To go or not to go: Travel constraints and attractiveness of outbound Chinese tourists to Japan

ABSTRACT

The fast growth of the Chinese economy has transformed Chinese outbound tourism into one of the major players in the tourism industry worldwide. However, Chinese outbound tourists may still encounter travel constraints in some countries, such as Japan, which has had close and complicated relationship in history with China. This study adopted the qualitative approach by applying focus group and in-depth interviews to investigate and triangulate the travel barriers of Chinese outbound travel to Japan. The findings indicated that domestic nationalist sentiment played a key constraining role in influencing Chinese outbound travel decision making, followed by current political factors, while quality products and service, as well as social environment attracted tourists to travel. This research also found that visitors and non-visitors have perception differences in terms of travel barriers and attractiveness.

Keywords: Travel barriers, Chinese outbound tourists, Japan, Travel constraints, Travel attractiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Constraint has been widely applied in various leisure and tourism settings to indicate the unique feature of tourism products, activities and to provide a better understanding for a particular activity. The application of constraint is now commonly seen in different tourism context, such as cruise tourism, medical tourism and outbound tourism (e.g. Huang & Hsu, 2005, 2009; Heung, Kucukusta & Song, 2010; Hung & Petrick, 2010). It also has been widely applied in different demographic groups, such as seniors, disables and gender (e.g. Henderson & Gibson, 2013; Lyu, OH, Lee, 2013; Kazeminia, De Chiappa & Jafari, 2015). However, the constraint research on complicated bilateral national research is relatively scarce. Considering the boom in China's

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economy brought about by its reform and opening up policy, Chinese outbound tourists have become a major player in the tourism industry. Many countries have exerted efforts to attract and welcome Chinese tourists to their countries. Among them, Japan is a short haul trip destination for most of Asian countries and is a favored destination because of its reputation as having excellent electronic products, eclectic fashion, and unique cultural experience. According to the Chinese National Tourism Bureau, a comparison of the numbers of 2014 and 2013 outbound visitors indicated a 31.36% growth of total visitors (JNTO, 2015), and China is considered the third largest visitors to Japan (Chan, 2015).

Unlike overall steady outbound travel growth trend as indicated in Table 1, Chinese outbound tourists to Japan present an inconsistency in visiting statistics. Figures from 2009 to 2013 indicated that a strong fluctuation in travel intention and other hidden barriers and the market share among the overall outbound Chinese tourists' volume is decreasing amid fluctuating, which raised a challenging task for the JNTO (Japan National Tourism Organization) as it plans its promotions as well as Chinese policy makers as it tries to balance the complicated national relationships. Hence, this study is a timely and necessary to understand the Japan travel barriers and attractiveness.

This study explored the overall travel attractiveness and barriers, as well as the different perceptions between tourists who visited Japan and tourists who do not visit Japan. The result implications can assist the industry formulate strategic plans to promote attractiveness while alleviate the constraints experienced by non-visitors so as to convert them into visitors.

Table 1: Overall Chinese outbound tourists and Tourists to Japan

Year	Overall Outbound Tourists Growth rate (Million)	Overall Outbound Tourists to Japan Growth rate (Million)	Percentage
2005	31.02 (7.50%)	1.11 (9.40%)	3.60%
2006	34.52 (11.30%)	1.28 (14.6%)	3.71%
2007	40.95 (18.61%)	1.45 (1.90%)	3.56%
2008	45.84 (11.94%)	1.55 (6.80%)	3.40%
2009	47.65 (4.00%)	1.55 (-0.30%)	3.26%
2010	57.38 (20.40%)	1.96 (26.80%)	3.43%
2011	70.25 (22.42%)	1.62 (-17.30%)	2.32%
2012	83.18 (18.40%)	1.96 (20.50%)	2.36%
2013	98.18 (18.55%)	1.83 (-6.50%)	1.87%
2014	107.00 (19.49%)	2.41 (31.36%)	2.25%

Source: CNTA (2005-2014)

In order to understand tourists' travel intentions and behaviors, it requires to investigate all the factors, both positive (e.g. facilitators, motivations and benefits) and negative parts (e.g. barriers, inhibitors, impedes and constraints). This statement indicates the importance of both factors. In this study, the integrated attractiveness and constraints were investigated together instead of separate entities. Moreover, according to Hung and Petrick (2012), cruisers seems to encounter fewer constraints and expressed higher motivations compared to non-cruisers. In terms of travel constraints and attractiveness, the differences between going behavior of visitors and non-going behavior of visitors also need to be explored. Given the lack of empirical evidence in understanding the attractiveness and travel barriers in outbound Chinese tourists to Japan, therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate to identify travel constraint and attractiveness of Chinese outbound tourists to Japan. In particular, this research focuses on four main issues.

(1) With the uneven growth of China outbound tourists to Japan, what are the major constraints for Mainland Chinese tourists?

(2) What are the travel constraint differences between visitors and non-visitors?

(3) Regarding Japan as a popular tourist destination among Chinese tourists, what are the major attractiveness and the travelling desire of Chinese tourists?

(4) What are the differences of travel attractiveness between the two?

The main objective of this study is to provide implications to the tourism planning of practitioners, policy makers, and other countries facing similar complicated bilateral issues.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of constraints

In their overview of leisure constraints, Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) developed a framework in constraint research that highlighted that constraints can be divided into two groups: participant-related constraints (i.e. interpersonal, intrapersonal) and structural constraints (i.e. external to the participant). Intrapersonal constraints lead people to choose or reject selected leisure choices based on their beliefs, values, skills, self-concept, predispositions, or expectations of others (e.g. peers and family members). Interpersonal constraints are defined as barriers related to social interaction with friends, family members, and others necessary to facilitate leisure participation. While interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints have their greatest influence on the development of leisure preferences, structural constraints block the participant from engaging in leisure activities. Structural barriers intervene between a person's preferences for a leisure activity and his or her actual participation in the activity. Examples of structural constraints include financial cost, work, climate, family commitments, transportation, the availability of facilities, and time (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Scott, 1991; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997).

