

**Title:** Changing Views of Young Chinese Travelers: Influence of Stereotypes and Host-Tourist Interactions on Post-Travel Destination Image and Evaluations of Residents

改变中国年轻旅客的意见：探究游客旅行前的刻板印象和目的地的主客互动对游客旅行结束后的目的地印象的影响

**Abstract**

In recent years, media coverage reporting or reflecting stereotypes from Chinese tourists towards other national groups has drawn widespread attention. Yet, limited research has been conducted to explore the connections among the concepts of Chinese tourists' stereotypes, host-tourist interactions (HTIs), and destination image. To address this gap, the objective of this study is to investigate the influence of Chinese tourists' *pre-travel* stereotypes of local residents and their *on-site* HTIs on *post-travel* evaluations of locals and destination image. In-depth interviews with Chinese tourists to overseas destinations were conducted, and a sequential model is presented to illustrate how tourists could make comparisons between their pre-travel stereotypes and experienced HTIs to generate post-trip evaluations.

近年来，媒体关于中国游客对其他国家国民群体所持有的刻板印象的报导和反映引起了广泛关注。然而，仅有有限的研究致力于探索中国游客的刻板印象，主客互动和旅游目的地印象三者间的关系。为处理此缺口，本研究意图探究中国出境游客旅行前对目的地居民的刻板印象以及目的地主客互动，对游客在旅行结束后对当地居民和目的地的评价的影响。本研究采用深层访谈法以收集中国游客前往海外目的地的旅游经历，并使结果按序呈现。本研究展示了获得的理论成果并详细为旅游目的地营销组织提供相关管理意见。

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, media coverage reporting or reflecting stereotypes from Chinese tourists towards other national groups has drawn widespread attention. For instance, an online survey showed Chinese had inappropriate stereotypes of Italians as weak, Bulgarians as milk-fed, and Lithuanians as suicidal (Brown, 2015). In addition, Air China, in its inflight travel magazine *Wings of China*, advised travellers visiting London to avoid “entering areas populated by Indians, Pakistanis and black people”, which caused outrage from British citizens (Cockburn, 2016). Evidently, Chinese public impressions and stereotypes of individuals from other nationalities and ethnic groups are constantly affected and formed by multiple information sources.

In an effort to understand stereotypes in the context of tourism research, past studies have explored stereotypes in various areas such as destination marketing (Bender, Gidlow, & Fisher, 2013), mass tourism (Wang, Weaver, & Kwek, 2015), media representations (Caton & Santos, 2008), and tourists’ perceptions of service providers (Luoh & Tsaur, 2014). More recently, Chen, Lai, Petrick, and Lin (2016) investigate the effects of stereotyping on destination image between divided destinations.

Despite important insights gained from past studies, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, limited research has been conducted to explore the connections among the concepts of Chinese tourists’ stereotypes, host-tourist interactions (HTIs), and destination image. Considerations relate to stereotypes, HTIs, and destination image are important for several reasons. First, stereotypes toward the destination could be formed in the pre-travel stage when tourists are exposed to relevant information sources (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Second, tourists judge the tourism destination as a whole (Woods & Deegan, 2003); their interactions with service staff, other tourists, and the wider community could influence their overall tourism experience (Bowen & Schouten, 2008). Furthermore, tourists’ attitudes, social motivations and expectations are highly influenced by social contact (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Tourists with more positive attitude, higher motivations of being involved in interactions, and higher expectations tend to be more active and could initiate HTIs, while tourists who hold negative attitude with no desire for contact and low expectations tend to act passively during social interactions (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). As a result, it is important to consider whether the tourist or host initiates an interaction in during HTIs. Third, a wealth of

tourism literature has demonstrated the value of destination image research for understanding tourist psychology and behaviors (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Destination image represents a totality of impressions and beliefs generating from various information sources that encompass ideas, expectations, and feelings accumulated over time (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Tourists' destination image could be affected by HTIs and understanding HTIs is vital for the sustainable development of tourism (Zhang, Inbakaran & Jackson, 2006).

