

Customer Insight in Tourism Business

Essays on Chinese Travelling to Finland

Heini Korvenkangas (ed.)

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Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulu

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PREFACE

Chinese incoming tourism has been a point of interest on various tourism courses over the past few years in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK). On a course called Customer Insight in Tourism Business, third year tourism students have conducted market research on Finland oriented Chinese incoming tourism. In 2016, course lecturers Maaria Berg and Heini Korvenkangas chose the Chinese incoming tourism as a common context for all students. As the Chinese tourism started to boom in Finland, it felt only natural to continue working with the Chinese context in 2017 and 2018.

Over the years, students have studied Chinese tourists' relationship with nature, sales channels, educational camps, buying behaviour in different segments and preferred choices in accommodation, food services and souvenirs among the other things. Every year we have had exchange students on the course as well, which has provided us the possibility to gain insight on Chinese travelling to Austria and France, for example.

Conducting extensive primary research has offered students with the opportunity to have expertise on a growing market segment when they graduate. At the same time, annual final seminars in the end of the course have offered new, updated information for tourism entrepreneurs to enhance their abilities to serve Chinese tourists.

From the very beginning, this has been an interesting pedagogical model, as students have studied a subject area that is constantly changing with a limited number of peer-reviewed sources available. Therefore, the skills and knowledge of SAMK's Senior China Advisor, Markku Paukkunen, have been an asset for the students and lecturers, as he has mentored and coached student groups during their research work. Paukkunen describes the collaboration as a two-way street: students have worked boldly in an unprejudiced manner and following their working has provided new insight for everyone involved.

This collection includes essays mainly from the last implementation of the course. Tourism curricula have evolved, and future students will continue working with Chinese incoming tourism in our new learning environment, SAMK EduTravel incoming agency. In September 2019 SAMK also opened a China Culture Center at SAMK Campus Pori in co-operation with Beijing City University. New learning environments will continue the long-term work that SAMK has done for enhancing the understanding of Chinese culture and business, offering learning opportunities for everyone interested in China.

Pori, 17th of September 2019

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THE YOUNG AND THE RICH CHINESE TRAVELLERS IN FINLAND

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Abstract

Finland has seen a rapid growth in the number of Chinese tourists during the few last years. Some of the reasons why Chinese travellers choose Finland as their travel destination is safety, good connections to the rest of the world and Finland's pure nature and especially Lapland during winter. Growth of Chinese tourists is not seen only in Finland but in other countries as well. China's new consumer generation, the millennials, are reshaping travelling. They are young, rich and aware of global culture. They are the result of the one-child policy, and a new consumer generation. The purpose of this essay is to examine these specific Chinese travellers and to answer the question: How Finland can capture the attention of the young and wealthy Chinese travellers as a travel destination? Furthermore, the essay focuses on how they differ from the other Chinese travellers travelling to Finland, and whether we have anything different or interesting to offer to them.

Tiivistelmä

Suomi on saanut nauttia kiinalaisten matkailijoiden määrän nopeasta kasvusta jo muutaman vuoden ajan. Yksi suurimmista tekijöistä miksi kiinalaiset valitsevat Suomen matkakohteekseen ovat turvallisuus, hyvät yhteydet muihin maihin sekä Suomen puhdas ja kaunis luonto, etenkin Lappi talviaikaan. Kiinalaisten matkailijoiden määrän kasvu on nähtävissä myös muualla maailmassa. Kiinan uusi kuluttajakunta eli milleniaalit muovaavat toiminnallaan matkailun trendejä. He ovat nuoria, varakkaita ja tietoisia erilaisista kulttuureista. He ovat perua Kiinan yhden lapsen politiikasta, ja uusi kuluttajasukupolvi. Esseen tarkoituksena on tutustua ja syventyä tarkemmin kyseiseen kohderyhmään sekä vastata kysymykseen: Miten Suomi voisi kiinnittää nuorten ja varakkaiden kiinalaisten matkailijoiden huomion matkailukohteena? Lisäksi esseessä tarkastellaan, miten he eroavat muista kiinalaisista matkailijoista, jotka matkustavat Suomeen ja onko meillä tarjota jotain erilaisista ja mielenkiintoista heille.

Keywords: young, affluent, Chinese travellers, consumer generation, millennials

INTRODUCTION

Typically, a young traveler does not need outside help in planning a trip and they usually do all the research themselves. This is starting to become more mainstream. Chinese tourists often rely on the internet when choosing their destinations. Search engines such as WeChat and Weibo are more popular in China than Google. (Chinese tourists... 2018.)

The world is becoming more and more dependent on social media and it is important to adapt to different platforms in order to reach the audience you want. That is why Finland should focus more on being a convenient and reachable destination on foreign social media platforms. The potential customers do exist and are out there. They just need a little push towards this country of lakes and forests. (Chinese tourists... 2018.)

When comparing between 2016 and 2017, the number of Chinese tourists in Finland rose 63 percent according to Visit Finland. They bring so much money that some local communities can even live off tourism. (Chinese tourists... 2018.)

MILLENNIALS

The millennials also known as Generation Y are a group of individuals born between 1970s and early 1990s. The Generation Y follows the older generation called Generation X, also known as “baby boomers” because they were born during increased birth rate era. The millennials are a group of people who prefer to communicate via email or text messages, which makes them an “internet generation”. This is the reason why they are so heavily dependent on their mobile devices, because they have always had access to them. The definition of millennials is also defined by modern technology, because they are required to use them in everyday life and work situations. (Study’s www-pages 2018.)

The millennials were born during an era where everything is tied together by mobile devices and other gadgets. Staying connected is easier than ever before, because of the modern technology. There are almost unlimited ways to stay connected and further advance in one’s career. They are used to this and they know how to take an advantage of this. (Generationy’s www-pages n.d.)

There are many ways to contact and stay connected, but millennials prefer ways that are more approachable and quicker than meeting face to face, like sending an email or a text message. Having a proper knowledge of all these possibilities is a key factor exceeding in your life. The Generation Y are people who appreciate organizations, which are taking the advantage of modern technology. That is why millennials are usually intrigued by companies, which use modern technology as their prime principle, when moving forward. Millennials are mostly seen working in organizations, which are ready to use modern ways and technologies to improve their structure. (Generationy’s www-pages n.d.)

Compared to Generation X, the Generation Y is much more family oriented. Their priorities are not to work long days and be promoted for better titles and earn more salary. Instead, they want to spend as much time as possible with their loved once. That does not mean that they are bad and lazy employees. Family is what matters the most for them, because they have lived in a family that were complete opposite to them. Their perception for family and work changed, because their parents worked long days not paying as much attention to them as they would have wanted and needed. The Generation Y is a group of individuals who want to find good balance between spending time with the family and ways to work as flexibly as possible. (Generationy’s www-pages n.d.)

The millennials know what they need and want. That is why they are seen as hardworking and ambitious people who do whatever it takes to succeed in life. They are not afraid of taking risks and do things that would make the older generation think twice. There are many successful entrepreneurs within the Generation Y, who raise the expectations for this generation. The millennials have high expectations towards their employees and co-workers. Millennials want their expectations to be matched. Staying in one role within the same organization is not something they prefer. Instead, they seek to improve themselves by working in different departments. (Generationy’s www-pages n.d.)

Working in a group is something that the millennials appreciate and enjoy greatly. Developing a project with a well-organized team and getting feedback from it is important to them. There is a sense of needing to be involved in something important. Teamwork is a key thing in many organizations these days. (Generationy’s www-pages n.d.)

Appreciating the input of an employee and getting constant feedback is a necessary thing in modern organizations. It is important to get proper guidance when starting a new career path and stepping into an unknown organization. Guiding new employees on their path at start is one of the factors that make modern companies appreciated. (Generationy's www-pages n.d.)

Chinese Millennials and The Fuerdai

It has been estimated that currently the world population is around 7.6 billion people. 1,8 billion of those people are millennials. In China alone, there are about 415 million millennials. They, together with Indian 440 million millennials, make about 47 percent of world's millennials. (Kumar 2018.)

There is a term for the young and the affluent Chinese people, which is called *the fuerdai*. It literally means "rich second generation" and it is starting to form a new type of class in China. They enjoy an extremely comfortable lifestyle and are often made fun of in Chinese media. The fuerdai can afford to travel a lot and are often sent to have a private education abroad. Almost none of these youngsters made their own wealth, but rather inherited it. They do not know the hard work behind their heritage and that is why it is easy for them to waste their parent's money. (McMahon 2018.)

The gap between poor and rich Chinese is getting wider than ever. The fuerdai usually go to the best schools and do not encounter many poor people and thus stay ignorant of the environment they live in. President Xi Jinping addressed the issue encouraging the fuerdai to think where their wealth came from and how to behave with it. (Shen 2015.)

Wealthy young Chinese people are a new target customer for the travel industry. Not all young Chinese people are from wealthy families. Some are, but most are not. However, they do have some significant advantages compared to some of their western counterparts. (Wang 2016.)

Comparing Chinese and Western millennials

It has been studied that millennials, no matter the country, share a few common features, such as experience seeking, insightfulness and digital savviness (Blanchard 2017). However, there are differences that set Chinese millennials apart from the western millennials.

While it is true that Chinese millennials have more in common with their western counterparts compared to older Chinese people, they are less westernized than they seem. For example, Chinese millennials are quite nationalistic in nature. They are deeply attached to their cultural heritage. So much in fact that they expect foreign brands to understand this heritage. (Blanchard 2017.)

Chinese millennials are very tech savvy and they are more active on social media than western millennials. This is most likely because when growing up, they were the only child and did not have siblings, which lead them seeking social interactions and entertainment on internet. (Retailinasia's www-pages 2017.)

Their access to worldwide web may be restricted and they do not have access to same social media in a way that most of the world has, like Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter but this does not mean that they are not aware of what is happening in the world. They have their own social and entertainment media platforms, for example Weibo, where they get the news in their own language. (Kumar 2018.)

What also makes Chinese millennials unique compared to other millennials, is the policy that was in place during the time they were born. In China, a one-child policy lasted from 1979 until 2015. In summary, it meant that for families in urban China only one child was allowed.

Being an only child in the family usually means that one was given all the attention and most likely was spoiled by parents and grandparents. Chinese millennials also grew up during China's economic reforms. They have never experienced the hardships that older generations did. (Wang 2017.)

Chinese millennials do not have to worry about paying off student loans after graduating. Usually their parents pay for their education and living expenses. The average cost of tuition is quite affordable, and majority of Chinese families can afford it. (Wang 2016.)

Many Chinese millennials do not have to bear housing costs. Around 90% of Chinese households own their homes, and most of them do so without any kinds of loans or mortgages. Taking a loan, or borrowing, is also not a part of their culture in the same way that it is in the West. These are the two major reasons why Chinese millennials can and do spend their income on other things, such as shopping and traveling. (Wang 2016.)

Chinese millennials as consumers

Chinese millennials are set to become the dominant consumer segment. Not only locally but globally as well. They have a high purchasing power. Since they do not have to worry about paying back student loans and do not have housing cost, they are free to spend their money on other things. Chinese millennials have turned to luxury products as a way to express personalities and reward themselves. (Blanchard 2017.)

Even though Chinese millennials are digitally connected and tech-savvy, when it comes to fashion, Chinese millennials do not look up the new trends from social media but from fashion magazines or brands own websites. Also, most of Chinese millennials are rather cautious shoppers and prefer to buy products in-store rather than to handle their shopping online like western millennials. Reasons for this are that in store they can feel, touch and try the product and "the experience". Only one-third of Chinese millennials make their purchases online. Compared to Western consumers, Chinese are also more brand loyal. More than half of Chinese millennials buy from a few preferred brands. (Zheng 2017.)

Luxury has made a comeback thanks to Chinese millennials. Not only in items but in traveling as well. What draws young Chinese people to spend money on luxury brands is the quality and they collect data from social media in order to judge the quality of a product. Uniqueness is also a feature that they consider when buying something. (Zheng 2017.)

In China, the average age of a luxury consumer is 28 years old, ten years younger compared to the rest of the world. Not only are they purchasing luxury products from young age, but also more frequently. (Asia times www-pages 2018.) Chinese people do not buy luxury products only locally, but globally as well. In 2017, Chinese people accounted for 32 percent of global luxury market (Mulqueen 2018). It has been estimated that by 2024 Chinese consumers will account for 40 percent of the global luxury market (Asia times www-pages 2018).

FINLAND AS A TRAVEL DESTINATION FOR YOUNG & AFFLUENT CHINESE TRAVELLERS

Young and wealthy Chinese millennial travellers are the once who travel the most in China. They usually spend their budget on sightseeing tours, shopping and expensive luxury items. They are also the once who travel most frequently, almost six different trips booked annually. After China's Generation Z (the generation prior to millennials), the Chinese millennials are more likely to go on a short vacation, which means fewer overnight stays. Chinese millennial travellers tend to relax, have fun with their families and go on sightseeing tours while on vacation, but they also go on romantic trips. (JingTravel's www-pages 2017.)

China's Generation Y is more willing to book trips into different locations than China's Generation Z is. The reasoning for this is that they are easily affected by visually appealing commercials and informative marketing campaigns. Chinese travellers tend to use smartphones in all situations, for example when researching information about new travel destinations. (JingTravel's www-pages 2017.)

Young and wealthy Chinese travellers are not only big-spenders on luxury items, but also on different activities, sightseeing tours and dining. One noticeable thing about Chinese millennials is that they are just like other millennials worldwide as travellers. They are much more willing to experience trips by themselves, share those memories with their loved ones and do things more freely, because they know what they want. (Carmela 2017.)

The Chinese Generation Y are the ones who want to spend a lot of money to stay in luxury hotels with excellent services. Most of Chinese millennials are not willing to stay in private accommodations such as Airbnb, because they lack quality services and comfort items. Hotel chains need to take advantage of this if they want them to book overnight stays. (Carmela 2017.)

Impact on Finland's travel industry

Finland's travel industry is booming right now, because of big-spending Chinese travellers. The growth is phenomenal, for example the income from tourism skyrocketed by 22 percent in a year. Tourism sector has a big role as an employer, because it employs almost six percent of Finland's workforce. (Yle's www-pages 2018.)

Chinese travellers are not only big-spenders, but also keen on visiting Finland many times. Chinese travellers want to buy luxury items and stay in the finest hotels, which is why they spent almost 1200 euros per person. The amount of unique Chinese visitors rose up to 63 percent in the year of 2017. (Yle's www-pages 2018.)

Altogether affluent Chinese travellers spent more than 214 million euros just in Helsinki region in the year of 2016. Compared to other visitors from other countries, Chinese travellers tend to spend more than others while on a vacation. The massive growth is made possible by the location of Helsinki Vantaa Airport. It is a key hub for connecting flights from all over the Asia region. Being a major hub gives wealthy travellers chance to enjoy local delicacies, go on sightseeing tours and spend money on luxury items while on a layover. (Yle's www-pages 2017.)