Table 2: Features of the hierarchical constraint levels

Constraint categories	Definition	Typical examples
Level I: Intrapersonal Constraints	Intrapersonal factors are thought to predispose individuals to associate feelings with leisure objects, such as activities and services as appropriate or inappropriate, interesting or uninteresting, and so forth (Scott, 1991).	Intrapersonal constraints increase with age (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997).
Level II: Interpersonal Constraints	Interpersonal relationships can influence individual's recreation preferences and choices or limit recreation participation when interested friends are difficult to find (Crawford et al., 1987; Hudson, 2000; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997).	Being constrained by family responsibilities, not having someone to participate in leisure activities with, and dissimilar leisure interests from those of a spouse or friends.
Level III: Structural Constraints	Interference between an interest in leisure and subsequent participation. In most cases, structural constraints, called "external" (characteristics of the physical and social environments) constraints (Jackson, 1988), have been considered as the most constraining factors (Chen, Kerstetter & Caldwell, 2001).	Cost- and time-related constraints rank among the most widely and intensely experienced constraints (Jackson, 2000).

It was reported that constraints are encountered sequentially, for example, respondents firstly encounter intrapersonal barriers, then interpersonal barriers and finally structural barriers. This claim was tested empirically by Raymore, Godbey, Crawford, and von Eye (1993), and later by Hawkins, Peng, Hsieh, and Eklund (1999). Both studies "verified that the constraint categories can be replicated and extended with subtle distinctions" (Chen et al., 2001, p. 90). Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter (2002) tested the leisure constraints model in a nature-based tourism context and also found support for the three-dimensional model.

Despite the widely recognition of three-dimensional constraint model, some research only highlight one or two dimensional constraint in their context. For example, some studies highlight the importance of interpersonal constraints. According to Kazeminia et al. (2015), seniors' worries no accompanies of friends and relatives and highlights the importance of interpersonal constraints in terms of their travel decision-making. Some research explored the relationship between social-

demographics and constraints, and it reported that intrapersonal constraints increase with age (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997). While, Chen, Kerstetter and Caldwell's (2001) surveyed 1,378 visitors and they found that, "the most constraining factors are structural in nature. Intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints were the least constraining" (p. 92). Jackson (2000) reported that cost-and time-constraints are the most widely experienced structural constraints. Jackson (1988) even suggested that the most commonly used conceptual constraints are "internal" (attributes of the individual) and "external" (characteristics of the physical and social environments) constraints.

2.2 Research on outbound travel of Chinese tourists and its constraints

Research on China's outbound tourism started in the late 1990s (Zhou, King & Turner, 1998). There are a great number of studies were concerned with tourist motivations (e.g. Hua & Yoo, 2011; Lu, 2011; Johanson, 2008), for example push and pull factors including learning, the history and culture of other countries, seeing some beautiful scenery and experiencing something different (Li, 2007). And a few studies have focused on the constraints among outbound Chinese tourists (e.g. Zhou et al., 1998; Hsu &Lam, 2003; Huang & Hsu, 2005, 2009; Sparks & Pan, 2009; Li, Zhang, Mao & Deng, 2011; Lai Li & Harrill, 2013). The outcomes of constraints are varying. Among them, Interpersonal constraints (e.g. lack of suitable travel companion) and structural constraints (e.g. time, cost, distance and inadequate holiday leaves, and the difficulty of getting travel document) are the most common travel constraints that outbound Chinese tourists encountered (Hsu & Lam, 2003; Huang & Hsu, 2005; Li et al., 2011; Lai at al., 2013, Zhou et al., 1998). However, Huang & Hsu (2009) found that the intrapersonal constraint did not emerge among Mainlanders, instead, lack of interest or disinterest is an influential factor on revisit intention in Hong Kong as a travel destination in the context of travelling intention to Hong Kong. Besides time, money and visa concern, Lai et al.(2013) also found factors that some negative

impressions of the country constrain Chinese outbound tourists from visiting United States. However, their study does not cover the detailed reasons behind tourists' negative impressions that inhibiting tourists' travel intentions. In addition, these constrain studies of outbound Chinese tourism were largely focus on Hong Kong, Australia and United States. Japan as a closely geographical location has been somewhat neglected although the sensitive of historical background between Japan and China need to be considered in terms of developing tourism industry.

2.3 Travel constraint and national relationship

Political relationship between two countries, attitudes from destination host, and media influence also play important roles in travel demand. Gao (2012) stated that the effect of nationalism on foreign brand are largely mediated by consumer, the government, the media and local companies. Furthermore, Cheng and Wong (2014) argued that popular nationalism may influence government policy to accommodate the demand of popular nationalism.

Zhou et al. (1998) found that the unpredictability of the political and economic environment may result in unstable demand, while Sparks & Pan (2009) proved that news on the relationship between Chinese and Australian government, as well as media warning about travel to Australia were inhibiting factors for outbound travel. Hence, social, economic, and political factors, as well as the directions of the public media can be inferred to play significant roles in shaping the growth of outbound travel tourism (Tse & Hobson, 2008; Guo, Kim, & Timothy, 2007). Cheng and Wong (2014) discussed how political constraint is closely related with individual perceived level of nationalism which may influence tourist travel intention.

From the micro-perspective, relationship between the host and guest constrained Chinese outbound trip demand. Through a focus group, Huang and Hsu (2005) showed that outbound

mainland Chinese sensed negative feelings on the perceived superior attitude of people of Hong Kong toward the Mainland Chinese. Li et al. (2011) found that Chinese people are discriminated against in Australia.

China is a huge country with a diverse history and culture. Chinese outbound tourists have continuously been motivated by culture, nature, and shopping opportunities (Yun & Joppe, 2011; Weiler & Yu, 2008). However, whether they encounter cultural barriers in their travels abroad is unclear. Among seven outbound Chinese related studies, only Li et al. (2011) found cultural constraints when Chinese outbound tourists travelled to Australia. Chinese outbound tourists were constrained by the different lifestyle, food, and travel companion, and exchange currency (Li et al., 2011). From the perspective of outbound travel destination, Hong Kong and Australia were the most studied destinations as they were the earliest to be included into the Approved Destination Status (ADS). The rapid development of China's outbound tourism, however, requires further studies that explore constraints in other destinations associated with cultural and political issues. Insert Table 3 here.

2.4 Chinese tourists trip to Japan

In terms of Chinese outbound travel research, travel barriers have not been included as one of the major research focuses. Few studies have systematically investigated the travel constraints of Chinese outbound tourists. Chinese outbound tourism research has focused thus far on a limited number of short haul markets such as Hong Kong, and long haul markets such as Australia and US. However, with the drastic increase in the number of Chinese outbound tourists who travel to abroad, studies should catch up with the rapid pace of outbound tourism among Chinese. The development of Chinese outbound tourism to its neighboring countries might be closely related with its historical and cultural ties and restricted by political and economic factors, such as its

relationship with Japan. With its complicated relationship with Japan, travel constraints of Chinese outbound tourism to Japan should be explored further. Kim, Guo, and Agrusa (2005) explored the competitiveness of overseas destinations for mainland Chinese tourists, and found that Mainland Chinese may not prefer Japan and South Korea because of similarities in their cultures. However, other possible factors such as influential political and economic factors should also be explored. Ji, Li and Hsu (2016) analyzed 20 online blogs describing travelling experience to Japan. However, this study does not cover the inhibiting factors of non-visitors and the majority of internet users are relatively young whose comments could not be generated to the whole population. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine the travel constraints and attractiveness of Chinese outbound tourists to Japan by considering both visitors and non-visitors in different age groups.