In light of the above, the objective of this study is to investigate the influence of Chinese tourists' *pre-travel* stereotypes of local residents and their *on-site* HTIs on *post-travel* evaluations of locals and destination image. In doing so, this study contributes to the tourism literature by providing insights on the effects of tourist stereotypes and HTIs on possible changes in destination image.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Fluidity of destination image**

There are various conceptualizations of destination image (Zhang et al., 2014). Researchers have measured destination image in terms of functional attributes (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), as well as affective appraisals regarding an individual's feelings, emotions and attachment to a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). These measurements of destination image oftentimes include a number of different components, such as comfort/security, interest/adventure, natural state, and climate (Gong & Tung, 2017; Hudson, Wang, & Gil, 2011). Holistically, destination image represents an overall image of tourists' impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations and feelings accumulated from multiple dimensions, including cognitive, affective and conative perspectives (Kim & Richardson, 2003).

Destination image, however, is not a fixed perception that cannot be revised or changed. Fakeye and Crompton (1991) suggested that the formation of tourist destination image as evolving through three stages: organic image, induced image and complex image. The former two stages refer to the image tourists hold in the pre-travel stage due to differences in the level of exposure to information. This information could include media information from destination marketing organizations (DMOs) that influence the stereotypes that tourists hold, prior to their departure (Bender et al., 2013). In contrast, complex image is

formed in the post-travel stage, constituting the final phase of the process and incorporating experiences after tourists visit the destinations. These experiences could include HTIs with locals, other tourists, and service staff that subsequently influence overall post-trip image of the destination (Bowen & Schouten, 2008).

The following sections provide a review of the literature on the influence of stereotypes and HTIs on destination image that are relevant to this study.

### 2.1.1. Influence of stereotypes on destination image

Stereotypes reflect beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of individuals of certain groups (Hilton & Hippel, 1996). Stereotypes are usually automatically activated, oversimplified, and of enormous potential for error, that can strongly influence emotions, judgments and behaviors (Judd & Park, 1993). While stereotypes are oftentimes regarded as negative biases, they can, nevertheless, link individuals to characteristics that are considered positive in nature (e.g., good at math) (Cox, Abramson, Devine, & Hollon, 2012). Applied in tourism context, pre-travel tourist stereotypes in this study are defined as the impressions, perceptions and beliefs that tourists hold toward local residents in terms of their characteristics, attributes and behaviors prior to their trip. According to the stereotype content model, stereotypes could be measured along two fundamental dimensions; namely, warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Warmth includes sociability and sincerity while competence represents capability and skills (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008).

Previous studies have suggested that stereotypes could impact the process of destination image formation in organic and induced stages (Alexander et al., 2005; Bilali, 2010; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). For example, Alvarez and Korzay (2008) indicated that preconceptions from tourists of Turkish residents were somewhat less positive than the overall destination image due to negative attitudes toward Turkish traditional lifestyle, innovation deficiencies, and religious values. The negative stereotypes even significantly influenced informants' destination image of Turkey and their intention to visit Turkey within next several years. Chen et al. (2016) investigated the effect of stereotyping on the destination image of China and Taiwan. The result demonstrated that the direct influence of international stereotypes on destination uniqueness, destination satisfaction and affective image were considerable, which supported the authors' hypotheses that international stereotypes indeed negatively affected tourists' cognitive and affective images.

