. karaoke). They were also generally satisfied with the price of food, beverages, souvenirs and gifts. However many respondents were concerned with 'overall value for money' and 'value of goods and services for prices charged' for tourism products and services in Vietnam. There was a prevailing view among respondents that prices are more expensive relative to other Asian destinations. Concerning overall safety and security, respondents were satisfied with the security provided at tourist sites, accommodation and restaurants. This would be of considerable reassurance to the Vietnamese authorities. Respondents enjoyed the friendliness and hospitality of local people, particularly when visiting the Chinese communities in Hoi An and Cho Lon (Chinatown). However, a number of respondents were disappointed at being harassed by beggars and street vendors.

Of the 15 attributes that respondents rated as most important, three rated very low in terms of satisfaction. These were 'Chinese language spoken at destination', 'sign posting to attractions and facilities in your own language' and 'availability of brochure in my own language'. Such communication deficiencies have become increasingly evident as Chinese arrivals to Vietnam have increased. The linguistic diversity within the Chinese market is also increasingly obvious. Since the Chinese language has different dialects, serving clients from different regions is emerging as a major challenge for Vietnamese service providers.

### Destination loyalty

When asked about their intentions to revisit, 35.3% of respondents stated that they would

Table 4. Degree of importance and satisfaction of destination attributes in Vietnam

Importance	Mean	Rank	Comparison		Rank	Mean	Satisfaction
			Importance	Satisfaction			
Value of goods and services for prices charged	5.52	1		1	5.54	Variety of beautiful natural scenery	
Overall value for money	5.49	2		2	5.40	Variety of activities (cruising, trekking or backpacking)	
Prices of food and beverages	5.42	3		3	5.39	Quality and variety of restaurants	
Prices of souvenirs and gifts	5.40	4		4	5.34	Prices of food and beverages	
Chinese languages spoken at destination	5.37	5		5	5.29	Quality standard of accommodation / resort	
Variety of beautiful natural scenery	5.35	6		6	5.25	Availability of shopping facilities	
Availability of brochure in my own language	5.34	7		7	5.21	Availability of nightlife and entertainment facilities	
Availability of shopping facilities	5.28	8		8	5.15	Prices of souvenirs and gifts	
Overall feeling of safety and security	5.26	9		9	5.06	Service levels of immigration and customs clearance	
Political stability of destination	5.26	10		10	5.00	Variety of cultural events and festivals	
Sign posting to attractions and facilities in your own language	5.25	11		11	4.98	Overall feeling of safety and security	
Friendliness and hospitality of local people	5.15	12		12	4.97	Safety at tourist sites/ accommodations/ restaurants	
Availability of nightlife and entertainment facilities	5.14	13		13	4.89	Political stability of destination	
Efficiency of services at tourist facilities	5.11	14		14	4.87	Friendliness and hospitality of local people	
Social and educational value of tour	5.07	15		15	4.81	Social and educational value of tour	
Safety at tourist sites/ accommodations/ restaurants	5.01	16		16	4.80	Services levels and competency of tour guides	
Variety of cultural events and festivals	5.00	17		17	4.79	Overall value for money	
Quality standard of accommodation / resort	5.00	18		18	4.78	Chinese languages spoken at destination	
Services levels and competency of tour guides	4.94	19		19	4.76	Variety of natural, cultural and historical attractions	
Service levels of immigration and customs clearance	4.89	20		20	4.75	Accessibility and comfort of local transport services	
Quality and variety of restaurants	4.86	21		21	4.67	Efficiency of services at tourist facilities	
Accessibility and comfort of local transport services	4.75	22		22	4.60	Services levels in retail shops	
Variety of activities (cruising, trekking or backpacking)	4.71	23		23	4.60	Overall hygiene and sanitation at destination	
Variety of natural, cultural and historical attractions	4.70	24		24	4.59	Service levels at airport	
Services levels in retail shops	4.60	25		25	4.58	Services levels of local drivers	
Overall hygiene and sanitation at destination	4.60	26		26	4.56	Services levels of front-line employees	
Service levels at airport	4.59	27		27	4.51	Value of goods and services for prices charged	
Services levels of local drivers	4.58	28		28	4.47	Availability of brochure in my own language	
Services levels of front-line employees	4.56	29		29	4.37	Service levels of banking facilities	
Service levels of banking facilities	4.37	30		30	4.31	Availability of facilities at tourist sites and airports	
Availability of facilities at tourist sites and airports	4.31	31		31	4.20	Sign posting to attractions and facilities in your own language	

Source: Survey Results 2004.