3. METHODOLOGY

The overall approach of this study is qualitative because the current study is exploratory in nature. Literature review indicates the limited amount of studies on the travel constraints of Mainland Chinese tourists to Japan. Adopting a qualitative approach allows researchers to obtain a better understanding of the proposed questions and the exploratory nature of this particular study. In order to obtain valid results, multi data collection techniques were used in this study including focus group and in-depth interview. Focus group is commonly applied to measure the feelings and reactions to new developments, policies, and products as well as to identify issues (Brotherton, 2008). To achieve triangulation, this study further collected data through semi-structured interviews. This technique was adopted because of the ability to elicit a substantial amount of information about individuals' thoughts, interpretations, and behaviors (Langley, 1999).

3.1 Data Sources

This study adopted 6 focus groups as part of the study to identify major travel constraints to Japan. It was conducted in a graduate-level hospitality and tourism marketing class in a prestigious university in Hangzhou, China among 49 Chinese master students who also currently working in the hospitality and tourism related field. They were mainly experienced managers or academic researchers from hospitality and tourism industry, who were enrolled in the program of master degree of hospitality and tourism management. The average age was 36 with a minimum age of 26 and a maximum age of 53. The average number of years of work experience of the participants was 12.8 (with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 28 years). They are not the expert of outbound tourism research to Japan, but their rich working experience in hospitality and tourism field help them to illustrate deep insights for proposed questions. The focus group were part of the class assignments conducted during the course of tourism marketing and management. All students were presented and participated during the focus group were conducted.

Before conducting the focus group discussions, 6 volunteer moderators were recruited from the participants and provided with briefing and training sessions. Each moderator began with an introduction of the ground rules, followed by facilitating discussions. A digital recorder was used to record the discussions. 6 focus groups were concurrently conducted in 6 meeting rooms on January 10, 2015. Each focus group lasted about 60 minutes. Digital recording of the discussions was transcribed and reconfirmed by 4 researchers.

While conducting the focus groups, the moderators proposed the following questions for participants to discuss. It includes: 1. What are the positive factors for choosing Japan as an outbound destination? 2. From your own point of view, why or why not Japan? If not, does Japan pose any difficulties?

3.2 Development of the Analytical Framework

The purpose of the focus group is to develop a basic framework from the entire data. The information obtained from the focus group were examined by 4 independent researchers using content analysis. The 4 researchers then combined their analytical results together and then, through a matching process and the elimination of inconsistencies, one preliminary classification framework was designed to gather the information for addressing the research issues of this study. In this study, the results were coded according to the most significant themes, which have emerged according to the proposed research questions on focus groups. The transcribed data were coded with the help of the qualitative research software QSR NVivo 11. Coding is usually inductive and deductive (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). The data were allowed to "speak for itself", and themes were primarily identified by adopting inductive coding due to the nature of this study is largely exploratory. Both positive (e.g. facilitators, motivations and attractiveness) and negative comments (e.g. Barriers, inhibitors, impedes and constraints) were also coded accordingly. The 5 temporary analytical dimensions of travel constraints that emerged from the data are "History and nationalist sentiment", "Politics and Policy", "Cultural Distance", "Media Direction" and "Destination Factors". The 4 temporary analytical dimensions of attractiveness emerged from the data are: "Cultural and History", "Natural and Geographical Environment", "Economic and Policy Factors" and "Social Media Promotion".

Once the preliminary classification categories were completed, sources from in-depth interview were used to extend the original framework of travel constraint. In order to capture different feature and perception among the whole population, this study divided the population into three sub-groups which included youngster groups ranging age from 18-24, working class ranging from 25-44, middle and above who is equal or over 45.

Then the researchers tried to approach participants fitting in the three age groups, both with experience and without travelling experiences to Japan (See Table 3). For visitors, many of them traveled to Japan one or two times, and only a few of them visited Japan more than five times. In-depth interview was employed to verify and identified structure and explore new aspects. In total, 45 in-depth interviews were completed via WeChat, one of the most popular software- in-depth interviews were conducted which included WeChat (phone) interviews and face-to-face interviews. Each of the interview lasted about 15 minutes. The number of interviewees was determined according to the guidelines of data saturation. Saturation is the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the research topic (Shank, 2006). The number of interviews in this study coincides with the assumption that qualitative researchers in the tourism context normally interview around 28 interviewees (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Totally 51 interviews were conducted from November to December 2016 (see Table 3).

All interview transcriptions were read by the 4 researchers again, and a comprehensive content analysis was performed subsequently. All the results were checked for validity and consistency by comparing with the previous studies and also by going back to the general literature. The helped to enhance the reliability of the findings and thus substantiated their meaning and significance for further policy making under the context of outbound tourism research.

The structure was revised several times to ensure comprehensive coverage of all views collected from the two different data sources (see Figure 1 and 2). One more analytical dimension of travel attractiveness emerged is "individual factors" which included intrapersonal motivations and interpersonal relationships. As to travel constraint, three more analytical dimensions of travel constraints emerged is "Substitute Tourism Destinations", "Individual motivation/relationship factors" and "Individual constraints".

Table 3： The profile of interviewees and their travelling experiences to Japan

Categories	18-24	25-44	Over 45	Total
Visitors	4	13	3	20
Non-visitors	16	10	5	31
Total	20	23	8	51

3. FINDINGS

3.1 TRAVEL CONSTRAINTS TO JAPAN

(1) History and nationalist sentiment

Among all text units analyzed, history nationalist sentiments factors represented the most important travel constraints for Mainland Chinese outbound travel to Japan Domestic nationalist sentiments (205, 34.34%) consist of two subcategories: (1.1) domestic nationalist sentiment (119 text units, 19.93%) and (1.2) Sino-Japan political and historical issues (86 text units, 14.41%). Mainland Chinese have strong feelings of hostility toward Japan because of historical reasons, such as the Nanjing Atrocity. Anti-Japanese sentiments run deep in China because of the bitter memories of atrocities committed by imperialist Japanese soldiers during World War II. Although Japan as a tourist destination has a lot to offer, Chinese tourists can sometimes be prevented from travelling there by their family or peers who had hard feelings of hostility toward Japan. An example of nationalist sentiment (F1: 6):

"Personally, there is a nationalist sentiment in my mind. What Japanese had done, I believed there is a reason behind which makes Japan to be one of top countries. However, I wouldn't buy Japanese car even the car has very good reviews."