Helsinki Vantaa Airport has taken advantage of the Chinese mobile payment app, Alipay. The arrival of Alipay has boomed the amount of money they spend while on a layover in Helsinki. Alipay lowers the gap and makes it easier for Chinese travellers to spend money in Helsinki. (Yle's www-pages 2017.)

The reason why Finland is so special as a travel destination

The extremely fast growth of Chinese travellers to Finland is not a myth. Chinese travellers started to pour into Finland back in the winter season of 2015–2016, but the massive growth did not stop there. The interest for Chinese travellers to travel to Finland achieved even a higher peak in the wintertime of 2016–2017. The growth was made possible by exceptional market campaigns and projects. (Wu 2017.)

Chinese people spend many hours watching different kinds of reality shows. Reality shows are one of the key things for Chinese travellers to find new interesting travel destinations. Finland is one of the lucky countries that has gotten good exposure in Chinese reality shows. (Wu 2017.)

Overall, Chinese travellers see Finland as a winter wonderland and almost fairytale-like destination (Visit Finland 2018). The famous and beautiful Northern Lights are sure to add to the experience.

MILLENNIALS ON A LUXURY TRAVEL IN FINLAND

Finnish luxury in Chinese point of view is something new that has not been fully studied yet. It is almost certain that affluent Chinese travellers are looking for and prepared to pay for luxury. Luxury can be something intangible like an excellent service where one is considered as an important customer whose needs should always be a top priority. Then again, it can be something tangible like an expensive glass of wine during the airplane flight. (Nälkäinen lohikäärme 2016, 34.)

The baseline for luxury travel is minimum 500 euros per night for short trips and minimum 750 euros per night for longer trips. This is just a baseline because luxury is a subjective notion, which can change with the current trend going on. Finland is usually a quite slow country to adapt to changes and therefore luxury travel is such a new thing here. (Visit Finland www-pages, 2017.)

So-called traditional luxury can always be found anywhere you go, which is why Finland has to define what is Finnish luxury in order to have a competitive position and to thrive on the market. There are lot of challenges ahead and the ability to adapt to changes fast is a key factor to stay on top. It is important to understand to serve the Chinese customer up to every detail and that is why companies need constant development on customer and marketing research among with strategic planning. Organizations need to understand their social media behaviour, what they know and where they should be present. (Zipster, Chen & Fang 2016, 13.)

Finnish and Chinese cultures are two completely different things, which is why the concept of luxury varies and it can be quite personal. A young Chinese traveller might not recognise the surrounding Finnish luxury, so it is important to know as much as possible of the segment you are targeting and what are their needs. (Liang 2017, 20–27.)

Chinese travellers in general are considered as a very communal group of people. However, a Finnish airline Finnair found a new segment that fits the description for young and affluent – single women that travel alone. They are usually from the bigger cities of China and have little to no family. If these women happen to be an heir of a big company, they might belong to the group of people called the fuerdai. These lone travellers seek new experiences and are ready to spend money for it. Finland can offer northern lights (or the aurora borealis) and the snow, which are key factors in Lapland. Down south Finland can offer the lakes and the forests. (Nälkäinen lohikäärme 2016, 35-36.) Peace and quiet and untouchable nature are considered self-evident for Finnish people but today it is more often considered as luxury by foreign travellers. This is something Finland has the potential of taking an advantage of. (Zipster ym. 2016, 13.)

If we think about Chinese shopping behaviour, they usually develop it in their youth and this stays all the way to the adulthood. In 2015, about 75% of Chinese people tend to think that being successful leads to having a happy family and they keep spending money despite the concerns about China's economic growth. International travel is becoming astoundingly popular, as is jumping on new trends such as mobile payments. Of course, the older one gets, the more they think about buying a certain product. However, before that the younger generations tend to pay more for higher-end products and thus become more westernized and quality conscious. Conformity is an important factor for Chinese youth when following trends. They

want to be seen as “cool” to others by following the mainstream. When it is trendy to travel to Finland to see the Aurora Borealis, people do just that or at least show to others in social media that they want to do that too. (Zipster ym. 2016, 13.)

Chinese travellers are proud of their ability to buy expensive products and for lot of them higher prices mean higher quality and higher status. They bring a lot of money to Finland through luxury travel according to Visit Finland. 623€ on average per stay, when Russians only spend 270€ a night. Almost 50 percent of people are starting to think that premium products are a lot better than mass produced ones. What Finland needs to do, is to seize the opportunity of making travel services premium in the eyes of the young Chinese, because many consumers quickly become loyal to single brands. (Shen 2015.)

Finland has been slow on the luxury trend and the reason for that might be found on the state of the people’s mind. Equality is a term everybody learns to respect early in their childhood. Finland is also big on self-servicing and minding their own business -attitude, so offering something special is not a thing that comes to mind at first. (Shen 2015.)

CONCLUSION

Young and affluent Chinese travellers are important and an ideal customer segment for Finland’s travel industry as shown in the research above. Chinese travellers as a whole are a significant group, but millennials especially are the new potential point of interest Finland should focus on. Finland needs to emphasize what is so special about the country. That is the unique nature and one of the cleanest air in the world. This is something Chinese travellers appreciate a lot and Finland should market this as luxury that is not available everywhere. This is how Finland could capture the attention of the segment.

Chinese people are big-spenders, so what Finland needs to do is to concentrate on better visibility on Chinese social media, since the huge part of the segment spends a lot of time there. The marketing should also be in Chinese, because the strong attachment to their heritage makes them appreciate, and in some cases assume that foreign services are available on their mother tongue. This attachment also affects consumer behaviour. Chinese often become loyal to the brands they have a good experience with and will stay as their regular customers.

Chinese travellers prefer hotels as their choice of accommodation, which contests the need to advertise smaller hostels and privately owned rental apartments. Excellent services are starting to replace products.

The expectations of youngsters differ from the rest of the Chinese travellers. The older generations tend to travel in groups more and it is universal that the mood of a single person depends on the other people around them. In this case, the mission is to please to group as a whole. Lone travellers instead want more services that are personal and thus are prepared to spend more money for it.

Ultimately, Finland captures the interest of young and wealthy Chinese travellers by doing everything to stay relevant, to do the exact opposite of the saying ‘out of sight, out of mind’. This means that when a young Chinese person is thinking about their next travel destination and browsing through the internet, advertisements about different Finnish travel destinations should pop up and seem much more interesting than other countries’ travel destinations.

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UNDERSTANDING TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS AND BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF CHINESE TOURISTS VISITING FRANCE

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Abstract

This article studies the behaviour and motivations of Chinese tourists travelling to France. Globally, there are so many places to visit for so many reasons, yet France is one of the most visited countries by Chinese tourists. Perhaps it is because of the good facilities or the many brands. What we know for sure is that this country has made and is making a lot to please and attract this new rising tourist group. France did not only made shops 'Chinese friendly', but also listened to what Chinese tourist wants and adapted shops, museums, hotels and restaurants according to their wishes. Moreover, French have introduced some Chinese mobile applications and other ways of payment to make it easier for Chinese tourists to travel to France.

Keywords: shops, luxury products, payment methods, duty free, Chinese speaking staff

INTRODUCTION

Since several years, the tourism industry is booming. As more and more people are going on vacations and are exploring the world, the economy of numerous countries is rising. It is obvious that tourism is good for the economy, so why not to develop it then.

Now that the Chinese are also interested in transatlantic holidays, several countries are making some big efforts to attract this new tourist flow.

France is the world's top destination with more than 83 millions of tourists in the last year. There were 2 millions of Chinese tourists in 2016 and this number is increasing every year. Even if today the number of tourists does not stop increasing, France has faced a light reduction of the traffic because of the terrorist attacks, theft and instances of open hostility towards tourists from China, but is now receiving again a lot of Chinese tourists. (Chinese Tourists Rise in France! 2017.)

Chinese leisure tourists often travel in larger Chinese tour groups because of different reasons. Many Chinese tourist do not speak English, so they need a guide. Another problem is the visa, which is taken care of by choosing for a travel agency. Others have never been abroad and are just used to doing things in groups. Even though there are many benefits with these organised tours by travel agencies, the new generation of millennials is more and more traveling on their own or with a few friends. (Tourism industry 2015.)

The aim of this essay is to look at the buying behaviours of Chinese tourists and understanding their travel motivations to visit France. What is it that attracts them and what could France do to gain more Chinese tourists?

FRANCE, A EUROPEAN COUNTRY THAT ATTRACTS CHINESE TOURISTS

Activities that attract Chinese tourists

Many activities attract Chinese people in France. First, Chinese tourists should be divided in three different groups because there is the Chinese tourism of mass with the young people originating from the middle class. There is also the tourism of seniors, which is very developed, especially in group markets. Finally, there is of course luxury tourism with the expansion of custom-made journeys. (Top 10 favorite activities of Chinese outbound tourists, 2015.)

Chinese tourists are attracted by many different activities worldwide. Golfing, gambling, visiting famous cities, making a cruise or celebrating their honeymoon – those are all reasons for Chinese tourists to travel overseas. Although they have many activities to choose from, their number one activity is still shopping. (Top 10 favorite activities of Chinese outbound tourists 2015.)

France is really attractive for Chinese people because of all this “clichés”, such as French people being experts in wine, romantic, very good cooks and so on. France is the land of their dreams with delicious food and luxury. France has some unique landscapes that are mostly loved by the Chinese women. A study by Atout shows that around 71% of Chinese tourists recommend France to their family and friends. Another study shows that 88% of Chinese who never visited France plan to go there in the future. (Olivier 2013.)

Shopping is certainly the favourite activity of Chinese people. In their culture, they love buying a lot of things to make presents (it preserves their social network). In China the present is more appreciated if it is expensive, which is why they are really interested by the luxury capitals like Paris. (14 Choses à savoir sur les touristes chinois 2015.)

In France, the symbolic shops like “Les Galeries Lafayette”, “Le Bon Marché” or “Le Printemps”, are really appreciated by Chinese, because these shops take care of this population. For example, “Les Galeries Lafayette Paris”, wrote the notice boards in French and in Mandarin and the sellers have to speak Mandarin, too. (Pic 2017.)

In this shop, Chinese people like to buy many luxury products. Chinese customers are very attached to the symbols. The origin is as important as the brand. For example, they love to buy Chanel products in the mythical Parisian shop in the Cambon street, because they like to return in the past by buying a piece of history. (Godard 2018.)

Chinese consumers represent the third of the Mondial luxury market, and the new generation is very interested by the fashion and by the accessories, to which they assign all their savings. As many of Chinese travellers are the only child in the family, the parents and the grandparents contribute to these luxury purchases. (Denis & White 2018.)

Chinese are really interested, too, by the cosmetics “Made in France” that they buy mass of to take back to China. In addition, they buy more and more jewels in Paris. They bought it in France to be sure that it is not counterfeit goods and to show to their friend that they wear French luxury. (Touristes chinois en France, quelle consommation ? 2014.)

The reason why shopping stays the number one activity for many Chinese outbound travellers is the huge price gap. It encourages them to spend a lot of money overseas. Chinese tourists fill their luggage with gifts for their friends and family, but also with luxury objects for themselves. (Top 10 favorite activities of Chinese outbound tourists 2015.)

The bio food and products increasingly interest Chinese. In France, the consumption of organic products is increasing and there are more and more shops, which sell it and is really inter-

esting for Chinese tourists. Especially for the high class who cares about its alimentation and the environment. Chinese people go into a bio shop and buy products to brought back into China with them. (Touristes chinois en France, quelle consommation ? 2014.)

A lot of Chinese tourists come to France for the wine. They consumption is growing, so many activities are organized, especially around Bordeaux, for the tasting and the shopping of the wine for Chinese people. (Touristes chinois en France, quelle consommation? 2014.)

Special amenities for Chinese tourists

Chinese tourists spend a lot of money when they come to France. To facilitate their purchases, countries adapt to their payment methods. Since 2006, Chinese tourists can use their credit card “UnionPay”. Nowadays, Chinese people are keen on dematerialized payments and especially on smartphones. As a result, popular payment applications in China are reaching France. The most famous are Alipay and Wechat. (Visseyrias 2017.)

Alipay, from the Alibaba group, is the leader payment application in China with more than 600 million of users. In 2016, French department stores like Printemps or Galleries Lafayette and shops like Sephora, initiated partnership with Alipay. Furthermore, in 2018, Alipay started to collaborate with the payment terminals society Ingenico, to accelerate its development in France. (Cuny 2018.)

This novelty should attract Chinese tourists, but it also reassures them. Indeed, they are the main target of pickpockets in big cities such as Paris. By using mobile payments, Chinese tourists do not have to bring their cash and optimise their purchase situations. For its part, France wants to attract about 5 million of Chinese tourists in 2020. (Cuny 2018.)

Nevertheless, WeChat pay, considered as a challenger, entered in the French market. WeChat is a notorious message application in China, with more than 1 billion users, and is now used as a dematerialized wallet. A lot of big companies and luxury brands already signed with the application, such as BHV or Galleries Lafayette and Louis Vuitton. WeChat Pay now even sells tickets for French monuments like Arc de Triomphe, Panthéon. (Cuny 2018.)

Recently, WeChat Pay introduced its instant payment service in France with a cooperation with the French bank BNP Paribas. Retailers can target now more than 938 million WeChat users every month. Having WeChat payment method will help the shop to attract Chinese tourists. (Chernavina 2018.)

If these new methods soar, the traditional credit card will keep its popularity. In fact, the Accor and Louvre Hotels groups opted for UnionPay. In 2018, according to a release from the credit card groups Union Pay and CB, stated that UnionPay will be soon available everywhere in France. (Cbanque 2018). With these new payment methods, France adapts to the Chinese demand and pleases the young generation, avid of technology and innovations. (Le Petit Journal Shanghai 2017.)

Moreover, if every shop wants to be equipped with this system, the first interested are the duty-free shops. They are special shops for example in airports and on ships selling products on which one does not pay government tax (Cambridge dictionary 2018). It is specially created for foreigners with many souvenirs. In France, the duty-free average rate is pretty high: about 12% and is available for purchases over 175 euros. (Dromard 2013.)

Duty-free areas are part of a marketing strategy, situated in airports and ports, they attract tourists who want to do their last purchases. From there Chinese people can find everything they love: wine, perfumes, luxury bags and clothes. (Giot 2015.)

However, more and more shops apart from these duty-free areas are opening. The first ones to join the movement were the French luxury brands like Chanel, Dior and Yves St Laurent. If stores like Printemps, Hermes or Chanel chose Alipay and WeChat Pay, it is because duty free is an opportunity. Moreover, Brands using these applications are able to refund the tax on the application, an asset that Chinese tourist appreciate. (Henry & Robinet 2017.)

Indeed, the duty-free sales enhance partly thanks to Chinese tourists. For example, on the 15th March 2017, Galleries Lafayette opened the “Shopping and welcome centre”, a duty-free space of 4000 square meters, an annexe dedicated to the Asian customers. There are also lounge areas with sofas and Wi-Fi, to make their experience comfortable and unforgettable. (Henry & Robinet 2017.)