### 2.1.2. Influence of HTIs on destination image

HTIs are inevitable occurrences at a destination. Previous studies have suggested that the goodwill and cooperation, support and participation of hosts are essential components for enhancing tourists' satisfactions and promoting tourism sustainable development (Pérez & Nadal, 2005; Zhang et al., 2006). For example, Su and Wall (2010) investigated the implications of HTIs on tourists' travel behaviour and experiences in Beijing, and found that more than 66% of the informants admitted their interactions with local residents have somewhat impacted their assessment of the destination. Additionally, Pizam, Uriely, and Reichel (2000) found that higher levels of positive social interactions between hosts and tourists contributed to tourists' higher favorable feelings toward the hosts and higher satisfaction with the destination experience, in particular for long-term tourists. The interactions result in higher favorable feelings and more positive perceptions toward the host by altering tourists' affective images and overall destination image.

Conversely, negative HTIs could arouse tourists' dissatisfaction and complaints, as well as conflicting emotions toward the host community, which potentially worsens destination image (Kozak, 2007). Skipper (2009) examined negative host behaviors in Montego Bay and Negril in Jamaica and found tourists felt uncomfortable when "greeted by pimps, prostitutes, beach vendors, drug dealers, and other sources of harassment" (p.1), which not only resulted in negative attitudes toward the hosts but also to the destination as a whole. In addition, Greeks who once traveled to Turkey and had negative social contact in touristic encounters, tended to have a more negative impressions in the cultural aspects of Turkish residents, which ultimately influenced their post destination image (Anastasopoulos, 1992).

## 3. Methodology

The present study investigates the influence of Chinese tourists' *pre-travel* stereotypes of residents, their *on-site* interactions with locals, and their subsequent *post-travel* image of the destination. A qualitative approach via in-depth interviews with Chinese tourists to overseas destinations was selected in order to better focus on the meanings and context

involved in tourists' experiences. In-depth interviews also provide informants with opportunities to describe their previous experiences in private with the researcher, thereby minimizing potential constraints in the communication process.

### 3.1 Sampling

Informants were recruited via convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Recruitment notices were posted on the lead author's social networks, including "moment" in WeChat, Weibo, and Facebook to look for volunteers. Once the author received a response, informants were asked screening questions to ensure that they had at least a moderate travel history overseas (i.e., at least three times in the last three years) and experienced HTIs with local residents rather than just service employees at a hotel, for example. Only qualified volunteers were accepted as informants. After each interview, informants were asked to refer at least three people who they think may be interested in participating in this study.

### 3.2 Data collection approach

All interviews were conducted face-to-face interviews in Chinese and recorded by a digital recorder for further analysis when approved by informants. During the process, the author also took notes while asking the questions. Semi-structured questions were prepared in advance but informants were allowed to share their experiences beyond the scope of the questions, if necessary. The semi-structured interview guide consists of three parts: pre-travel stereotypes, on-site interactions, and post-travel destination image (see Table 1). Probing questions were also prepared in advance.

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

In pre-travel stereotypes, informants were first asked to describe their pre-travel destination image and stereotypes of local residents. For example, participants were asked: "What did you think about the people at the destination before you travel?" This question sought to identify their preconceptions prior to their travel experience. Probing questions were also included to prompt informants about the specific characteristics, attributes, and behaviors they harbored towards local residents.

The second part of the interview guide sought to uncover informants' on-site

interactions with locals and assess the influence of their pre-travel stereotypes on HTIs. Informants were encouraged to recall their encounters and elaborate on their stories as much as possible. For instance, the question: “what interactions did you have with locals”, was aimed at understanding the nature of interaction in general. In addition, informants were asked probing questions to solicit their memories from various perspectives of the interactions.

The last part of the interview guide mainly focuses on informants’ post-travel destination image. Informants were asked to describe their image of the destination after their travel, and to compare their images from the pre- to post-travel stage. Overall, the questions were designed based on a chronological sequence.

### 3.3 Data analysis procedures

Once data collection ended, the transcripts were translated to English by the researcher. Additionally, the transcripts were sent to a Chinese-mother-tongue translator for further accuracy checking.