Consequently, boycott Japanese goods are considered one of method to demonstrate their nationalist sentiment. Some participants admitted Japanese products are often received positive reputation in their quality. However, with family and peers influence, they decided not to use

Japanese products. This finding supported Cheng and Wong (2014), Gao (2012), and Tang and Darr (2012) on the close relationship between Chinese nationalism and political factors can impact on consumer behavior. Furthermore, this finding extends the understanding of destination choice behavior is also closely related with individual nationalism. In addition, within focus group discussion, many participants mentioned the feelings of hostility on both sides which made them have psychological distance. Still, some of Chinese tourists have complicated feeling towards to Japan as a travel destination.

(2) Politics and policy

Politics and policy (105 text units, 19.59%) represented the second most important travel constraints for Mainland Chinese outbound travel to Japan which includes (2.1) current Sino-Japan political catastrophe (61text units, 10.22%), and visa policy restrictions (44 text units, 7.37%). The understanding and recognition of what has happened in history, the political uncertainty between the Chinese and Japanese governments, the subsequent pressure of imposing economic sanctions on Japan, and visa policy restrictions were some of the main political constraints for Chinese tourists to travel to Japan. Political tensions between the two countries may exist for a while and could represent the most important constraints.

An example of political constrain (F3, 2):

"I always wants to go to Japan, however, every time I mentioned this intention my friends they try to persuade me to go to other places first. Thus, I feel political environment is still very important."

This finding coincides with the findings of Zhou et al (1998) and Sparks & Pan (2009) who determined that political relationship can be a travel constraint factor. In particular, the dispute

over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands could become very bitter, causing China to recall and take revenge for past actions of Japan. Economic sanctions could include placing restrictions on travel to Japan.

Although current visa policy facilitates more and more Chinese tourists visited Japan, but it still set up many restrictions. The complications of this visa policy has been a constraint factor for Chinese outbound tourism, a finding that echoed previous studies (Lai et al 2013; Li et al 2011; Spark & Pan 2009; Huang & Hsu 2005, 2009; Hsu & Lam 2003). Although currently visa requirement to Japan is gradually release, it still together with some restrictive conditions, the general public in China still hold skeptical attitude towards it.
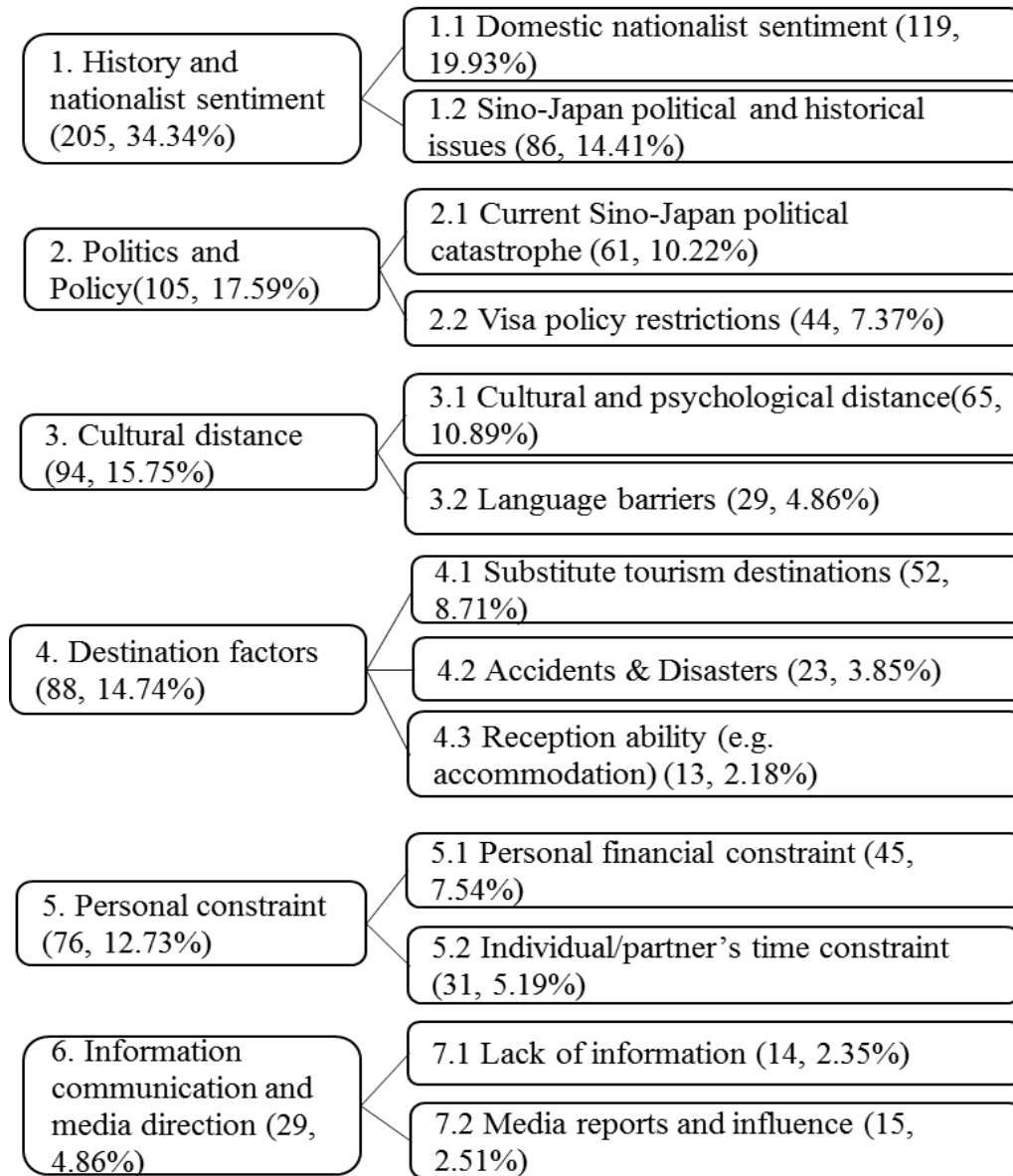
1. History and nationalist sentiment (205, 34.34%)
- 1.1 Domestic nationalist sentiment (119, 19.93%)
- 1.2 Sino-Japan political and historical issues (86, 14.41%)