Besides, the society Premier Tax free, specialised in duty-free for purchases, connected with AliPay to propose an immediate repayment to its Chinese customers in Paris. The duty-free is a real market which is well known by Chinese tourist, who inform before coming to France and Belgium. (Les touristes chinois dépensent toujours plus en France 2018.)

These shops are doing everything possible to attract tourists. Information is written in French, English, but also in Chinese. Also, companies ask more for employees speaking Chinese, because Chinese tourists like when people are interested about their culture. Someone able to talk in Chinese is an asset for a company. (Shankman & Ali 2013.)

Amenities also mean doing partnership with Chinese companies to show interest and get credit from them. For example, Fan Bing Bing is a famous influencer in China. She worked with Louis Vuitton and L’Oréal. (Gentlemen, 2016.)

To be known by the tourists, a shop has to be in Chinese social media like WeChat, Sina Weibo or Baidu Tieba. As Chinese tourists like to anticipate, they will gladly check on internet where they want to go and what they want to buy. (Thai 2018.) As Chinese tourists care about the renowned of a brand, the latter wants to be well referenced online. Shopping companies take measures to be well rated. (Verot 2014.)

Thanks to Weibo, even small companies, shops or restaurants can become well known. If Chinese tour groups have had a good experience, they will talk about it in Weibo and it will give your brand more customers. Even though attracting massive groups may not be number one priority for a luxury brand, it is well known that rich people prefer to travel independently. Therefor this application is also useful, because they prefer making their purchases in private shops with good recommendations. (Chernavina 2018.)

CHINESE TOURISTS: A SPECIFIC BUYING BEHAVIOUR

The most common products and services bought by Chinese

The graph in Figure 1 shows the budget that Chinese tourist spent on several products in France in 2016.

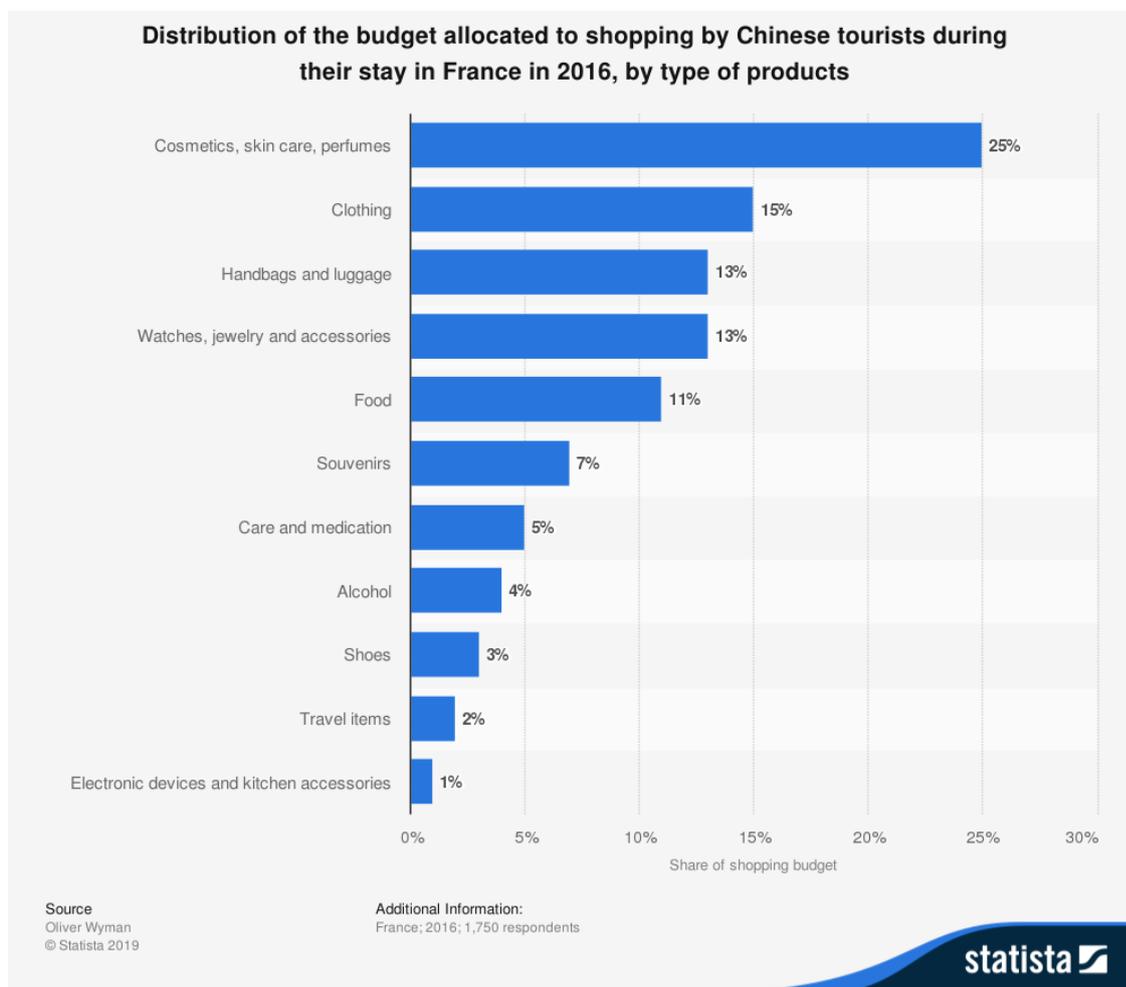


Figure 1. Distribution of shopping budget. Wyman 2016.

As can be seen from Figure 1, they gave a quarter of their budget to cosmetics, skincare and perfume. (Chinese tourists in France: breakdown of the shopping budget by product 2016 | Survey n.d.)

Through the years the vacation behaviour changed, shopping is not the most important activity anymore during a vacation in France. Although, last year Chinese tourist spent around 1647 euros during their stay and many of them bought a luxury watch, which made the watchmaking-jewellery-goldsmiths boom again. (Nault n.d.)

Chinese tourists love buying luxury bags and other high-quality products, which makes to think they are rich. Although if looked at it, they actually have saved a lot of money before the trip to spend in Europe and shops like Louis Vuitton are at least 30% cheaper than in China. (Fes 2018.)

In “Galerie De Lafayette” in Paris, some of the staff working there speaks already Chinese to help the tourists better. Outside the Louis Vuitton shop there are already strings stretched for

the queue for the Chinese tourists. In addition, “Printemps”, another luxury brand, saw their sales rise some 10%. (Parijs is magneet voor rijke Chinees 2017.)

Most of the times, Chinese tourists travel around 20 days through Europe and spend around \$7000 per person. Half of this money is spent in stores. The majority of the Chinese Tourists spend more on shopping than on entertainment, accommodation and food combined. Gallery Lafayette is still the first thing to visit after Eiffel Tower and it has an entrance just for Chinese tourists. The average Chinese tourist spend more time in the shops than in a museum. (Fes 2017.)

In Europe, Chinese tourist can either buy something a lot cheaper than in China or something that is not available on the Chinese markets. (How do Chinese tourists really feel about Paris? 2015.)

Their behaviour and motivations

When looking at the Chinese target group, there are different options for segmentation. Most of the times they are divided in millennials, explorers and seniors. The Chinese millennials represent 60 percent of the populations of the millennial group what makes them a valuable source of income for countries worldwide. They are big spenders and travel an average of four times a year outside China. Chinese millennials prefer to spend their money on fun activities and good food rather than on a five-star hotel. Throughout the journey they share lots of experiences via social media. The millennials are a new generation and they are thrilled to explore new things. (Elbers 2016.)

Chinese travellers are curious about local life and want to live like a French would. They mix their shopping with lifestyle activities by choosing nice places to go, hang out at small cafés, and try the best neighbourhood bakeries. They also want to go to the latest concept stores that they know from the media. (Duveau & Dumenil 2017.)

More and more Chinese millennials choose authentic local experiences above luxury shops due to the influence of social media. Young people do not want to wait in a queue in front of luxury brands, but they want to discover the best boutiques, the best cafes and bakeries chosen by some locals. (Thiessen 2018.)

When earlier coach loads of tour groups stopped at luxury stores, nowadays the millennials choose to explore the real Paris instead of the famous hot spots. Millennials now represent about 54 per cent of Chinese visitors to Paris, and that number is only going to increase. These millennials are adventurous, curious and hungry to see and discover all aspects of the culture. (Thiessen 2018.)

A new hot spot for these groups is the Marais district. There are a lot of great eating and shopping spots in this area and beautiful boutiques instead of the large chain stores. They do not want longer the big brands, but prefer the excellent products that do not exist in China. They are looking for "Made in France" labels and the atypical brands are the most loved ones. Marais is full of colour, pubs, graffiti and small vintages shops that will lure these millennials. (Thiessen 2018.)

A new mobile application AiShopping introduces 500 different brands and 800 boutiques. There are different shopping routes and all of them are divided by theme. The application wants to help the millennials with discovering new unknown labels which fits better with their individual style. (Thiessen 2018.)

For the explorer, travel is a way to change the everyday life and discover the world. Often, they want to reconnect to themselves. The explorer often travels alone. Most of them want to

organize the trip themselves to have a perfect travel. They book their flights and hotel directly on the supplier's website or from a price comparison web site, on their smartphone or laptop. Even if the trip is very organized, the Chinese explorer is the one who improvises most during its journeys. More than three quarters of them consider that it is important and enriching to adopt the customs of the country. (4 profils de voyageurs asiatiques | Veilletourisme.ca, 2017.)

China counts as the biggest senior population in the world. More and more of these seniors are traveling abroad. Despite their sometimes-bad experiences in the past, the number of interested seniors is starting to rise anyway. Nowadays they are often sponsored by their children, because they completely cached the travel jitters. In Chinese tradition, it is normal for children to financially support their parents as long as possible. Seniors still travel a lot in groups and most of the times the trips for seniors are a lot cheaper. Due to low quality hotel this is possible, but it is not what the seniors prefer nowadays. Seniors do not care that much about the price, but more about the quality. (Zhou 2015.)

Seniors are most of the time on retirement what means they have more free time and money to travel. Chinese seniors mostly travel during low season and thus they help the tourism industry through this period. After the trip, these seniors recommend the hotels, tours, and shops to their friends and tell which ones to choose. (Tourism industry 2015.)

More people from Chinese population start belonging to the over-60 group. More than 5 million seniors travel abroad each year. They love travelling because most of the time they do not have any other plans for their retirement. Chinese seniors love travelling to East Europe or Russia, because it is somehow nostalgic for them. They watched movies when they were younger about these countries and want to explore them now themselves. Even though, shopping is not the most common activity for seniors, they do like exploring the shops but it needs to be relaxed. (Weiyun 2015.)

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Chinese tourists represent an important part of the tourism in France. Their motivation and buying behaviour are mainly based on shopping and especially on luxury shopping. They know that they will buy products from famous brands before planning their trip. They like local shopping and souvenirs to remind them their journey in France, but they love fancy brands like Louis Vuitton or Dior. The most interesting segment is the millennials; the young generation which spend its money in shopping, keen on social media and influencers.

Knowing that Chinese tourists are the key of its tourism economy, France has decided to dedicate special areas to make their trip comfortable. Moreover, they even accept Chinese payment methods and more and more vendors in the shops have to speak mandarin to be able to advice Chinese tourists. Over the years, duty-free have been opened in big cities and partnerships were created with Chinese companies.

However, with the recent terrorist attacks, more and more Chinese tourists feel unsafe in France. To overcome it, France has to strengthen its security in the touristic areas like monuments and shopping centres. Then, the Chinese tourist's rate could surge in the next years.

Finally, even if shopping is still one of the favourite activities of Chinese tourists, it is outstripped by visits and leisure. The part of shopping in the Chinese tourists' budget is decreasing for the benefit of cultural activities.

MANAGERIAL SUGGESTIONS

This essay explored the buying behaviour of Chinese tourists about the shopping in France. In conclusion, if French tourism entrepreneurs want to satisfy Chinese tourists, they have to create amenities for them. The most important thing is to get the Chinese payment methods Alipay and WeChat because it is easier for them, and because they can have tax-refund on it. Then, make them benefit from the free-tax to make them buy more.

It is a benefit if the organization has some Mandarin-speaking staff, because they make the tourist feel comfortable and they probably know a lot about the culture as well, which is also a must. Companies should create a real quality service, as Chinese tourists prioritize quality instead of the price.

Of course, one can use partnership with Chinese celebrities to help, and if the budget is limited, companies should think about using a Chinese model and create Chinese advertising that can be shared in social media.

For that reason, companies should be present on Youku, to share videos, WeChat and Sina Weibo to create a brand page and share everything. Once the company is famous on Chinese social media and tourists are referring to the company, they will come and make promote the location to their family and friends.

It is important to get to know the different types of tourists and companies need to work out a strategy specifically for their target group.

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CHINESE TOURISTS SHOPPING LUXURY

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Abstract

This research focuses on Chinese tourists' shopping habits, especially on luxury brand shopping and the payment methods that they prefer. These focus points have been chosen because there are a lot of Chinese traveling all around the world. They are big spenders across the globe and that is why research is needed in this matter. The research questions are: *How Chinese tourists want to pay abroad?* and *What kind of items they would like to buy?* Research will increase consciousness about what Chinese tourists want and need when they are shopping abroad. Research's target is also to familiarize Finnish people to Chinese shopping habits. After that, Chinese could feel comfortable to go shopping in Finland.

Tiivistelmä

Tämä tutkimus keskittyy kiinalaisten matkailijoiden ostoskäyttäytymiseen, erityisesti luksus- ja brändituotteiden sekä heidän käyttämiensä maksutapojen näkökulmasta. Tämänkaltaista tutkimusta tarvitaan, koska määrällisesti kiinalaisia matkailijoita on paljon maailman laajuisesti ja he käyttävät paljon rahaa matkoillaan. Tutkimuskysymyksiä on: Miten kiinalaiset matkailijat haluavat maksaa ulkomailla ja minkälaisia tavaroita he haluavat ostaa? Tutkimus lisää tietämystä kiinalaisten matkailijoiden tarpeista ja mielenkiinnon kohteista, kun he tekevät ostoksia ulkomailla. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on lisätä suomalaisten ymmärrystä kiinalaisten ostoskäyttäytymisestä, jonka myötä kiinalaiset voisivat kokea ostoksien teon Suomessa miellyttävämmäksi.

Keywords: payment methods, shopping behaviour, Chinese tourists Chinese Consumer behaviour

CHINESE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Consumer's buying process

First stage is triggering. Something triggers the consumers' interest on a specific product in some category. Second stage is considering. Then a consumer feels that he has found an item to satisfy his interest and starts to search information on all the brands that are offering it. Search is stage number three and time that takes is connected to the essential of an item. When products price or necessity is higher, so is the information and decision-making time. For example, it takes longer to search and choose when buying a car than buying a t-shirt. After information search comes the choosing stage. Today's modern consumers have too many options to pick up from rather than few. Having too many choices can be energy draining and can result in making a bad decision. Then comes the fifth stage, buying. Then consumer has made the decision to buy an item and money transaction happens. The final stage is the outcome and experience from the product, which can be positive or negative. Positive or negative realization can come right after the purchase or long after it, for example, if the product breaks right away or after some time. (Doctoroff 2006, 118; Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg 2010, 313–315.)