Data analysis focused on the words that informants repeated and emphasized. Data coding was conducted in English followed by translating keywords back to Chinese and sent to the informants to confirm if the analysis conveyed their messages. In addition, keywords were categorized and compared. Finally, excerpts were identified from a careful, thematic reading of the transcripts that were later connected to pre-travel stereotypes, on-site interactions with locals, and subsequent destination image. This approach sought quality from the data, rather than results that could be generalized to the broader population.

## 4. Findings

The total sample consisted of 20 informants (i.e., 12 females and 8 males; ages ranged from 20 to 23 years old). Most informants encountered HTIs when they visited countries in Europe (45%) and Asia (40%). Other informants shared their experience when they travelled to North America (10%) and Africa (5%) (see Table 2).

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Since the study objectives are sequential in nature (i.e., influence of pre-travel stereotypes, on-site HTIs, and post-trip evaluations of locals and destination image), the

upcoming results will be presented sequentially as well by following the outline in Park and Santos (2016): (1) pre-travel, (2) on-site, and (3) post-travel.

#### 4.1 Tourists' pre-travel stereotypes of local residents

When recalling and describing pre-travel destination image, some informants already considered residents or even attached importance to them. In other words, impressions of residents constituted a critical part of pre-travel destination image: "Most of my destination image of the Great Britain focused on British before travel" (Informant 17).

Informants indicated their positive impressions by providing positive attributes of locals such as "friendly," "hospitable," and "hardworking", or expressed their affections in general: "I had a favorable image of Koreans" (Informant 7). Nevertheless, negative impressions of locals were also reported even though informants ultimately decided to visit the destination. For instance, Informant 15 considered Indonesians as "weak and a little bit rude and savage". For other informants, they had rather neutral or no impressions of locals as what they usually suggested were: "Americans were just average" (Informant 16), or "I didn't know Burmese really well before travel" (Informant 4).

Interestingly, the composition of one general impression could be complex, as informants who had a general positive impression also acknowledged negative characteristics of residents.

"I considered German as a nation that worked hard, loved rules but without being flexible. They were a little bit standoffish. But generally I held rather positive impressions of Germans" (Informant 11).

In addition, even though some informants harbored no impressions of locals or did not know them in-depth, it was highly possible that they guessed or anticipated characteristics of locals based on their existing pre-travel destination images. These characteristics were usually aligned with existing perceptions of the destination. For example, while Informant 13 did not harbor any impressions of Tanzanians before travel, he "felt maybe people there were enthusiastic as Africa was a hot continent". In this regard, positive or favorable destination image accounted for rather positive preconceptions of locals.



## 4.2 On-site HTIs

When asked to recollect their on-site interaction with locals, informants usually emphasized three major dimensions: (1) environment surrounding the interaction; (2) actors in the interaction; and (3) content of interactions. It should be paid attention that almost every informant somewhat described their emotional feelings that the interactions aroused, and many of them stated their opinions on local residents after the interactions.

### 4.2.1 Environment

Responses indicated that the environment surrounding the interaction primarily included place and time. Place was an element integrated into the whole interaction experience. Responses suggested where the interactions happened could be divided into two categories: (1) around tourist-centric areas, and (2) around residential areas or areas shared by both locals and tourists.

Tourist-centric areas include tourist attractions (e.g., “Ta Prohm,” “Toronto Zoo”) and leisure settings nearby such as “the lawn in front of Buckingham Palace”, “the square near The Imperial Palace”, and “a garden near the Coliseum.” Interactions with locals also happen in residential areas shared by both residents and tourists such as “a park” and supporting facilities (e.g., “train station,” “subway,” “hotel”). Responses demonstrated that tourists could not tolerate any negative interactions around tourist-centric areas as some reported that they “got cheated” and were “ripped off” by supposedly ‘free’ guided tour. These types of interactions had extremely negative impacts on informants.