2. Politics and Policy(105, 17.59%)
- 2.1 Current Sino-Japan political catastrophe (61, 10.22%)
- 2.2 Visa policy restrictions (44, 7.37%)

3. Cultural distance (94, 15.75%)
- 3.1 Cultural and psychological distance(65, 10.89%)
- 3.2 Language barriers (29, 4.86%)

4. Destination factors (88, 14.74%)
- 4.1 Substitute tourism destinations (52, 8.71%)
- 4.2 Accidents & Disasters (23, 3.85%)
- 4.3 Reception ability (e.g. accommodation) (13, 2.18%)

5. Personal constraint (76, 12.73%)
- 5.1 Personal financial constraint (45, 7.54%)
- 5.2 Individual/partner's time constraint (31, 5.19%)

6. Information communication and media direction (29, 4.86%)
- 7.1 Lack of information (14, 2.35%)
- 7.2 Media reports and influence (15, 2.51%)

Figure 1: Frequency and percentage of travel barrier main categories (including focus group)

(3) Cultural Distance

Cultural distance (94 text unit, 15.75 %) consists of (3.1) cultural and psychological distance (65 text units, 10.89 %), and (3.2) language barriers (29 text units, 4.86%). Despite being part of the Asian culture, Japanese and Chinese cultures have distinct differences because of the variations in the living environment and stages of development. Japanese culture is influenced by both Eastern and Western cultures, with its Confucian characteristics and Western political system. The

strong voice against Japanese culture in Mainland China can be attributed to the lack of understanding of the culture, language barriers, and the generally negative attitude toward each other. The Japanese people are commonly soft-spoken, particularly in public whereas speaking loudly in public is culturally acceptable in Mainland China. An example of cultural difference in dining atmosphere (F3, 3), "Chinese like to have bustling with noise whereas Japanese tend to have peaceful dining atmosphere." Language barrier is another one of the main factors from cultural distance that supports the previous findings (Li et al. 2011; Sparks & Pan, 2009; Huang & Hsu, 2005, 2009). On the other hand, one participant (F2, 2) mentioned "cultural radiation" has strong impact on how Chinese tourists perceive Japanese culture. Still, "I believed most of Chinese and Japanese are still have negative feeling of each other" (F1, 2) which indicate cultural distance between both.

(4) Destination factors

Destination factors (88 text units, 14.74%) consist of (4.1) substitute tourism destinations (8.71%), (4.2) accidents and disasters (3.85%) and (4.3) reception ability (2.18%).Among destination factors, (4.1) substitute tourism destination (8.71%) represented the highest weighting. Some participants do not consider Japan as a top choice in travel destination. The interviewee 4 mentioned: one of the reasons is Japan has similar culture to Chinese culture which does not as appeal to tourists compare with Western countries. If money allows, I would prefer to choose European countries (I-4). Destination safety also is one of the concerns when they make travel decisions (Sparks & Pan, 2009, Hsu & Lam, 2003). Earthquakes, tsunamis, and the nuclear crisis in 2011 had serious impact on the travel market. This result is in accordance with those obtained by Lai et al. (2013) who found security concerns to be part of the factors that constrain Chinese outbound tourists from visiting the United States. During a nuclear crisis, the government should

have played a key role in providing information and ensuring food security. The coding results indicated that Chinese people noted the reluctance of the Japanese to provide the latest information on the nuclear crisis and food safety issues. Consequently, the restrictions from official travel warnings have caused many Chinese tourists to be skeptical of outbound tourism to Japan.

The findings indicated a fluctuation in the number of Chinese outbound tourists to Japan because of reception ability (13 text units, 2.18%), including limited airplane tickets and hotel accommodations. According to JNTO (2016), the top four countries with the most visitor arrivals to Japan in May 2016 were Korea, China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. With the recent weakening of the Japanese yen, the demand for travel to Japan increases not only the markets listed above but also the emerging market of China. The travel demand results in much pressure for Japan to increase its receiving capacity.

(5) Personal constraint

Personal constraints (76 text units, 12.73%) consist of (5.1) personal financial constraints (45 text units, 7.54%) and (5.2) Individual/partner's time constraint (31, 5.19%). This outcome supports with the past literature that cost- and time-constraints are the most widely experienced structural constraints (Jackson, 1988). This study also identified personal financial and time are two key elements of personal travel constraints to Japan despite the frequency is comparatively not high. This outcome support both Huang & Hsu (2005) and Lai et al. (2013). Due to limited time and Money, interviewees only expressed their expectation for travelling outside. A majority of them are youngsters between 18-24 who frequently mentioned these personal shortages as their travelling restricts.

(6) Information and Media Direction

Information and media direction (29, 4.86%) consists of (6.1) lack of information (14 text units, 2.35 %) and (6.2) media direction (15 text units, 2.51%). Understanding of Mainland Chinese travelers towards the Japanese and vice versa has mostly been clouded and politicized by the influence of public sources such as movies, news, and other media in the public domain. Part of these findings is consistent with Sparks & Pan (2009). These findings suggested that tourists interested in visiting Japan are reluctant to do so because of the influence of their peers and the media.

An example of media influence (F3:2), "*we rely on rumors and media report about Japan. Without much clarifications, we have negative feeling about Japan because of misleading by our media*".

Chinese tourists with past travelling experience, if they transmit their travel experiences accurately, could assist in increasing the number of outbound Chinese tourists to Japan. Chinese tourists attach great importance to word of mouth and thus, a negative impression can spread quickly.