Chinese tourists buying behaviour

Chinese tourists are very interested about Europe. Nevertheless, wealthier Chinese travellers are starting to slow down the trips to Europe. All the travellers who are not going Europe are heading Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea since hearing about the terrorist attacks at Europe. On the other hand, it needs to be said that people still travel through Helsinki-Vantaa airport to their main destinations at Europe (Yle 2017). It is important to notice that the wealthier travellers are now interested to spend their hard-earned money on entertainment, trips and healthier life, rather than on shopping or other material stuff (Janczak 2016).

Chinese tourist spends a lot of money when they travel. Tourists are also ready to spend much to trips. Global tourism income from Chinese tourists was 79 billion euros in 2012. Chinese tourists like to shop abroad and want to bring a lot of souvenirs to friends and family. The Telegraph reported that Chinese tourists spends average 896€ to shopping abroad and it is a lot compared to what a tourist normally uses for shopping abroad. (Olivier 2017.) Chinese travellers spend for example approximately 656 euros per day at Finland when stopover traveling at Helsinki. (Visit Finland 2017). All around Chinese tourists spend around 896 euros and other nationality tourists only 298 euros. It is also important to remember that the Chinese tourists spent 214 million at the Finland's capital area around Helsinki. (Yle 2017.) It is also good to point out that in 2016, six million Chinese travelled abroad to buy products during their Spring Festival break. (Shanghaiist 2016.)

Luxury brands are a status symbol to Chinese shoppers. Usually Chinese do not think only about one brand, so they are not brand loyal (Spelich 2017). This may change because more than 50% of Chinese millennials use loyalty program applications. The first luxury brand loyalty application was made by Michael Kors and its main focuses are membership service and after-sale services. Chinese tourist prefers to buy brand items from the country where those are made in. They want to feel the culture of the homeland of the item to experience luxury. (Zheng 2017.)

LUXURY ITEMS AND PAYING METHODS

Luxury shopping

Luxury taxing at China is at a higher rate than here in Western countries, which is why it is cheaper to buy all kinds of expensive items from abroad. Luxury items price can rise up to 40–68% more in China when comparing France, Germany and USA. (Shanghaiist 2016.) Story is also important part of the items attractiveness to Chinese (Zheng 2017). Chinese travellers are looking more and more luxury items and activities to spend their hard-earned money on. They are seeking for quality and authenticity. (Spelich 2014.) In addition, they are looking for good customer service and experience, something they did not attain in China when comparing to Europe (Sun & Lau 2015).

One extra reason to buy luxury items abroad is the anxiety of a fake product at homeland China. Chances of buying a fake is higher there than almost anywhere else in the world. This fear forces them to travel or purchase items from overseas. Also returning with the item from abroad gives it more of an authentic feeling. (Albatross group 2015.)

Older Chinese women do not buy or use any used items in fear of bad luck. Younger customers are more interested in the vintage items, because they are just not available in shop. They are looking for uniqueness, because no one wants to go to a party and see someone wearing the same piece of clothing. (Harilela 2015.)

Albatross Group (2015) has made a research to 180 affluent Chinese travelers about their shopping habits. Research shows that Chinese are buying one-third of the luxury purchases made worldwide. Two-thirds of these purchases are made outside the borders of China. This shows how important role China has over the luxury shops. Yet there is no solid or little to none information about what Chinese customers want and need. Two-thirds of the interviewed people usually spend more money than they have planned and buy more products even when not in need. It seems Chinese are not after the cheap prices, even though prices in other countries are cheaper compared to China and more attracting this way. They are willing to spend more, if they are happy and the circumstances are right. One of the circumstances are that the items are something that cannot be found back at China. This can be backed up, since nine out of ten people from the interviewed people responded this way. Half of these people told as well that they made quick decision to buy more, after finding out something unexpected they had not planned for at home.

Chinese customer is going to back out from purchasing items, if the customer service is bad, store environment is unappealing, or the expectations do not match results. There are also situations where price ends up being higher than expected or researched from internet. The experience that is happening inside the store can sometimes derail purchases that were planned beforehand. (Albatross group 2015.)

It is also critical to bear in mind that all these luxury shoppers are more and more travellers. These travellers want to experience the destination country, too, and not only just shop luxury. They are now traveling long distances to other countries and find out just what is so unique at their destination. In summary of these results, Chinese want to buy luxury and brand products with cheap price tags, but are still more than happy to pay a higher price, if conditions are right. They are looking for the good customer service, pleasing store environment and wider or just different selection of products that they can find from China's brand stores. The brands who can get these aspects right can prevail via Chinese customers. (Albatross group 2015.)

Payment methods

Chinese use phone on everything and it is the most important item for them when traveling. It is only natural to Chinese to use phone for paying. (Rapp 2017.) On a Visit Finland's (2017) video interview, Chinese traveller tells that it would be easiest for them to pay with mobile applications called Alipay, WeChat Pay and UnionPay.

Alipay's share in the Chinese mobile payment market was 55 percent and WeChat Pays share was 40 percent in July 2017. Those two are also the biggest dominants when talking about Chinese mobile payment methods abroad. (Hinsdale 2017.) About 50 percent of the Chinese does research for shopping possibilities before traveling out of China. It means that competition of whose payment application travellers are going to use, starts before the trip. Mobile payment systems have different offers and tips for travellers. That way they are trying to engage the travellers to one payment system. (Rapp 2017.)

At some locations in Helsinki, it is possible to use Alipay after it first appeared at Helsinki's Airport. Based on a 11-month experience of one of the shop owners using Alipay, Chinese travellers are always happy about it. Since the younger travellers tend to do everything by phone, this helps them to feel more at home. (Yle 2017.) Chinese travellers like to bargain, but in the end, result of the price does not really matter. Product availability takes the priority in the eyes of the Chinese customer. (Olivier 2017.)

Especially homelands of luxury brands want to serve Chinese with their familiar payment methods. Countries want to increase possibility to pay with Alipay. For example, Italian bank

UniCredit has took Alibaba's payment system to their network of 120,000 merchants. If global brands want to reach Chinese tourists, they need to pay attention to Chinese mobile payment providers. (Pan 2017.)

Zhang Yan (Yan, personal communication on 24.11.2017) a student at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, explained how she uses cash and epayments. She did not mention anything about paying with card. According to her, the most popular payment methods in China are Alibaba's Alipay and Hongbao's Wechat. In China, it does not matter whether the company is big or small. It is very common to use epayments in China. One phone is enough for paying almost everything, for example street food. Yan prefers to buy products from abroad if they are cheaper than in China. Usually, Chinese buy luxury items when they are travelling. Zhang Yan also told that she is not brand loyal. Yan wants to buy destination countries famous brands and local souvenirs. She said that she uses about 3000–4000 euros per year to travelling. Yan would like to go on a shopping vacation to fashion cities and countries like Paris and Italy. Yan clarified that Chinese want to buy good quality and limited items. Before shopping, Chinese do little homework at home. They want to, for example, value if it is wise to buy luxury products from abroad. Chinese people want to find out, is it really cost effective to buy luxury items abroad than in China? Chinese also like to pay by cash over card payment when they travel. Yan also mentioned that nowadays paying is much easier, because mobile paying has become more common in many countries. She also wanted to point out that young people has different habits than what older ones have.

CONCLUSIONS

Luxury brand stores should focus mainly on the great customer service, appealing store design and different range of selection compared to Chinese stores. Chinese travellers used to bring cash with them, when they travelled before. Now they and the stores are more used to using mobile paying methods. In China, every small and big company has completely skipped the card payment stage, and gone straight to the mobile payments. This skipping stage has made card payments feel out of place for the Chinese.

Chinese want to use only their phone to pay instead of the normal Western habits like cash or card payments. Chinese are after the products of the destination countries' luxury brands and items that are not available at their home country yet or anymore. For a Chinese tourist, buying is not only about the item itself, it is about the experience.

Finnish companies that are in direct contact with Chinese travellers should invest into mobile payment methods and familiarize themselves with them. This little advantage could make Finland more attractive than other Nordic countries. Finnish brands should create more special luxury brand products that have intriguing story behind them. In addition to the story, the store and store's workers should almost offer better customer service to Chinese to impress them. In addition, Helsinki Vantaa airport, for example, should focus bringing Finnish souvenir shops there to be more accessible to travelers. This should make it easier for Chinese and other nationalities to purchase souvenirs with story behind it.

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ONLINE MARKETING FOR CHINESE LEISURE TRAVELLERS

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Abstract

China has 802 million active internet users. Different mobile applications and websites have become integrated as part of Chinese people's daily life. These platforms offer services on many different areas. Therefore, it is only natural that when it comes to travel industry, online services play a major part. They offer not only tools to plan and to book trips, but ways to access content and services during the trip as well. Chinese travellers use mobile applications and websites before, during and after their trips. Sociality is an integral part of services on every step. Every aspect of the trip is shared online with friends, family and strangers. Understanding these services, how they work and operate can give companies tools to better reach Chinese travellers. As there were 430 000 trips taken to Finland by Chinese tourists in 2017, they are a group whose value to Finnish travel industry should not be underestimated.

Tiivistelmä

Kiinassa on 802 miljoonaa aktiivista internetin käyttäjää. Erilaisista sovelluksista ja verkkosivuista on tullut kiinteä osa kiinalaisten päivittäistä elämää. Nämä alustat tarjoavat palveluita monilla eri alueilla. Onkin siis luonnollista, että verkon palveluilla on iso rooli matkailualalla. Ne eivät tarjoa ainoastaan työkaluja matkan varaamiseen ja suunnitteluun, vaan mahdollistavat pääsyn sisältöön ja palveluihin myös matkan aikana. Kiinalaiset matkailijat käyttävät sovelluksia ja verkkosivuja ennen matkaa, sen aikana ja sen jälkeen. Sosiaalisuus on kiinteä osa palveluita jokaisessa vaiheessa. Matkan jokainen aspekti jaetaan verkossa ystävien, perheen ja tuntemattomien kanssa. Näiden palveluiden, niiden toiminnan ja toimintaperiaatteiden ymmärtäminen voi antaa yrityksille työkaluja, joilla paremmin saavuttaa kiinalaiset matkailijat. Vuonna 2017 kiinalaisten matkailijoiden osuus Suomeen saapuneista ulkomaalaisista matkailijoista oli 430 000 henkeä. Tämä tekee kiinalaisista matkailijoista ryhmän, jonka arvoa suomalaiselle matkailualalle ei voi aliarvioida.

Keywords: Chinese travellers, social media, Finland, OTA, WeChat.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this essay is to answer to questions about Chinese tourists' information search behaviour, how can Finnish companies benefit from understanding this behaviour and how companies can response to their way of doing research online?

Chinese leisure tourism to Finland and to the rest of the Nordic countries is a growing segment. The number of overnight stays by Chinese in Denmark has grown from 2011 to 2017 by 149% (Statistics Denmark 2018), in Sweden by 169% (The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and Statistics Sweden 2018), in Norway by 418% (Statistics Norway 2018) and in Finland by 240% (Statistics Finland 2018). As these statistics show, Nordic Countries can be seen as interesting destination to a growing number of Chinese travellers.

CHINESE LEISURE TRAVELLERS

Growth in Chinese outbound travel

The number of households globally able to afford leisure and international travel has been growing in the 21st century, particularly in China. The growth of Chinese long-haul leisure travellers can be attributed to a growing middle class, as well as rise in average income. (Oxford Economics 2015, 8–10.) Annual household income of around US\$ 20,000 has been seen as the income class, in which leisure travelling becomes affordable to the consumers. For affordable international travel, the annual income should be around or higher than US\$35,000 per household. In the year 2003, around 6 million households in China earned more than US\$35,000 annually. By 2013, the number was 27 million households. (Oxford Economics 2015, 10). Chinese travellers made 130 million trips to foreign destinations during the year of 2017 (Tan 2018).

To Chinese travellers, trips to major cities outside Greater China (area that encompasses mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan) account for 70% of the trips taken. By comparison, 45,1% of all global travel demand is to major cities. One reason for major cities' large percentage of Chinese overall international travelling is due to major cities being important business areas, although business travel comprises less than half of all Chinese travel demand. Cities are therefore major destinations for leisure travellers as well. (Oxford Economics 2015, 16.)

Destinations and forms of travel

A study that was conducted in late 2017 (Nielsen 2018,9) shows that 40% of Chinese tourists that answered to the study chose Europe as one of the regions to visit in the year of 2017. Of all Chinese tourists, 40% choose Europe as one of the regions to visit. According to Nielsen (2018,10), the three most favoured attractions amongst Chinese tourists were natural landmarks, theme parks and historical sites. Theme parks were especially favoured with travellers born during the 1980's, who are typically married couples travelling with their children, and travellers born in the 1990's, who tend to travel with friends. As stated by Nielsen (2018, 11–12), Chinese tourists consider the beauty and uniqueness of tourist attractions, safety and the ease of the visa procedures as three most important qualities when selecting a travel destination. In international travel, Chinese tourists tend to favour leisure trips and activities.

While most non-Chinese tourists, around 70% of them, prefer independent travel as the form of travel, Chinese tourist prefer different forms of travel much more equally. Independent travel is preferred by 42% of travellers, and semi-independent travel by 49%. Package travel is preferred by 34% and customised travel by 25%. Chinese travellers tend to choose different types of travel depending on the destination. Much of the travelling to nearby countries and territories is being done as independent travel, whereas trips to a farther away destinations are usually made as customised trips. (Nielsen 2018, 12.) Especially new travellers prefer package travel, as the common language with the guide and company of other travellers from the same culture can be seen as comfort factors. Package trips also usually lower the cost of components, such as air travel, accommodation and such compared to independent travel. Therefore group travel is seen as an economical alternative to independent travel. This has helped to grow leisure tourism in the growing Chinese middle-class. The first trip of Chinese tourist to international destinations tends to be package trips, but when leisure travelling becomes more common and more easily accessible for a growing share of population, subsequent trips usually are and will be independent trips. (Oxford Economics 2015, 31.)