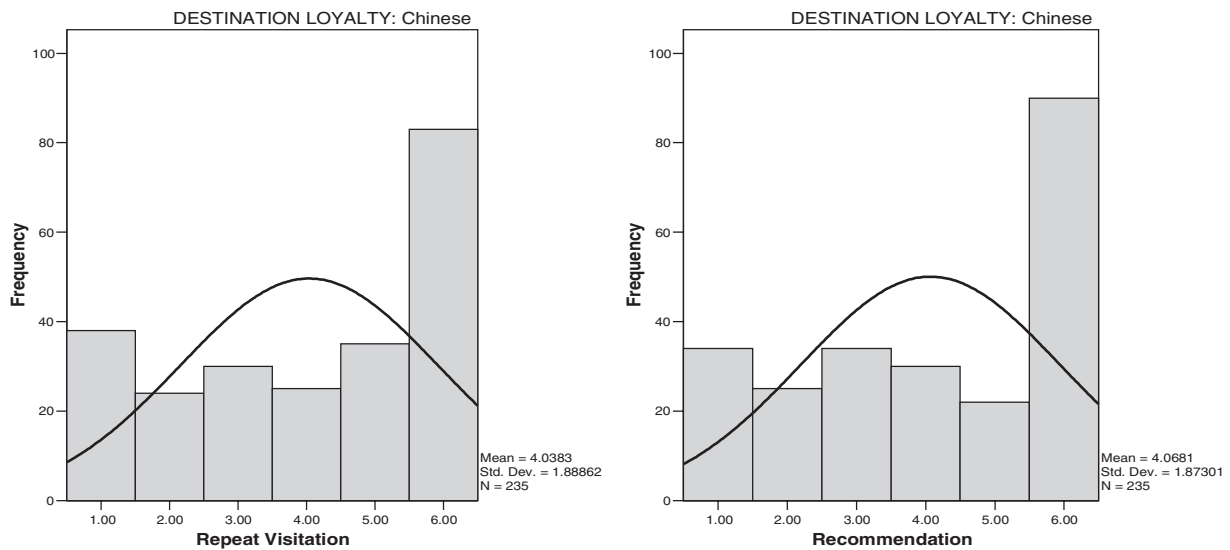


Figure 2. Behavioural intentions of Chinese tourists.

definitely return to Vietnam, 48.5% would consider returning to Vietnam, whereas only 16.2% would not. These findings suggest that Chinese tourists are poised to continue travelling to Vietnam. In terms of recommending Vietnam as a holiday destination to others, 38.3% of respondents said 'definitely yes', 47.2% said 'yes' with only 14.5% of respondents replying in the negative. The proportion of respondents indicating a positive recommendation to others is higher than for repeat visitation (Figure 2). However, overall satisfaction among Chinese tourists is high.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By analysing multiple variables, this paper has addressed an under-researched aspect of tourism, namely Chinese views about Vietnam's tourism products. As is the case with other forms of leisure-oriented consumer behaviour, tourism is a product of cultural variables and processes. The findings should provide researchers with an enhanced understanding of the factors determining travel behaviour, including the effect of cultural characteristics such as socio-demographics, travel

characteristics and behavioural intentions on tourist perceptions and satisfaction. From a managerial perspective, the findings should assist tourism operators to develop more focused marketing activities and guide the development of products targeted at the Chinese market. The socio-demographic and travel characteristics of Chinese tourists that have been identified should provide some guidance for future marketing activities. The appeal of escorted tours could, for example, be enhanced by the incorporation of activities, thereby allowing tourists the opportunity to enjoy the company of fellow travellers and families. A number of key benefits that have been identified as important for respondents through the course of the paper are worth emphasising. These include scenic beauty, interesting history and culture, friendliness of local people, overall safety and security, quality and variety of restaurants, accommodation, shopping facilities and entertainment facilities, price of food, beverages, souvenirs and gifts purchased. Providing Chinese tourists with a satisfactory experience is equal in importance to projecting a positive image. Vietnamese service providers would be well advised to ensure that Chinese tourists have a satisfactory travel experience and should consider how to



add value with a view to securing a share of this emerging and high-potential market.

Tourism is often treated as a generic experience or product by those involved in planning and marketing. However, the findings of the present study indicate that marketers should take account of the cultural diversity of their target markets. This should apply not only to nationality but also to language, because the results have indicated that Vietnamese service providers faced some challenges in dealing with communication deficiencies. This is caused by the linguistic diversity of the Chinese market. The conduct of adequate training is highly recommended in this area. As tourism destinations draw increasingly upon culturally diverse source markets, the results will be of particular relevance. The findings should enhance the appreciation of Asian-based cultural characteristics among Asian and Vietnamese tourist marketers, particularly in the case of the Chinese, and provide a basis for adjusting relevant marketing strategies. Since Asia is one of the world's fastest growing tourism regions, it is timely to extend knowledge about Vietnam as a destination and connect tourism with prevalent culturally based visitor traits.

According to Mok and Armstrong (1995), the 'tastes and styles of travellers are still of an emerging nature'. Given China's stage of development as a source market and Vietnam's development as a destination, it will be particularly important to conduct longitudinal research on Chinese pleasure travellers. This approach should provide an understanding of travel patterns and monitoring attitudinal changes towards different types of activities and services. Though beyond the scope of the present study, it may be worthwhile comparing the expectations and perceptions of Chinese who have visited Vietnam with those who have visited other destinations. It is hoped that the present study will provide guidance for tourist destinations in general and Asian destinations in particular catering to the Chinese market. Since Asian destinations, including Vietnam, have much to offer to Chinese tourists in terms of diversity, culture, affordability and historical significance, further research is needed to place this potential within a wider context.

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