3.2 Travel attractiveness to Japan

In addition to identifying travel constraints to Japan, it is also necessary to understand the related attractiveness. With total of 1227 text units, the attractiveness is categorized to five dimensions, namely, cultural and history, natural and geographical environment, economic and policy factors, social media promotion, and lastly individual factors (See Figure 3).
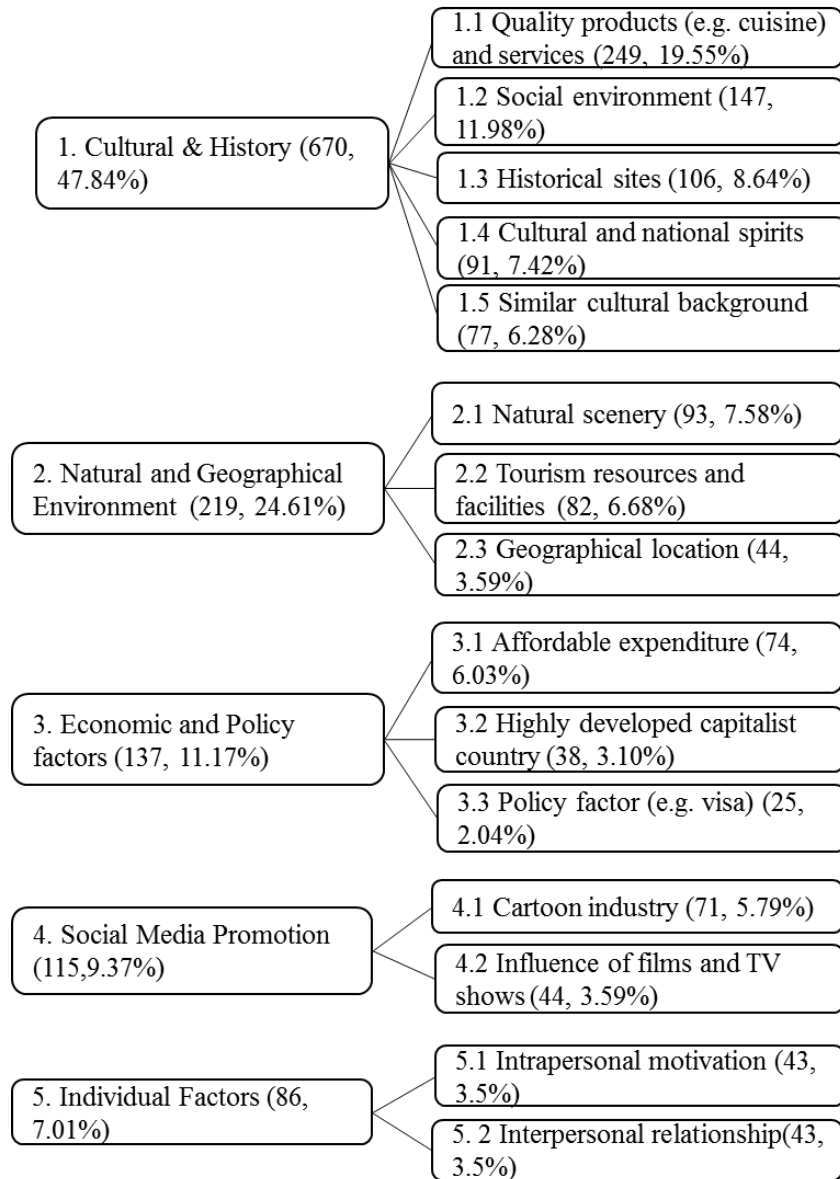
Figure 2: Frequency of travel attractiveness (including focus group)

(1) Culture and History

Firstly, culture and history received the highest weighting (670 text units, 47.84%) which consists of (1.1) quality products and services (19.55%), (1.2) social environment (11.98%), (1.3) historical sites (8.64%), (1.4) cultural and national spirits (7.42%) and (1.5) similar cultural

background (6.28%). The good hospitality services and products provided for tourists, and the highly civilized polite attitudes attracted Chinese tourists. in addition, Japanese cuisine and ingredients are highly appreciated by tourists.

An example of highly approval of the Japanese products says (F3-2):

"*I think the quality of products made in Japan …in many Chinese people's point of view…. excel Chinese made products. For example, kitchen appliance products. Many friends went to Japan and bought many home appliance products, including rice cooker, and camera*." Despite historical reason and current political status, some participants highly prize Japanese hospitality and profession. An example of service could illustrate this point (F6-6): "*in terms of travelling, we are treated as guests. If we are in China, we have to be bullied; but in Japan and other countries, especially in Japan, their service is really dedicated*." The analysis of this sub-category also includes culture and some historical attractions, for example traditional and historical sites. Since Japanese culture was deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture as early as Tang dynasty, until now the style of Japanese architecture and other historical buildings are alike Chinese constructions. However, many historical sites and temples were destroyed or ruined during revolution and wars, as a consequence, Chinese people could only appreciate authentic sites and places by virtue of visiting Japan. Chinese tourists were attracted by the similarity of cultural attractions and something new in a foreign country. This finding have parallels to Kozak's (2002) cultural (wish to learn about foreign places) motivation category in terms of the context of its items.

(2) Natural and Geographical Environment

Secondly, natural and geographical environment received second highest weighting (219 text units, 24.61%) which includes (2.1) natural scenery (7.58%), (2.2) tourism resources and facilities

(6.68%). and (2.3) geographical location (3.59%). Japan has been renowned for its clean and tidy environment, and the featured unique tourism resources, such as spa, coastal beach, diving, and Japanese cherry blossoms, etc. An example of tourism resources (F3, 5), "*Since 2015, Okinawa will turn out to be one of the most popular attractions in the world, because Okinawa is the wonderful palace for young backpackers. It has a very nice beach and world-class diving place.*"

(3) Economic and policy factors

Thirdly, economic and policy factors received 137 text units (11.17%) which consist of (3.1) affordable expenditure (6.03%), (3.2) highly developed capitalist country (3.10%) and (3.3) policy factor (2.04%). Due to Japan is a China's close neighbor and the depreciation of the Yen (Japanese dollar), the travel expenditure to Japan is inexpensive when compared to travelling to other destinations. Furthermore, in order to attract more Chinese tourists, Japanese government gradually release visa restrictions and implement tax refund policy recently. Unlike China with socialist system, Japan carries out capitalist system and also this is a highly developed capitalist country. Chinese people want to broaden their vision because of curiosity.

(4) Social media promotion

Social media promotion received 115 text units (9.37%) which includes (4.1) cartoon industry (5.79%) and (4.2) film and TV show (3.59%). Japanese cartoon movies, films and TV shows have attracted many Chinese youngsters. Recently, Chinese movies present the beautiful Japanese landscapes towards Chinese, such as Hokkaido, Mount Fuji, Spa and Cherry blossoms. The influence of visual media promotes a great number of tourists visiting japan. This finding is consistent with past studies, as film tourism is a growing trend worldwide, there were significant benefits of attracting film tourists to their destinations (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006).