Chinese leisure travellers in Finland

In Finland, the trend of Chinese travellers choosing major cities as travel destinations continues. During 2016, Chinese travellers spent 175 300 nights in Helsinki Metropolitan Area, accounting for 65% of Chinese nights spent in the country. Most of the nights, 65%, were during summer months from June to August. The total number of nights spent in Finland by Chinese tourists in 2016 was 271 200 (Visit Finland 2017, 4–5.) In a survey conducted on Chinese tourists, Finnish cultural attractions rose as the most interesting experience for tourists who visited Finland in 2016. 66% of visitors were inter-

ested in and also experienced cultural attractions, and 14% were interested but did not experience these during their trip. Other experiences were not so popular, but there seems to be a great interest for winter sports and other winter activities, as around 35% of Chinese visitors were interested in them even though had not tried them. The actual percent of Chinese tourist interested in, and also experiencing winter sports was 10% and 20%, respectively. (Visit Finland 2017, 8.) Winter tourism amongst Chinese travellers seems to be a segment that is not yet fully exploited. As most of the nights Chinese tourists spend in Finland occur in the summer months, the winter season needs better marketing to stand out of its competitors. In 2016, Chinese tourists spent 940€ per trip and 152€ per day on a trip to Finland (Visit Finland 2017, 10). 2017 saw a rise in spending and trips taken by Chinese travellers. Overall annual spending by Chinese tourists in Finland rose by 286 million euros to 513 million euros, a growth of 126%. Trips were up by 63% or by 167 000 to 432 000 trips taken. (Visit Finland 2018c.)

CHINESE TRAVELLERS' INFORMATION SEEKING

Internet usage of Chinese people

According to studies in 2014 there were 632 million internet users in China and 527 million of them are using mobile internet by their smartphones and mobile devices (Attract China 2014a). In 2018, 802 million people, 57,7 percent of the population, are actively using internet according to Chinese government. (McCarthy 2018). Searching information online has become a part of people's every day life. Since the early days of internet, Chinese government has been controlling online information with censorship. In 2013 Google tried to fight the censoring but only made their own services banned by doing that. (Attract China 2014a.) For that reason, Chinese people mostly use only the domestic search engines. Chinese search-engines somewhat differ from their western competitors. The portion of sponsored links is greater than for example in Google. Chinese search-engines are also much more visual, often displaying at least one or more pictures in connection with individual results, as well as maintaining specific functions for picture searches. The search engine market is dominated by three operators: Baidu, Haosou and Sogou. In 2014, these sites together held over 98% of the market share. (Hakala 2015, 5-6.) In 2016, 94% of interviewed Chinese tourists used internet to plan their trip (Chinavia 2016, 36).

Sina Weibo

Using social media for sharing information besides pictures and short messages is popular in China. The most popular platform among Chinese is Sina Weibo or just "Weibo". It has over 500 million registered users. It is very common to share experiences and reviews in social media which makes it a large base for user-generated content. Most Chinese internet users read comments and suggestions from Sina Weibo before they do their final purchase decision. Companies not only in China but all over the world are using Sina Weibo as their primary marketing channel for Chinese customers. (Attract China 2014a.) It has become a strong stereotype that wherever Chinese tourists are, there are also smartphones. Pictures, video, more pictures, they are most likely going to Weibo. Attract China's market survey showed that it has become the most popular platform among Chinese travellers to share their experiences during their trips. The three most popular functions of Weibo for Chinese travellers are posting landmark photos, sharing location check-ins and making up their own topic hashtags. (Attract China 2014a.)

Despite Weibo's popularity, it is not often used in planning the trip. On a study conducted in 2016 of Chinese tourists visiting Helsinki, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Gothenburg, Weibo's importance on planning the trip was rated as average. Most destinations use Weibo to attract travellers by sharing information on the destination. Hence, while Weibo is extremely popular platform, it is not seen as important in travel planning as other services. One reason for this can be that planning the trip can be understood as the act of reserving the trips, airfares, accommodation and other services, rather than the information search and destination selection. (Chinavia 2016, 31–32.)

WeChat

Before Weibo, the most popular social media for Chinese to share information while travelling is WeChat. WeChat started as social messaging app, but it has grown to include many other functionalities. It has news and payment services and users can hail taxis with it. WeChat also features city bike renting, and a possibility for third party “mini-programs” which can feature services like online shopping, ticketing and booking services and information about the destination. (Chinavia 2016, 38).

WeChat is the most used social media app on China, with over 900 million users (Woerner 2018).

Other online communities

Chinese people use online communities. Those are websites where people register by their name and interact with other users via posts and comments. Qyer is an online community focused on budget travelling. On this platform, people share experiences about their trips. The users mostly consist of independent travellers who are looking for tips to arrange their own trips on a budget. (Attract China 2014a.) Qyer offers three main services. These are the online community, where users share articles about travelling in different destinations as well as articles about specific themes, for example photography or food, and interact with each other. The second service that Qyer offers is trip planning. The site and the app offer users trip plans based on user input and preferences. Qyer also offers an e-commerce platform for independent overseas travel, offering for example flight tickets, visa services and tickets to attractions. It has over 80 million registered users. (All Tech Asia 2017.)

Online Travel Agencies

Online Travel Agencies, or OTAs, are internet-based companies that offer consumers the ability to book travel services directly from webpage or from an application. OTAs resell trips, accommodation, flights and other travel services provided by other companies. The booking and payment can be instant, and the customer is able to make decisions on the go, not being dependant on office hours or accessibility of store-locations. While some travel agencies offer online booking options as well as service locations, OTAs operate entirely online. (Xotels 2018.)

In China, OTAs make up to 77,5% percent of flight bookings when using websites and 81,2% when using apps. The next most popular ways of booking are trough airlines’ applications or their website. When reserving accommodation, seven out of ten Chinese travellers use OTAs, with one in ten using the hotels own website or applications. (EyeforTravel 2017.)

Gross merchandise volume, GMV, means the total volume of sales in money during any given time (Hsiao 2018). In 2017, Chinese online travel industry’s GMV was an estimated 738.4 billion Yuan or 93.9 billion Euros. The growth was 24,3% compared to 2016. (Marketing to China 2018.) The largest of Chinese OTAs is Ctrip (Visit Finland 2018a.)

In China, many OTAs feature social media platforms built-into the site itself. Influencers posting content of their travelling to social media is a global phenomenon, as is the fact that especially younger travellers with the desire and means to travel globally see the influencer created content as inspiration and in turning posting their own content to social media. The difference in China is that the OTAs have the social media functionality as integral part of sites operation, not as separate sites. Sites like Mafengwo and Qyer have thousands of blogs uploaded daily, covering in-depth travel accounts of their experiences. These blogs link to the sites’ other functions, such as downloadable travel guides, forums and possibilities for booking and purchasing. (Sentence 2018.)

The OTAs with social media functions speak of larger Chinese trends. Many sites and applications have multiple different functionalities, for example messaging, payments and food delivery. Other trend is the popularity of in-depth content with Chinese internet users. In the west, blogging as an influencer media has made room for a more visual social media usage, such as YouTube and Instagram. (Sentence 2018.) Combined with Chinese preference to seek recommendations of friends, family and celebrities, OTAs in China do not only make them a place to do business, but a place to market as well.

Mobile internet access and internet usage during the trip

Mobile internet access is important to Chinese tourists, as 97% of them make arrangements for the use of the internet during their trip. Popular options for mobile internet connectivity include discounted data plan packages, renting portable devices for Wi-fi access and using international data roaming. (Nielsen 2018, 13.) Roaming is the use of mobile devices while travelling outside the customer's home market to make and receive phone calls, sending text messages or downloading data (ECC 2018). Especially Chinese independent travellers use the internet and social media to plan their trips not only in advance, but also during the trip to look for accommodation, schedules, and sights. Free Wi-fi on hotels and on other accommodation options is expected. (Visit Finland 2013, 3.) In fact, on a study conducted in 2016 of Chinese tourists visiting Helsinki, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Gothenburg, respondents listed free Wi-Fi as the most important factor when choosing accommodation. (Chinavia 2016, 28).

For example, in 2018, the city of Helsinki began offering a WeChat mini-program to Chinese tourists visiting Helsinki. The program offers its users content about the city's sights, services, events and transportation, as well as 360° panoramic photos. There is also translation service and emergency help included. The updated program will also offer an interactive map and a public transportation journey planner. The city plans on making it possible to buy mobile transportation tickets through the program and is planning to test the use of WeChat's native payment service, WeChat Pay, on some of its services. (City of Helsinki 2018.) In 2019, Helsinki launched a MyHelsinki Mini Program in conjunction with WeChat's parent company Tencent in order to provide a 'live like a local' -experience for Chinese travellers (Spinks 2019).

Accessibility of the information

Information in Chinese language is important to Chinese travellers both prior and during the trip. For older travellers, the availability of information on their native language is more important than to younger travellers. Interestingly, information in Chinese is more important to Chinese tourists travelling as group than to those travelling independently, despite the more organised groups and guide-driven trips. With social media especially, but also regarding content on traditional websites, the use of Chinese language is a must. Chinese travellers do not speak or read English as well as other groups, but the number of them is growing. (Chinavia 2016, 31.)

Reasons for destination selection

China is a collectivist culture. People around them easily affect the opinions and views of Chinese people, as group ties are important. When it comes to selecting destinations for trips, friends and family are seen as important information providers. This creates a word-of-mouth type marketing, in which successful trips and good public image of destinations will likely attract more visitors. (Attract China 2014b.) While Chinese tourists in general choose destinations endorsed by celebrities, this is not the case with Nordic region as a destination. For first-time travellers to Europe, friends and family were the most important source of inspiration. (Chinavia 2016, 32.) In 2016, the three most common reasons for selecting Helsinki, Stockholm, Gothenburg or Copenhagen as a destination were recommendations from friends and family, information from travel agency or travel catalogue and social media or blogs (Chinavia 2016, 33).

In the past, Finland has mostly been a part of a tour on Nordic countries, with Helsinki and sometimes Turku being the destination. During recent years, effort has been made to market Finland to Chinese as a mono-destination, the only destination during the trip. This has worked especially well in Lapland (Visit Finland 2018a.) The easy access to Finland is a pull factor, as there are 38 flights weekly from China to Helsinki, operated by Finnair (Finavia 2018a).

Finland's visibility and image in China

When searching for information about holidays in Finland, most search result on Chinese search engines show results mainly from big travel companies: Lulutrip, Booking.com, Qyer, Ctrip and Mafengwo dominating the results (Hakala 2015, 9). As a rule, Finland is sold as a destination to Chinese

tourists by Chinese companies. Only Visit Finland's website and the site of a Helsinki based travel agency rise to top results. (Hakala 2015, 17.)

Finland has had successful products and campaigns in China, organised by Finnish travel companies and Visit Finland. These have helped making the travel trade in China more familiar with Finnish products. Many companies have launched products designed for Chinese tourists. Chinese companies have had several years of experiences and confidence from sales of Finnish products. In 2016, big tour operators and OTAs acquired large amount of resources and contributed to the rising amount of Chinese tourists to Finland. (Wu 2017.)

In 2016, Finland was featured in two popular Chinese reality shows, *We are in Love* and *Chef Nic Show* (Wu 2017). *We are in Love* features Asian celebrities in exotic, romantic destinations. Lapland was featured on three episodes. The first season of the show generated over 950 millions clicks on Chinese video sharing sites and has been a trending topic on Chinese social media. (Virkkunen 2016.) The *Chef Nic Show*, a popular celebrity cooking show in China featured an episode filmed in Lapland that included dog sledding, an overnight stay in a glass igloo hotel and the Northern lights (Ko 2017). As celebrity endorsements are important to Chinese when selecting travel destinations, this can be seen as a boost for tourism to Finland (Virkkunen 2016).

Much marketing is directed towards presenting Finland as a winter destination. There has also been an effort to make the services and itineraries better suited for Chinese tourist's demand and likes. Several tour operators are specialising in tailor-made itineraries for Chinese tourists and online travel agencies are offering short day-trips and mini-packages. Sport tourism is usually organised by special clubs, for example ice hockey clubs. There has also been more direct flight-routes opened between China and Finland. These factors have increased Chinese travel to Finland. (Lin, Li, Lai & Wu 2018.)

In China, Finland competes with Japan, Switzerland, Canada and US on winter sport tourists (Lin et al. 2018). Compared to other Nordic countries, Finnish winter is seen as the most impressive amongst Chinese tourists. Finland differentiates itself from the other destinations with snow activities, attractive accommodation and The Santa Claus. (Wu 2017.)

While the marketing emphasises Finland as a winter destination, only around one third of nights spent by Chinese travellers in Finland during 2016 were during the winter season. There is an interest towards winter activities, but that interest has not turned to actual customers taking part of those activities. (Visit Finland 2016, 9.) It has been suggested that Finland is seen too much of a winter destination and marketing should consider promoting other aspects and areas in Finland, rather than just winter and Lapland (Lin et al. 2018).

FINNISH COMPANIES' ONLINE PRESENCE

Presence in Chinese social media

Major Finnish travel operators and regions have utilized Chinese social media on their marketing and on the services offered to Chinese travellers. The Finnish airport management company, Finavia, has a presence in WeChat, Weibo and on Youku, the Chinese equivalent of YouTube, providing information and services on Helsinki Airport (Finavia 2018b). In 2017, its campaign on social media, featuring Chinese influencer Ryan Zhu living at the Helsinki airport for 30 days generated an audience of 2.2 billion (Moodie 2017). Marketing Helsinki, the tourism and marketing agency for the city of Helsinki is active on WeChat (City of Helsinki 2018). Visit Finland, the country's tourism agency has a presence in Weibo (Visit Finland 2018b). Finnair, the national flag carrier of Finland sells tickets through WeChat and utilizes its mobile payment service, WeChat Pay (Tamminen 2017). Travel in Lapland is marketed in both Weibo and WeChat, managed by House of Lapland, the marketing and communications agency for the region of Lapland (Ylä-Anttila 2018).

Presence in Chinese social media is a popular option for the bigger operators. However, there is also a big number of smaller companies in Finnish travel trade hoping to benefit from Chinese tourism to Finland. For them, the use of Chinese social media, mainly WeChat and Weibo, can pose a challenge. On WeChat, it is suggested that content should be uploaded to the account at least on a weekly basis,

but many companies post content almost daily. WeChat content is articles, not just on the services or products the company is providing, but also mixed with cultural and social topics. Visuality is the key, for both to stand out from the mass and to keep the readers engaged. For companies that use Weibo, daily posting is necessary. Like in WeChat, visuality is very important in Weibo. Weibo is best suited for posting shorter content, as there is normally a maximum message length of 140 Chinese signs, more if posted from Weibo's webpage. (Zhou 2016.)

Both channels need to be managed not only by people with deep knowledge of the product or the service, but by people with excellent writing skills in Chinese as well as general familiarity of social media marketing. (Zhou 2016.) The content should tell a story (Visit Finland 2013). Social media presence in Chinese sites demands dedication to long-term and continuing development of the channel. For these reasons, it may be wiser for smaller operators to team up with bigger ones. The greater resources and bigger visibility of national and regional operators can benefit the smaller companies. For example, regional operators can display smaller companies and offer them a chance to make themselves known. In turn, national operators, such as Visit Finland, can make regional operators better known and give Chinese social media users a more in-depth view of the country and what its different regions have to offer, rather than marketing the whole country as one. Companies can also team-up with other local travel industry companies to share the costs and efforts. (Zhou 2016.)

OTAs selling Finland

Ctrip, the largest OTA in Asia and second largest in the world, and Visit Finland signed a deal in autumn of 2018 to market the Lakeland region of Finland to Chinese tourists. Lakeland and Finnish archipelago are relatively unknown in China, but there is great interest in them amongst OTAs. Lakeland will be featured significantly across Ctrip's different channels. Ctrip has also put together several new travel packages in Lakeland for Chinese travellers. As individual travellers' numbers grow, so does the competition to get them. Visit Finland believes it is important that Finland and Finnish travel companies and destinations are all part of the marketing and selling effort in different Chinese channels. Ctrip's platform helps to reach the Chinese consumers. Visit Finland has worked with Ctrip starting in 2016 when Ctrip started to sell new StopOver-packages. (Visit Finland 2018a.)

Few Finnish agencies operate in China and try to compete with Chinese companies. The most successful one is Aurora Xplorer, with turnover of around 1,3 million euros and a staff of twelve in 2017. Nine out of twelve workers were Chinese. Half of the revenue comes from school camps organised for Chinese tourists in Finland. (Tuominen 2018.) The company combines the travel agency channel favoured by group travellers and the mobile store favoured by independent travellers. Instead of volume, Aurora Xplorer focuses on the value experienced by Chinese tourists. Especially family groups and school camps tend to stay in the country longer than average travellers. (Markkinointi & Mainonta 2017) To compete with Chinese agencies, local competitors need to be on Chinese social media. Aurora Xplorer's online staff writes, photographs and video shoots content to social media. The company also works with influencers and bloggers. In the year of 2017, a blog post by their UK partner about Finnish sauna generated 1,5 million views. Other posts about Finland had almost that many views as well. Aurora Xplorer works with Finnish travel companies to make the packages offered suitable for Chinese travellers' needs, preferences and likes. The Chinese travellers differ from other groups, and packages offered to other groups cannot be sold without some alternations. Aurora Xplorer offers more tailored packages, rather than trips for the entire Chinese tourism sector. (Tuominen 2018.)

As most Chinese OTAs that operate into Finland produce their own packages, it is important for Finnish travel companies to come to their attention. It can be difficult to attract the interest of a large multinational operator. Regional and national operators can help marketing these smaller companies to operators. Finnish OTAs working with Chinese tourists can be a way to attract more customers, but those have a marginal market share, so working with larger organisations can have better results.

CONCLUSION

Chinese travellers are a major segment for Nordic countries and to Finland. Internet usage and other online activities are an integral part of peoples' life in modern China. With hundreds of millions of

users and services covering almost every aspect of a daily life, travel industry has also seen a shift to a more internet-based travel industry in a past two decades. Because of the importance of recommendations from family, celebrities and friends, Chinese tourism has always had a social aspect. The rise of online platforms has caused this socialism in the industry to shift from more secluded environments, like homes and workplaces, to online. These services are used while planning the trip, while on it and after it. Because of a growing number of features and services being offered on online platforms, the user base is not likely diminish or the services to lose their importance in the future.

For smaller companies, effective use of internet in China in boosting their operations is hard. The need for fluent Chinese writers and for constant online presence can be a too big of investment for smaller operators. Companies need also focus on visual, detailed articles designed for Chinese users, so that the content is created for and tailored to them. The content cannot be something already offered to western customers in social media translated into Chinese. In Finnish travel industry, usually only larger operators have a presence in Chinese social media, with examples including regional travel agencies, transport operators and national marketing organisations. As these operators usually have the resources for the use, and an established follower base in social media, it is recommended for the smaller companies to work with them. National and regional operators, such as Visit Finland or My Helsinki, boost and showcase smaller companies on the travel industry to Chinese social media users. As Visit Finland especially has good marketing agreements and a strong presence in Chinese social media, it is a good idea to work with them.

The OTA industry in China, as well as in Asia, is dominated by Chinese companies, with Ctrip being the biggest in China and the second largest in the world. Because of the size of them, it is difficult for smaller companies to market themselves for them, or to suggest cooperation. As most of the travel packages especially built in China, the companies need to make themselves known. Visit Finland works with Chinese OTAs to boost marketing of companies and different areas of Finland to make them better known in China. Visit Finland has also made deals on travel packages, so that OTAs will develop new packages for Chines in Finland. The OTA segment is big in China, and to effectively cooperate with them by themselves, companies need to invest in Chinese speaking staff and have resources for longer relationship building. This can be too much for smaller companies, so once again cooperation with bigger operators is advisable. Some OTAs that work in China are Finnish companies. These companies are smaller than their Chinese counterparts are, and therefore have a smaller market share. Finnish OTAs working with Chinese tourists focus on a more tailored packages, such as school camps and adventure holidays rather than more mainstream packages. While smaller and having access to smaller customer base, working with Finnish OTAs can be a lucrative way to enter the Chinese tourism business.

Because Chinese travellers are active internet users, using online platforms to gain access to them can seem as a tempting idea. However, working on social media and with OTAs is a time consuming task, which binds many company resources. It is advisable to work with larger organisations that already have the means and the tools for the operation. There is a huge potential in Chinese online travel platforms, companies just need to be aware of the commitment catering to their needs. For bigger companies, separate and individual presence is highly recommended, but for smaller companies it is usually better to work with someone, and to concentrate the efforts to delivering the core services and products for the customer.

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LEARNING FROM BENCHMARKING: IMPLEMENTING THE MARKETING OPERATIONS FROM OTHER REGIONS TO RURAL AREAS

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to explore and analyse different marketing strategies being used in different regions in Finland for attracting Chinese tourists. The purpose is to find out different marketing styles that appeal to Chinese visitors and offer tourism entrepreneurs in rural areas like Satakunta valuable knowledge and guide the entrepreneurs towards more successful marketing. In this essay, there is also question of profitability and the attempt to make small entrepreneurs to reflect whether it is possible for them to start attracting Chinese guests. The regions this research is focusing include Oulu region, Inari-Saariselkä region and Saimaa region. The research question is “Can tourism entrepreneurs in rural areas learn some marketing strategies from other regions in Finland?” The sub-questions are “How to market attractively to Chinese tourists?” and “What are the marketing strategies used in these destinations?”

Tiivistelmä

Tämän esseen tarkoitus on tutkia ja analysoida erilaisia markkinointitoimenpiteitä, joita toisilla matkailualueilla on hyödynnetty kiinalaisten matkailijoiden houkuttelemiseen. Tarkoituksena on selvittää erilaisia markkinointityylejä, jotka vetoavat kiinalaismatkailijoihin ja ohjata suomalaisia matkailuyrittäjiä kohti menestyvämpää markkinointia. Esseen tavoitteena on tarjota syrjäisillä seuduilla toimiville yrittäjille arvokasta tietoa markkinoinnista kiinalaisille. Esseessä halutaan myös herättää pienyrittäjiä ajattelemaan, onko markkinointi kiinalaismatkailijoille ylipäätään mahdollista heidän kohdallaan. Matkailualueet, joihin esseessä keskitytään, ovat Inari-Saariselän, Oulun ja Saimaan alueet. Tutkimuskysymys on: ”Voivatko matkailuyrittäjät syrjäisillä seuduilla oppia jotain markkinoinnista toisilta matkailualueilta Suomessa? Alakysymyksinä ovat:”Kuinka kiinalaismatkailijoille markkinoidaan onnistuneesti?” ja ”Miten Suomessa markkinoidaan matkailualueita kiinalaisille?”

Keywords: benchmarking, rural travel destinations, marketing, online marketing, digital marketing, Chinese tourists, Oulu, Inari-Saariselkä, Saimaa

INTRODUCTION

Chinese travellers are a wanted tourist group everywhere in the world and Finland has also stepped in the competition. But what does it take to get them to come to Finland and how to create an interesting marketing to them? The purpose of this study is to include rural areas in the competition by benchmarking other regions in marketing and analysing if it is possible to implement these marketing operations. This study represents also the opposite view, if the rural areas should even take part in the competition or should they primarily focus on other traveller groups. The goal of this study is to wake up the operators and be realistic about whether they should start attracting Chinese tourists and how to do it.

Before making marketing operations, entrepreneurs should learn and dive deeper into the marketing principles. Travel operators need also to understand the power and benefits of benchmarking, since it

is an effective way to learn from others, and improve their internal methods and see where their strengths and weaknesses lie. When the entrepreneurs have gained the basic knowledge and learned about the customer segment, it is easier for them to start working on their marketing plan by using the results of this study.

MARKETING: GOALS AND CREATING A MARKETING PLAN

Marketing is the most important thing, which is leading most of the companies' strategies and operating models. Marketing-centred thinking contains customer-oriented approach, such as customer's needs and expectations. Customer's needs are important when new services are produced and improved. If the company wants to ensure that their marketing is successful, they need to create strategies in the long term. Keeping touch with other cooperating partners is also necessary. Company's daily working has to support their marketing strategies. For example, company must ensure that they do not make too big marketing promises, customer service is friendly and everyone who works in company has internalized its policies. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 18.)

Marketing has four main goals. These goals include demand identification, creating and up keeping demand, fulfilling demand and demand regulating (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 21–22). Demand identification is important in every company when they are creating new services. Company needs to know target group behaviour, their needs, and why and where customers are buying. Demand creation and up keeping means that company makes marketing strategies suitable to target group's needs. In this way company gets target group interested about their services, and customer makes the buying decision. It is also important to keep on track that customer relations are long lasting. In this way, already existing customers are recommending company's services. Fulfilling demand contains customer-oriented working. Company can make research about customer satisfaction and develop in this way their services. Services should be easy to buy whenever customer needs it. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 21.) Demand regulating is justifiable when demand is high and because of that company cannot offer their services, or products are being corrupted (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 22).

Customers are experiencing the value of services in different ways, which means that company needs to adjust their offering right. Depending on company's services, they need to ensure that for example services are always easy to buy and that products are good in quality. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 21–22.) Value can also relate to status which product brings, or products reputation. Values which product or service is offering are always personal. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 22.) The ideal position is when customers feels getting more value from service or product than they are sacrificing to get it. It is called convincing value proposition. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 23.)

Company marketing plans and strategies are defined by made goals. Plans and strategies are profitable if they are made in long term, usually for one year. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 26.) To make a profitable marketing plan it is recommendable to make a marketing research and analysis. Analyses can be internal or external. Internal analysis examines for example competitors, law, economy and market position. External analysis examines company's present state, such as staff, products or marketing communication. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 26.) Research helps the company to find new marketing possibilities and specification of the present state of the marketing. By using a research company, it is possible to recognize problems and focus on the right matters, which are the most profitable. It is also important to research when companies marketing strategies are productive, so the company will not change their working marketing strategies too much. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 27.)

Marketing plan defines goals precisely, and how to reach these goals. It contains concrete plans, such as how much company's total sale will grow until next year. Goals define what marketing strategies are. If company executes for example a marketing campaign, it is operation. Operation and strategies are both necessary in the marketing plan. Marketing can be made for different groups, for example for new or old target groups. (Bergstöm & Leppänen 2015, 28–29.) If company cannot reach the planned goals with old customers, it has to define a new customer group. Company also needs to prepare to let go of target groups that cause additional costs. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 28.)

Continuously developing technology is affecting marketing. Technology makes it possible to reach customer in many ways and via different channels, which are suitable for the target group. Company can use for example digital marketing, word of mouth marketing (WOM) and viral marketing. (Bergström & Leppänen 2015, 30–31.) When considering different digital marketing channels entrepreneurs usually face the biggest challenge when they are thinking which innovations are the most relevant for the organization and how they can be integrated effectively with traditional marketing practices (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 8). Digital marketing means managing the company's presence in different online platforms such as social media. Marketing managers can use online channels to support the customers' whole buying process and to develop and maintain customer relationships. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 11.)

Effective digital marketing strategy is a part of company's multichannel marketing and aligned with the business. Effective digital marketing activities are consistent about what kind of customers they are trying to reach. Differential and compelling value propositions are then communicated to the customers through the channels. It is important to support customer through the whole buying process that might go through different channels before reaching the end. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2016, 16.) Especially customer groups, who use lots of internet, are tech savvy and have networked in social media, are important to reach continuously. It is vital for tourism businesses to be present in these channels to reach these groups of customers. Customers will share content and their experiences via digital channels they are using and if the experience is good, even promote the company. (Oksanen, Ruokamo & Saari 2014, 86.)

MARKETING FOR CHINESE TOURISTS

Chinese market is constantly and rapidly changing, and their middle class is the largest in the world. Digital and mobile marketing is by far the most effective to promote and communicate with the Chinese customers. (Dudarenok 2018.) There are few basic things that should always be considered while marketing to China. Chinese people like to browse content in their own language, so it is important to know how to speak and write in Chinese language. One should however avoid direct translations. Brand should always appear the same in all different channels and it is good to point out locality, but also to keep in mind that same things might not work for them. To know the special features of Chinese market, decision-making process and even to get to know the right people it is best to find a local partner. To reach Chinese people you must use their social media channels and optimize the content for Baidu search engine. It is also important to notice that webpages that include user interfaces from Twitter, Facebook or YouTube might not work in China at all. It would be useful to locate company's webpage domain to China to keep the site running smoothly. (Vennonen 2017.)

Most popular social media platforms in China are WeChat and Weibo. Both are very cost effective since they can reach huge amount of people. Approximately 700 million Chinese use smartphones and average user spends about 25 hours in Internet every week. Before having

own accounts on these platforms few things should be considered first. There should be enough appealing content and pictures play huge role in content creating. When using Weibo, one should be able to have new yet inspiring content daily and using WeChat weekly. Uploader should have experience in marketing and lots of knowledge about Finland. It is also important to have excellent writing skills in Chinese. Maintaining and developing these channels also takes a lot of dedication. If it is not possible to master these things it would be useful to co-operate with national brands like Visit Finland and work together with local or regional tourism office to make marketing activities towards China. (Zhou 2016.)

Chinese people are rewarding brands with the most entertaining content and western brands should enhance their brand story to Chinese followers in order to keep their attentions. In China there are social influencers called KOLs (Key Opinion Leader) that can have a major influence on the target market. KOLs have usually a high engagement with their followers and collaborating with them to promote products is a good way to pursue the wanted audience. Live streaming became a popular trend 2015 in China and streaming with KOLs; the Chinese live streaming market could increase by 32 percentage from 2017. In addition, short videos of six to 15 seconds are very trendy in China and are quickly becoming more widely used marketing techniques. (Dudarenok 2018.)

One effective marketing tool is story telling. Chinese tourists love to get to know the destination by hearing fascinating and exciting stories about the local history, traditions and culture. Learning about the Finnish culture and way of living is something that is truly interesting to them. When searching for the new travel destination, Chinese tourists want to see pictures and successful experiences from other Chinese people. They value each other opinions and finding happy pictures and positive travel experiences in social media is very assuring to them. Naming tourism products in Chinese is also a good way to reach out for Chinese travellers and to get their attention. Chinese tourists adore beautiful landscapes and sceneries and they are enthusiastic photographers. By marketing these places to them, they are convinced that travelling to the destination is worth it. (Hietasaari & Lind 2013, 4.)