**(5)	Individual factors**

Lastly, individual factors received 86 text units (7.00%) which consists of (5.1) intrapersonal motivation (3.5%) and (5.2) interpersonal relationships (3.5%). This is consistent with the research findings related to push and pull motivation factors, which included learning, the history and culture of other countries, seeing some beautiful scenery and experiencing something different (Li, 2007). With various media reports about Japan, interviewees (I-17 and I-18) mentioned they want to discover Japan with their own eyes and find out the real Japan by themselves. This study found interviewees value on positive feedback. "Based on friends' positive feedback, I would visit Japan for sure" (I-42). As a result, peer to peer review is one of key factors to their travel intention. The outcome supports how interpersonal relationships can influence individual's choices and preference (Crawford et al., 1987; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Hudson, 2000;).
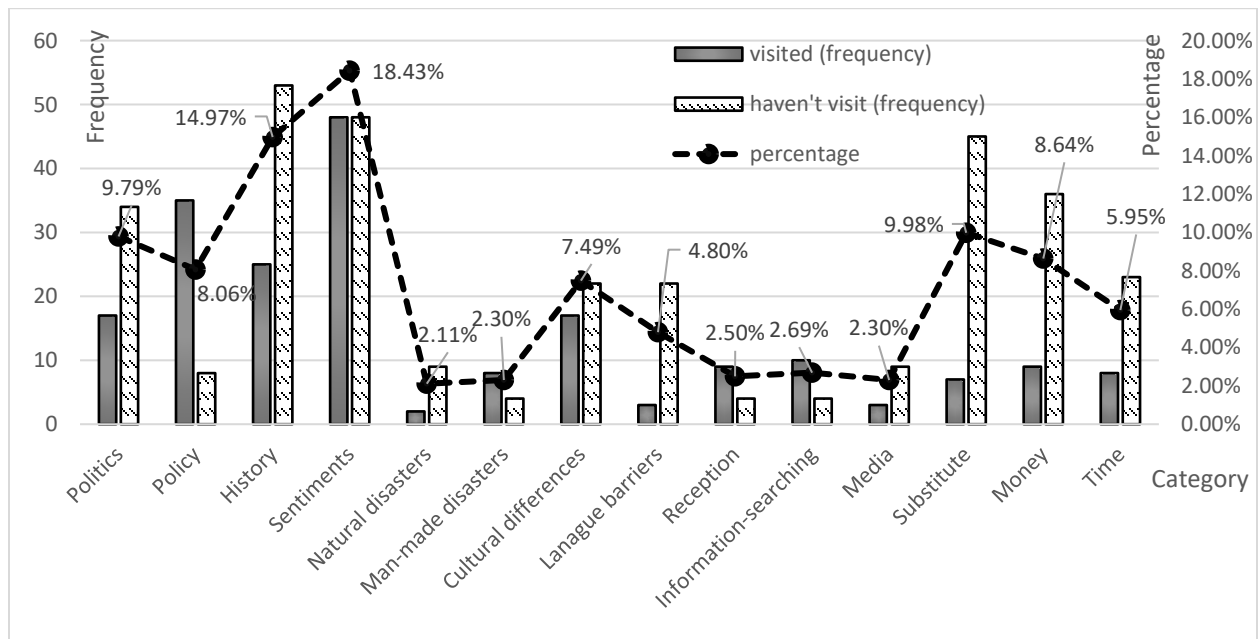

Figure 3: The frequency differences of travel constraints based on in-depth interview

Figure 3 the descending order of constraining factors are national sentiments (18.43%), historical issues (14.97%), substitute tourism destination (9.98%), political catastrophe (9.79%), money constraint (8.64%), visa policy restrictions (7.37%), cultural distance (7.49%), and follow by time constraint (5.95%) and language barriers (4.80%). However, in terms of comparing the differences between tourists with travelling experience and tourists without experience in Japan, it exists some different perceptions. For participants who have not visit Japan, their level of constraints is comparatively higher when compared to participants who visited Japan. This is in accordance with Hung and Petrick (2012) that cruisers reported less constraints and expressed higher motives compared to non-cruisers. Specifically, Sino-Japan political and historical issues, Domestic nationalist sentiments and current Sino-Japan political catastrophe are of utmost concerns for participants who have not visit. This indicates that the historical issues inhibited many Chinese tourists going to Japan. However, this stereotype is hardly to be changed in the short terms. Among participants who have not visit Japan, many of them plan to go. Still, they think that since there are many substitute tourism destinations available in both domestic and overseas, the attractiveness of travelling to Japan is comparatively low. In order to increase more potential tourists, the destination marketing organizations should enhance the advertisement of regional characteristics and unique tourism resources of Japan. Besides that, participants who have not visit Japan worried about their personal constraints including time and money. If travelling to Japan, they worried about some situational problems when they arrive, such as language barriers and cultural differences.

For participants who visited Japan, their overall constraint perception is relatively lower than participants who have not visit Japan and the comparatively higher level of constraining factors

were visa policy restrictions, reception ability, information searching and man-made disasters, which were relevant to their past travelling experiences.

As one of the interviewee (I-8) complained his experiences: *"Frankly speaking, my family and I were very angry (about the visa procedure). They request this and that evidence… so many requirements… you (Japan) is not as attractive as other countries like US and Australia. If finance allow, why I choose Japan instead of other countries which can better facilitate my visa procedure?"* Many participants mentioned the visa policy varies from province to province in China which they found this issue is part of their constraints.
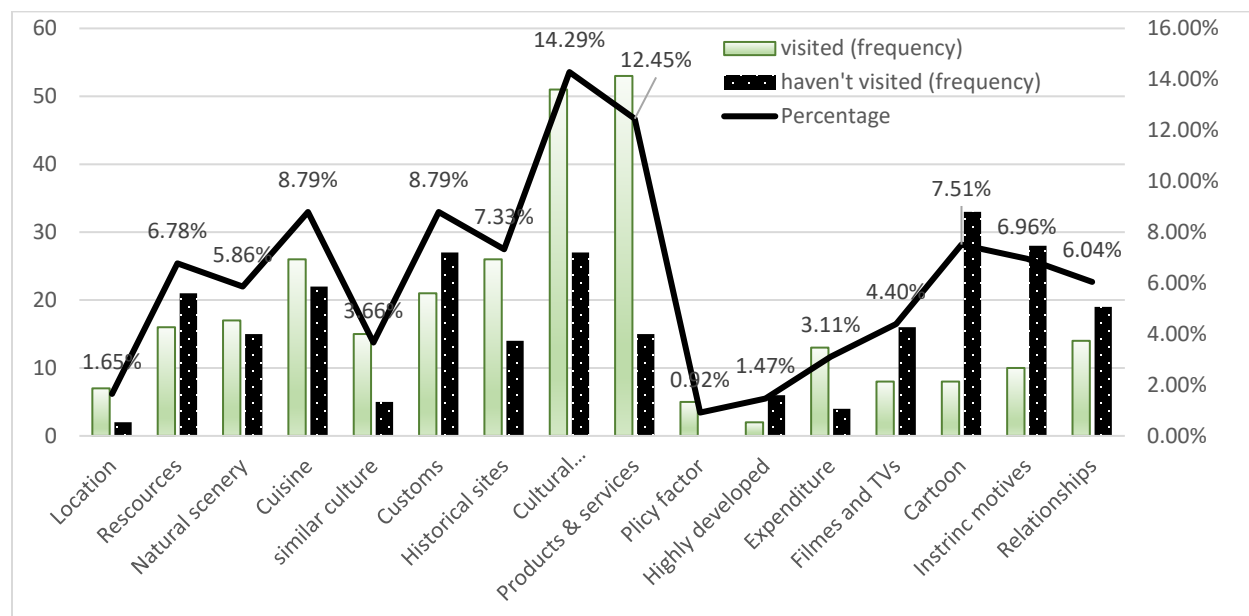