Marketing of Finland needs to be renewed and travel destinations should bravely come up with fresh ideas and concepts. Chinese people are already well aware of Santa Claus, Marimekko and sauna and Finland has used these in their marketing for decades. For example, Finnish food and beverage culture is one possible interesting aspect to Chinese tourists and marketing our culinary specialities is still very little used. Chinese people also appreciate modern buildings, technology, statuses and elegant brands and focusing to market our nature and forests could endanger attracting this particular segment. The cultural life and city festivals in Finland have also developed considerably in the past years and they deserve more international attention. Marketing is problematic and challenging because many other countries are also pursuing Chinese travellers and Finland is competing with other European and Nordic countries. Some tourism experts believe that Finland should focus primarily on other nationalities. (Kilpeläinen 2017.)

WHAT IS BENCHMARKING?

Benchmarking is an organizational performance comparison and its purpose is to identify performance gaps, while taking consumption and production within the organization into account and make necessary changes and adapt the best practises. Benchmarking or performance gap means difference in performance scores between the benchmark for a particular activity and other businesses taking part in the comparison. Benchmarking is often confused with competitive analysis, but while competitive analysis is between the organizations in the same geographic area, benchmarking can be used to find the best practises regardless of

where the business is located. Benchmarking method includes the benchmarker and benchmarkee, and the latter is the benchmarked organization. Benchmarking helps the organization to understand their weaknesses and strengths, improve their performance quality, establish new standards and goals, increase employees' motivation and motivates them to set up and accomplish new and improved standards, document reasons for performance differences, motivates the organization to making continuous improvement, improves their competitive advantage and standards. Benchmarking is also a very cost-effective and time-efficient method because it helps the organization to utilize practical examples and innovative ideas. There are also some threats in benchmarking, if the organization is resistant to changes, planning poorly, lack professional human resources and management commitment or have short-term expectations, time constraints, cost and competitive barriers. (Kozak 2003, 2–5.)

Benchmarking can be either an internal or an external process. Internal benchmarking can be used inside same organization between different departments or a chain between different countries. The method used in this research is external benchmarking, where the benchmarker is pursuing to find new ideas, methods, products and services from external organizations, benchmarkee. Benchmarker can understand what, if anything, needs to be changed by analysing the gap between internal and external practises. Benchmarker can this way adapt the best practises by determining how the benchmarkee has achieved their performance levels. (Kozak 2003, 10–11.)

External benchmarking is necessary these days when travel destinations are forced to compete with other international tourist destinations and when customer's needs, wants and expectations are changing rapidly. External benchmarking process aims to display methods to close the gap between internal and external performances. Main question needing to be answered are "what others are doing, how and why?" The proposed model of external benchmarking begins with defining the mission statement, choosing a partner, collecting the data, identifying performance gaps, deciding what to benchmark, presenting the benchmarking results and finally taking necessary actions. (Kozak 2003, 96–98.)

BENCHMARKING OF THE DESTINATIONS

The regions that are chosen for the benchmarking in this study include Inari-Saariselkä, Oulu and Saimaa region. The reason why these regions were chosen is that all of them are in different stages on marketing for the Chinese tourists. It is interesting to find out and learn how these regions have started their marketing process and what operations they have chosen and what they may have in common. The research data is also much more versatile when the study is focusing on such different destinations.

Marketing in Lapland: Inari-Saariselkä region

Chinese tourism is already so well developed in Inari-Saariselkä region that it could be valuable to learn how they became so appealing destination for Chinese tourists.

In 2016, Lapland's summer season marketing was in poor shape. Marketing manager Tarja Manninen from Inari-Saariselkä Tourism Ltd says that Lapland's summer season has much more potential, which has not been fully utilized. Summer season in Lapland used to be popular especially among European traveller groups, but nowadays people want to travel with their family or friends. Timo Lappi from the Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa says that the most important thing is creating an attractive image about summer season. He says that many travellers may think that summer in Lapland is only mosquitos, but for example, national parks are fascinating even in summer time. (Web page of MTV 2016.)

Lapland has been under a magnifying glass lately. In November 2018, Lapland was wearing only thin snow cover, which was also noticed by British media Independent, and they wrote an article about it and gave Lapland an unpleasing nickname “Crapland”. Independent and few other media wrote that people who have booked trip to Lapland are worried, and few flights are cancelled because of the poor snow situation.

Problems like this have been recognized, and marketing of Lapland is beginning to change to concentrate on the whole year. The idea is to change people understanding about Lapland to be a good destination only in wintertime. Marketing organization House of Lapland reacted to these articles quickly and responded that Lapland has also many other attractions than snow. Their goal is to change Lapland’s strong winter branding. Branding has had a good start because of Aurora Borealis -trips, which are tempting tourist in Lapland also in autumn. (Holopainen 2018.)

Most important Lapland’s pull factors from Chinese traveller’s perspective are Aurora Borealis, glass igloos and Santa Claus. They travel in big groups and their travel itineraries are tightly scheduled. (Linna n.d.) Lapland is a developing area and the customer capacity of Lapland has increased. The share of overnight stays in winter 2017 was 60 percentage of the whole year. Summer season percentage however has decreased, and at the same time, the number of Chinese travellers has dropped. (Lapin kesä ei... 2018.)

Marketing in Oulu region

Saimaa and Oulu regions both are being actively marketed for Chinese tourists and because of that, both destinations are currently trending and becoming new favourites. Oulu is becoming an interesting destination for the Chinese tourists.

In 2016 Oulu begun a two-year marketing campaign called “Attractive Oulu Region 2018”, where they are defining the main themes of marketing, making product development and marketing the area for tour operators with the expertise of a DMC (destination management company) called Arctic China Oy. BusinessOulu together with Oulun Matkailu Oy is handling the international marketing. (BusinessOulu web page 2016.)

For example, Tang Chao, the entrepreneur of Arctic China Oy (BusinessOulu web page 2016), sees potential in educational tourism and camp schools in Oulu area. Mr. Chao also offers professional insight to Oulu on what Chinese travellers are looking for in Finland and what tourism products and packages would be desirable for them. According to Marju Niskanen, who is the CEO of Tumlare (BusinessOulu web page 2016), potential new tourism products in Oulu include technical visits together with sight-seeing. Interesting topics that would attract Chinese tourists are forest industry, ICT, school visits and elderly care. Oulu needs more visibility through effective marketing and partners from activity, restaurant and accommodation services. Asian tourists usually do not stay for too long in the same place, but in educational camps, overnight stays would be twice or triple the normal amount. (BusinessOulu web page 2016.) Even though in 2017 the number of Chinese visitors increased by 15,8 percentages, and overnight stays by 17,1 percentages from 2016, the average length of overnight stays have dropped from 2011 to 2017 (Visit Finland & Tilastokeskus 2018).

VisitOulu has already taken some significant steps in marketing the region to Chinese travellers. The organization has translated its webpage in Chinese, because Chinese tourists appreciate having information in their native language. VisitOulu has also made new contacts and presented Oulu region as a hot new travel destination in China. Oulu is also developing some cooperation strategies with its twin town in China, Hangzhou. (BusinessOulu web page 2016.) VisitOulu has integrated their Instagram feed to their web page to attract customers with beautiful pictures of the region, and one can read travel stories and tips from other travel-

lers who have visited Oulu region (VisitOulu web page 2018.). The main pull factor of Oulu is its location. Airport of Oulu is the second largest airport in Finland. The CEO of Oulun Matkailu Oy, Janne Soini, is hoping that in the future Oulu would become a main hub for the trips made to Northern Finland. (Maaseudun Tulevaisuus web page 2017.)

Marketing in Saimaa region

Chinese are traveling with constantly growing numbers, which creates potential for regions outside their main destinations (Pasanen & Pesonen 2016, 45). In Saimaa region, tourists can enjoy fresh and clean air and nature. Region has potential in serving especially small groups and individuals that have interest in certain activities and job opportunities. These travellers are looking for new experiences rather than products and services that are productized clearly for Chinese travellers. (Pasanen & Pesonen 2016, 46.) Region has also Saimaa ringed seals that may have potential to market the region since Chinese believe that seeing them brings good fortune and guarantees the birth of a son (Tanskanen, 2015).

In 2017, Saimaa region started to do co-marketing with cities of Lappeenranta, Imatra, Mikkelin and Savonlinna and has a goal to be the third internationally known destination beside Lapland and Helsinki by 2020 (Saimaan seutua markkinoidaan... 2018). To make this happen, South Karelian marketing company GoSaimaa and Southern Savonian marketing company Visit Saimaa have created together a brand called Lake Saimaa Purest Finland and Southern Saimaa region uses about million euros per year to market Saimaa as a tourism destination (Skyttä 2018). GoSaimaa and Visit Saimaa are uniting their forces and they are creating a joint web site, and it is possible that they will make browsing easier to their Chinese customers by translating the content also in Chinese language. Web page is named as Saimaa.fi and internationally it is Lakesaimaa.fi. (Pesu 2018.)

The entire eastern Lakeland has now reached the first big step to get to the Asian market. Asia's biggest online travel agency is called Ctrip, Visit Finland and Lakeland have agreed to collaborate attracting more Chinese tourists to travel to Lakeland. As part of the agreement, Ctrip has made several travel packages to Lakeland region. (Visit Finland, 2018.) All seven packages are targeted for individuals and they can be purchased straight from the website. Packages have been designed so that they would increase tourism in summer season. (Tanninen 2018.) They include flight tickets to Helsinki, accommodation in Lakeland and a rental car. At the moment packages are tours around Lakeland, but future will show if there is demand for products focused on Saimaa region alone. (Hackman 2018.) Saimaa is currently also a part of European Union's China Joint Promotion platform as the only Scandinavian destination (Saimaan seutua markkinoidaan... 2018).

Saimaa region opens a new channel and will get its own mini program in WeChat due to cooperation with the Chinese corporation Tencent. Program includes useful features such as event calendar, translator and emergency call. Program also offers users information about areas accommodation, restaurants, attractions and nature trails. Program will be launched under the name of Lake Saimaa, Lakeland Finland. Program offers travellers more holistic experience from start to finish. From entrepreneur's point of view, it is an opportunity to offer services targeted and created especially for Chinese travellers. After launching, Tencent will market the program through its news services and using influencers. (Eronen 2018.)

CONCLUSION: IMPLEMENTING THE MARKETING OPERATIONS

One of the main things that came up many times during this research was how the smaller businesses started to cooperate together to accomplish regional success through marketing. Marketing for a huge number of Chinese customers could easily become an up-hill battle to a

small operator. Struggles can be financial and small operators may not have the needed resources for example to maintain an interesting content feed in social media platforms. But through joint marketing and cooperating small operators can save a huge deal of money and use resources in an effective way. Joint marketing of the whole region can also be beneficial to create a versatile brand of the destination, where travellers can have many opportunities to enjoy during their holiday.

Marketers should keep up with the changes, for example in the climate. Climate change is visible also in Finland, and it would be wise not to base the whole brand to uncertain factors like snow or northern lights, if there is a risk for breaking your service promise. Travel organizations should have also services and products that are not dependable of the season. All-year round activities and services should be highlighted in the marketing so that the customers would be informed about all of the possibilities in the destination. This way they know that the destination offers also other opportunities and will maybe change their expectations towards the trip.

Destinations should create joint Chinese social media platforms, such as Weibo and WeChat, and establish a strong digital presence, so that the Chinese travellers can find information easier and get an overall image of the destination. This way also their content is staying interesting for the Chinese tourists and the content flow is continuous when there are many operators running the platform. Also, it could be difficult for Chinese tourists to find smaller businesses or follow them in social medias. It would be profitable to hire a Chinese-speaking and writing professional who can translate the content into Chinese. The marketers should also know Chinese culture and traditions, and understand how they should market to them and what styles they should avoid. It is very important not to offend them or publish any vulgar content.

It was also discovered that Chinese people love to hear stories and learn about the local culture and traditions. Marketers should use stories in their marketing, as Finland has a rich history and have many traditions and beliefs that can be targeted to travel destinations, especially about nature. With story telling you can make even modest things fascinating and make even unfamiliar places and facts known and interesting. In social media platforms, it is important to invest in good quality pictures and overall visual look of the site.

If a Finnish destination wants Chinese customers, they need to invest much effort and time. There are many international travel fairs organized in China every year, where one can create new contacts, networks and get the destination to stand out. Destinations should be represented as a whole, and a wise thing to do is to go there together. China is also interested in twin town cooperation. For example, Oulu has formed a twin town alliance with Hangzhou and Satakunta with Changzhou. Marketing could become more effective, if the destination manages to create a partnership with a Chinese operator that could do the marketing locally, for example a travel agency or online travel agency, and offer insight on customer behaviour and their needs.

Finally, destinations should consider whether it is profitable to pursue Chinese travellers at all. The process of marketing to the Chinese customers is going to be long-lasting and challenging and it requires a lot of human resources and money especially to a small business. Even though the decision of the joint marketing and cooperation is made, the remaining question is how to implement everything in practice? Operators must decide who is supervising and controlling the process, and they should agree on what are their goals. Destination marketers, especially small entrepreneurs, should consider whether pursuing this target group is profitable or even possible, and if they could have better success attracting some other group. If the destination will however decide to pursue Chinese travellers, one successful idea is to

create something new and fresh to the market, because marketing Finland is a little stuck-up and old-fashioned and it can damage the whole process that is otherwise working.

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WHEN PERSONAL RELATIONS TRULY MATTER – INTERVIEW WITH MARKKU PAUKKUNEN, SENIOR CHINA ADVISOR

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Abstract

For decades Finnish cities and organizations have co-operated with Chinese. In China, the support for the co-operation from parliament level for example in the form of twin town agreements is crucial for individual and organizations to seize their opportunities. However, long-term co-operation with Chinese is only possible when personal relations have been created. Markku Paukkunen, Senior China Advisor at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, shares some of his ideas behind the success stories in doing business with Chinese.

Tiivistelmä

Hallinnollinen tuki, kuten ystävyyskaupunkisopimukset ovat ratkaisevia, mikäli yksittäinen organisaatio tehdä yhteistyötä kiinalaisten toimijoiden kanssa. Pitkäaikainen yhteistyö on kuitenkin mahdollista vain, mikäli osapuolet onnistuvat solmimaan henkilökohtaisia suhteita. Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulun vanhempi Kiina-neuvonantaja Markku Paukkunen jakaa ajatuksiaan onnistuneesta yhteistyöstä kiinalaisten kanssa.

Keywords: co-operation, personal relations, business culture, twin towns

BUILDING PERSONAL RELATIONS

When Markku Paukkunen first graduated as a construction engineer in 1975, he did not predict he would one day own his own plywood factory or that one day he would be appointed as a Senior China Advisor into an institution of higher education. (Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019.)