Figure 4: The frequency differences of travel attractiveness based on in-depth interview

According to Figure 4, the descending order of top five major attractiveness factors are quality product and service (19.55%), cultural environment (14.29%), local customs (8.79%), cartoons (7.51%), historical sites (7.33%). This is another evidence that Chinese tourists' main motive of travelling to japan is shopping. In order to uncover the differences between participants who visited

and who have not visit Japan, this study split the data into two sub-datasets according to their experience. Both group participants highly valued product and service, and similar view of social and cultural environment. The distance between China and Japan is acceptable travel distance. Also, they agree that the distance from China to Japan is acceptable and travelling to japan is value for money when compare with other outbound destinations.

In terms of participants who have not visit Japan, their motives to travel mostly came from cartoon, films an TVs as well as their family members' word of mouth. Also, many youngsters study/work overseas including Japan. Some of the interviewee express their willingness to visit Japan for visiting their family members simultaneously. As to the intrinsic motives, some interviewees mention they want to broaden their vision and travel with curiosity. Therefore, the outcome of attractiveness of Japan demonstrates the distinct difference between participants who visited Japan and who have not visit Japan which can be served as promotion strategies for Chinese market.

4. Discussion and implications

This study confirmed that travel constraints for Chinese outbound tourists to Japan included history and nationalist sentiment, politics and policy, cultural distance, destination factors, personal constraint as well as information communication and media direction respectively. These findings are similar to the results of previous studies.

This research contributes to the understanding of travel constraints of Chinese outbound tourists to Japan. Unlike other destinations, the travel constraints of Chinese outbound tourists to Japan indicate the strong influence of political factors and domestic nationalist sentiment. Raymore et al. (1993) noted that constraints are encountered hierarchically. This study extends

understanding of the three levels constraints, which may not always be linked hierarchically, instead, each level of constraints can be affected by one or the other based on the individual. In addition, political factor manipulates the domestic nationalist sentiment as well as travel intentions.

The travel constraint of domestic nationalist sentiment cannot be avoided but can be alleviated. The current political relationship of Chinese and Japanese governments could be used to weaken the nationalist sentiment among Chinese. These factors explained the inconsistent number of Chinese outbound tourists to Japan. This finding supports Cheng and Wong (2014) on tourist travel intention which is closely related with individual nationalist. Consequently, political reason can be part of travel constraint to Chinese tourists (Cheng & Wong, 2014). Furthermore, this study found that political factors also can weaken or intrigue the history and nationalist sentiment, or even lead to Japanese goods under a boycott. As a result, maintaining a stable relationship between two countries can smooth down the individual nationalist sentiment.

In addition to the support from previous literature, this study also put challenges to the previous studies. Jackson (2000) highlighted that cost- and time-related constraints rank among the most widely and intensely experienced constraints. However, this study found that Japan is regarded as affordable destination both economically and time concern. Additionally, Chen (2001) uncovered that intrapersonal and interpersonal constraint were the least important constraint. For the outbound tourism under the context of complicated bilateral national relationship, this study found that intrapersonal constraint is not only highly important but also influence structural constraints.

In order to attract more Chinese tourists and satisfices the demand of potential tourists, some marketing tasks should be enhanced. Since tourists consider there are many substitute tourism destinations for outbound tourism, Japanese government should highlight the Japanese unique tourism resources and geographical culture to attract more potential tourists. Before they visit

Japan, they pictured Japan from cartoons, films, TVs and word of mouth from their friends and relatives, especially for youngsters in China, they grown up with Japanese cartoons. It is important for marketing organizations to create the atmosphere related to this popular entertainment culture so that visitors could realize their dream after they come.

There are also some implications for destination marketing organizations (DMO) in China. Under the national and historical sentiment, there is still an increasing shopping trend among Chinese tourists in Japan. It is also urgent for DMOs to improve the quality of domestic tourism products, and regulate tourism market so as to improve the quality of service, and further to keep more outbound expenditure in China.

This research adopted focus group discussions from hospitality and tourism industry participants, which does not reflect a sufficient variety of views (Brotherton, 2008). To further support the focus group findings, this study also adopted semi-structure interviews to enrich the data and consolidate a holistic view of Chinese outbound to Japan. It is understandable that multi-resources could assist to enhance the better and comprehensive understanding of travel constraint to Japan. However, with the competitive media industry, exaggerate report is not uncommonly exposed to general public which may affect Chinese tourists' perceptions of Japan as a travel destination. This study contributes the understanding of Chinese Mainland tourists' travel constraints and attractiveness to Japan which can serve as destination marketing strategies for promoting Japanese tourism industry. In addition, this study found that fine quality product and service received the most attention from both groups which can be emphasized in promoting Japan. Follow by second and third weighting, cartoon and cultural environment received from participants who have not visit Japan. Whereas, cultural environment and historical sites received from

participants who have visit. Both group of participants' views can be considered for future promotion plan of Japan.

Future studies may focus on the quantitative approach to enhance understanding of the travel constraints of Chinese outbound tourism to Japan. Investigating Chinese tour operators and agents could also assist policy makers and service industry professionals to improve the quality and standards of the tourism industry in Japan. Since Chinese outbound tourism to Japan develops rapidly with an almost double digit growth in the recent year, it might be of greater interest to explore the attractiveness of Japan as a tourist destination for operator's perspectives.

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