After graduating as a M.Sc. in engineering, Paukkunen worked for 15 years as a project manager at Prizztech, a business development company in Satakunta. In 2006, while still at Prizztech, Paukkunen made his first trip to China. The delegation visited a fair in Shanghai and later they travelled Changzhou as a result of a single e-mail. This can be seen as a turning point for Paukkunen on his career towards being appointed as a Senior China Advisor at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) in 2014. (Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019.)

Personal relations in Chinese business culture

When doing business with Chinese, foreigners should understand that they are facing both the modern realities and ancient traditions that have an impact on Chinese business culture due to the underlying effects of ancient Chinese philosophies and strategic thinking (Moran, Abramson & Moran 2014, 406–407). From the Chinese point of view, there are two key factors that determine the success of the business: reliable relationships (guanxi) or networking practices and ancient military strategies. Initially, guanxi based relationships have been built on the culture of gift giving and doing favours. These reliable relationships create the feeling of togetherness (ganqing), which means looking after each other's interests in the network rather

than following one's own interests. Should the foreigners, who often see *quanxi* as a corrupted practice, fail in responding to Chinese efforts to build *guanxi*, Chinese may be invoked to rely on the adaptation of military strategies to business purposes. (Moran et al. 2014, 408–409.)

For Paukkunen (personal communication on 7.6.2019), personal relations have been in the core of every China related activity. In 2012, Paukkunen was part of a project group whose main goal was to set up a national centre of excellence in remote technology and to help technology companies to enter the Chinese markets. The project included several Finnish cities and also SAMK was part of the team. That is when Paukkunen met Cimmo Nurmi, Vice President for Research. In 2013, Nurmi asked Paukkunen to prepare a project for SAMK regarding China and in 2014, at the age of 65, Paukkunen joined SAMK upon Nurmi's request. Paukkunen started immediately as a Senior China Advisor based on his long experience with the Chinese and he has no regrets: "SAMK is an excellent work community", Paukkunen says.

From personal to professional

Co-operation with Chinese has a very personal significance for Paukkunen. Personal relations, personality traits and similar are significant when doing business. For example personal investments into the relations with the city of Changzhou pay back in the way they react and relate with Paukkunen. Negotiation skills are built on life experience, work experience and political understanding. Nothing has made Paukkunen more strong as a person than the China adventures and the long personal relations Paukkunen has utilized for the benefit of SAMK. (Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019.)

Paukkunen (personal communication on 7.6.2019) has been involved basically in everything that SAMK has done in China or with Chinese, whether it has something to do with student or staff exchange, setting up an office in Changzhou or negotiating double degree contracts. As Paukkunen describes, he had been "handed over with an open letter of attorney to define what China co-operation means for SAMK".

FINNISH CITIES IN CO-OPERATION WITH CHINA

The internationalization of Finland regarding China has only started (Viljanen 2019). Finnish cities have very different starting points and abilities for the co-operation with Chinese. For example, in Salo region, the key selling point in education export is the fact that a Chinese student coming to Finland is able to establish their life at the region due to the close connections between educational organizations and industry. (Inna 2019.) Some cities, such as Vantaa, have better infrastructure to offer as a basis of the co-operation, such as good transportation connections and industrial parks (Viljanen 2019) whilst other cities, such as Helsinki, have better employment opportunities to offer and also better support services for local companies to recruit foreigners, for example (Pakarinen 2019).

The co-operation between the city of Kouvola and China is based on the rail connection between Kouvola and Xi'an (Toikka 2019) whereas Rovaniemi, the hometown of Santa Claus, has built the business with Chinese on tourism (Seppälä 2019). For over 20 years already, the co-operation between the city of Espoo and Shanghai has been based on the exchange of know-how (Mäkelä 2019).

Thus, in Finland, cities and companies have versatile experiences and opportunities when it comes to co-operation with China. Partially this interest into co-operation is explained with the decreasing number of the population, due to the decline in birth-rate. Organizations, such as schools and institutes of higher education which are worried by the shrinking generations are seeking for new opportunities with the Chinese, for example in the form of education export as the city of Salo has done. (Inna 2019.) For similar reasons, the city of Kuopio is interested in attracting foreigners, but most importantly to provide services at a level that makes it attractive for the immigrants to stay (Pirhonen 2019.) However, according to Viljanen (2019), Finns should invest more in language and culture studies in order to enhance the co-operation with Chinese.

At the same time, Chinese, especially the younger generations, are interested in coming to Finland, both to study and work. Finland has one of the best education systems in the whole world, Finland is a safe country with clean environment and Finland ranks high on the global innovation index. Not to forget that Finland has been nominated as the happiest country in the world. The brand called Finland is very well known in China, which leaves only two questions: How to be present in China and let Chinese know about the channels of co-operation and how to open the gate and make the co-operation and immigration possible. (Wang 2019.)

The co-operation between Finnish and Chinese cities and organizations is well described by the fact that despite the differences in the sizes and functions of the economies, both countries have invested into each other's equally as much (Puustinen 2019). However, if organizations and cities are truly interested in attracting Chinese business, they will have to co-operate with each other. The size of the economies is so different that all the plans should be multiplied by 250 to make the numbers relevant for Chinese, whether it is the number of exchange students Finnish school organization is planning to receive or the number of business deals Finnish companies plan to sign with Chinese. This multiplying exercise demands co-operation between Finnish cities and Finnish organizations if they want to enter the Chinese markets. One city or school is not likely to have enough recourse to respond to the demand by Chinese once the door is open. (Wang 2019.)

Twin towns as a basis for business relations

The co-operation with Chinese starts from the official city level before companies and individuals have the opportunity to enter the markets (Harlin 2019, Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019). This is why European level agreements are so important. Examples of these European level agreements include the accord of European Union Member States getting the "Approved Destination Status" (European Commission 2004), service contracts like "World Bridge Tourism" promoting Chinese FIT travelling to Europe and Europeans' investments in China to boom domestic tourism (European Commission 2019a) and declaring 2018 as EU-China tourism year. (European Commission 2019b.)

The city of Pori signed a twin town agreement with a Chinese city back in 2004, but the agreement since 2008 between the Regional Council of Satakunta the city of Changzhou is the actual kick-off for the business relations, making the city of Changzhou a twin town with the entire Satakunta (Kuntaliitto 2015, 28). Paukkunen (personal communication on 7.6.2019) also assisted in negotiating the twin town agreement in 2008. These kinds of negotiations require skills, as for example for Chinese, ranking is highly important, and the roles of a mayor of a city and region mayor is confusing for Chinese.

Even though parliament level agreements are required, also there, personal relations matter. Local mayors need to have good, functioning relationships with the local business representatives to make the agreements mutually beneficial. (Yle 2011.)

The value of co-operation with Chinese for SAMK and Satakunta region

In the Satakunta Regional Programme 2018-2021 (Satakuntaliitto 2017, 24) it is stated that the main gates for internationalization for Satakunta will be EU and China. Co-operation with Chinese will grow and develop further, suggesting that the industrial region of Satakunta aims to establish itself as an expert in co-operation with Chinese.

Since 2012 companies and other organizations from Satakunta region have actively searched for co-operation and business opportunities from China. Yet this has been the most difficult task to accomplish. Companies, whose strategy this fits into and who have the courage to enter Chinese markets, are relatively low in numbers. For small and medium sized companies, the time span required to do co-operation with Chinese is too long. From SAMK point of view, the results are now becoming visible after years of persistent work. (Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019.)

For the Health and Welfare Faculty in SAMK, the co-operation with Chinese has a lot of value. Aging is a major challenge in China that requires investments, and senior lecturers from the Health and Welfare Faculty have trained already dozens of nurses and elderly care experts in China. As a form of an

educational export, this is also a business transaction for SAMK and hopefully in time this will result in increasing the number of Chinese degree students studying in SAMK. For the Faculty of Technology and especially for its RoboAI branch the value is increasing, for example in the form of summer camps concentrating on technology and automation. (Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019.)

The summer and winter camps were also the starting point for an incoming travel agency, SAMK EduTravel, focusing on educational travel. Originally, Paukkunen was solely in charge of arranging the camps with the help of some students, but as the number of incoming pupils started to increase, it was clear that these types of activities would require a new form of organizing. For that purpose, SAMK EduTravel learning environment seemed to be an ideal solution and the travel agency started in January 2019. The purpose of the travel agency is to enhance the educational travel to Satakunta region and to act as a bridge between the local service providers and Chinese tour operators. Already by June 2019, the winter and summer camp groups have doubled from the past year showing significant increase, and only resources can be seen as a potential obstacle to hinder growth. SAMK EduTravel is an important tool for the entire Satakunta region to enhance the co-operation with Chinese. This requires open attitude and resources to function and to develop operations. Students doing their practical training in SAMK EduTravel or who study (study by working) courses in SAMK EduTravel, will experience what it is to make business with Chinese. This opportunity should be promoted more for student applicants, as tourism students most likely will be involved with Chinese after graduation. (Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019.)

In addition for the seminars organized by tourism students for local entrepreneurs on Chinese business culture and opportunities, local tourism companies have benefitted also from the other inputs SAMK has offered, for example in the form of attending tourism fairs in China. The challenge is how to share the knowledge that companies involved in China projects have gained. At the moment there is only a small group of companies, who join the China related projects co-ordinated by SAMK, and too many companies are being left without this insight. (Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019.)

When asked about the vision, how does the co-operation with Chinese look in 5–10 years, Paukkunen (personal communication on 7.6.2019) describes how the incoming travel agency has established itself on the region organizing dozens of educamps and delegates for visits on Satakunta region. At the same time Paukkunen reminds that even though there has and will be persistent work in getting Chinese to the region, it is worth to be cautious, too. Even though SAMK, in the long run, can offer the example on how to promote one destination by working as a network or as a cluster, the ultimate question is, how can we grow sustainably and what is the amount of turnover we are after.

A SOCIETAL VANTAGE POINT TO CHINA

When speaking about China, human rights are most often raised as a topic for discussion. On a regular basis people have asked from Paukkunen, how can he co-operate with Chinese. His answer is: “Exactly for that reason.” For example, the work done to develop the elderly care in China is aiming at human-oriented nursing of the elderly. For pupils joining summer camps it is the best opportunity to show the strengths of the Finnish education system, when aiming at human-oriented view of the world. By doing this work, one can do something at least in small scale to enhance the human rights conditions in China. The co-operation with Chinese has offered a unique societal vantage point to China for Paukkunen. (Paukkunen, personal communication on 7.6.2019.)

Paukkunen travels to China three–four times per year and has been there for approximately 25 times. Has China become a hobby? “Oh no, on my spare time I would rather sail on my wooden boat in the Luvia Archipelago.”

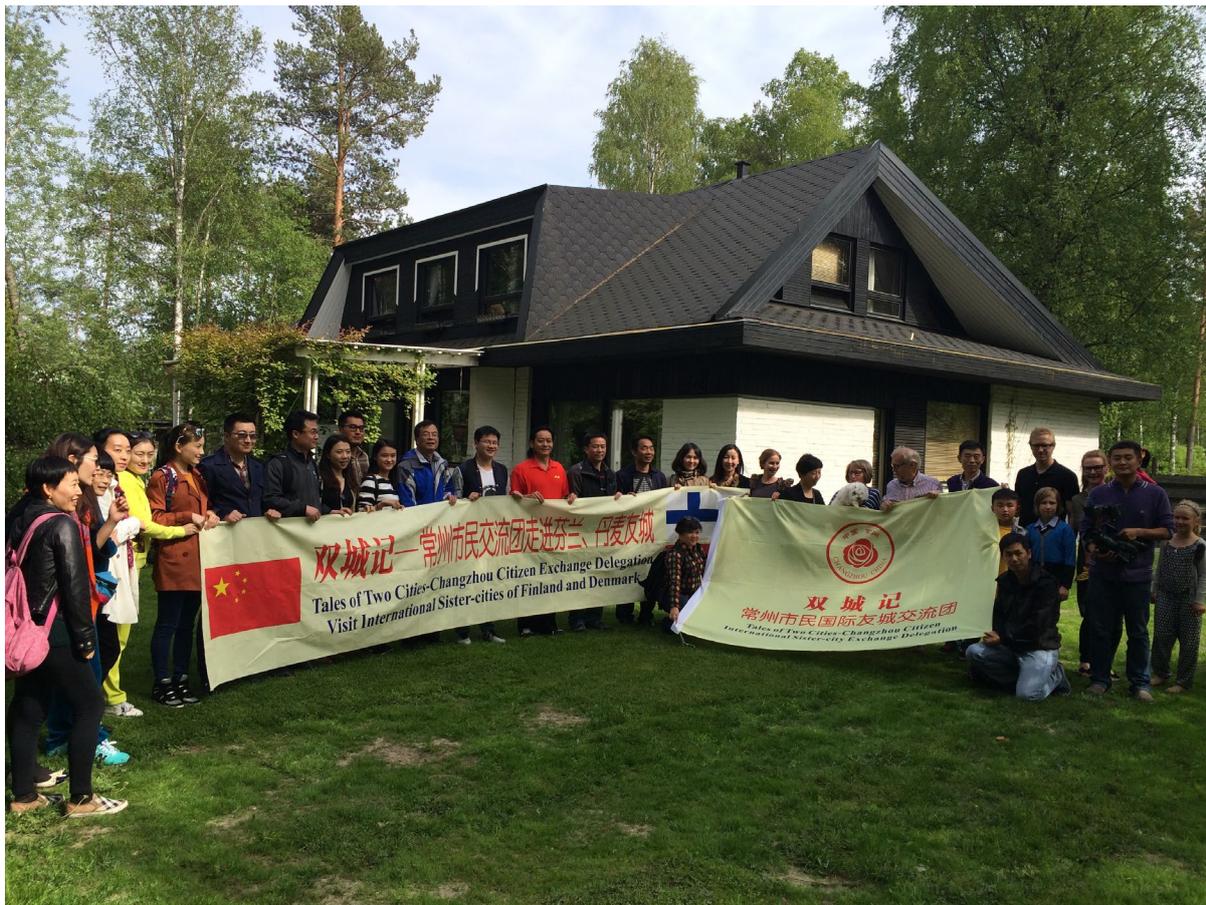


Figure 1. Tales of Two Cities – Changzhou Citizen Exchange Delegation on a visit in Satakunta in 2015. Picture: Markku Paukkunen’s home album.

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The number of Chinese incoming tourists travelling to Finland has been booming over the past years. The persistent work done on European, national and regional level to attract Chinese tourists is starting to pay off, not to forget the impact of reality television shows and social media influencers.

At the same time, the question is how can Finnish service providers respond to the growing demand? What are the channels to reach Chinese tourists and what sort of services would they like to buy? Tourism students from Satakunta University of Applied Sciences have studied Chinese incoming tourists as part of their course *Customer Insight in Tourism Business*, and this publication includes examples of their research work.

The work done by tourism students is remarkable for the entire Satakunta region, but also nationally, as the Chinese tourism segment is constantly changing with a limited number of reliable information available. Satakunta University of Applied Sciences will continue to provide knowledge and understanding on Chinese tourists in order for the entrepreneurs to market and sell their services in a more efficient way.



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