In terms of interactions that happened outside tourist-centric areas, interactions typically included atypical tourist activities with local residents such as “playing with kids at a small garden.” It should be noticed that the positive interactions that informants encountered outside tourist-centric areas generated enormous positive impact. For example, Informant 12 once randomly walked into a restaurant in a residential area and suddenly suffered from cramps. After receiving tablets from local customers, she felt “so touched” and “thought the pasta in the restaurant was the best pasta in Italy” and “even specially revisited this restaurant several times even though it was far from touristy area ”.

When the interaction took place could be generally divided into daytime and nighttime. More specifically, female Chinese tourists perceived “when it was getting dark” or “at dusk” as signals of uncertainty and danger, and therefore tried to avoiding interactions with unfamiliar local strangers. In contrast, other informants recognized “sunrise” and “midnight” as good opportunities to communicate with locals as there were “not so many people around there” and “you could never imagine such a good chance in daytime”.

#### 4.2.2 Actors

Both informants and local residents played the role of main characters in the interactions. Informants who acknowledged that they sought to “travel like a local” or “always desired interactions with locals” attached more significance to the interactions. When recollecting the profiles of residents who were involved in their interactions, informants mostly mentioned residents’: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) appearance, (4) number (i.e., whether more than one resident participated in the interaction simultaneously), and (5) occupation.

The results revealed that female Chinese informants usually “stayed alert” and “felt scared” if the local was a man, especially if only the two of them were part of the interaction. Interestingly, male informants also underlined gender issues if they had previous negative interactions with female locals at the destination. Informants also considered residents’ age during HTIs. Responses revealed that the elderly and children seldom caused “negative feelings” while younger residents sometimes made informants feel “upset” or “disappointed”. For example, Informant 2 who travelled to Japan and had interactions with both the elder and the young indicated: “the younger generation in Japan is not as polite and does not have as good manners as the older generation”.

Local residents’ appearances dominated informants’ memories. Residents were at times described as “handsome”, “charming”, and “seemed trustworthy” together with detailed descriptions including their height, weight and attire. ‘Number’ refers to the number of residents that the informants interacted with. Informants perceived a group of people, such as “family”, “couple”, and even “locals with a dog”, as safer compared to interactions with only one individual. For instance, Informant 9 who met a local family including five members at the Toronto Zoo “had no guard and didn’t feel fearful” during the whole interaction. The last attribute that informants typically used to characterize residents is occupation. Although informants frequently emphasized their interactions with police officers, their responses showed that they had rather neutral reactions even if officers were

able to help by “directing me the way to bus station” and “look for swindlers”. However, if officers failed to adhere to their responsibilities (e.g., an informant was told by an officer that police do not work on Sundays), it could result in tourists’ negative feelings not only of the locals, but also of the destination.

Finally, several informants mentioned the ‘initiator’ of the interaction. A positive, host-initiated interaction was generally a “surprise” to informants as some informants admitted about themselves: “If people don’t approach for help, I won’t directly go to ask if I can offer any assistance” (Informant 17). On the other hand, informants also took the initiative and approached residents if they felt confident or had enough positive pre-travel impressions of locals.

#### 4.2.3 Content

Stories are an important part of memorable tourism experiences (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Tung, Lin, Qiu Zhang, & Zhao, 2017), and informants described HTIs that could be classified into several content categories: (1) HTIs through typical touristic activities, (2) HTIs that caused or nearly caused economic loss; and (3) HTIs that reminded informants of their Chinese tourist identity.

The most common HTIs that informants encountered were during typical touristic activities. These HTIs included assistance or help from locals, such as residents who “showed the way to tourist attractions/hotels”, “provided bus information”, and “helped take photos.” The second category of stories that Chinese tourists reported from their interactions with residents is related to economic losses. Economic losses that informants usually suffered were “my money was pickpocketed” (Informant 20), “I was ripped of by a ‘free’ guided tour/taking photos with locals” (Informant 8; Informant 14), and “I was robbed of my cellphone” (Informant 14). Informants also described interactions that made them felt like they were in risk of suffering potential economic losses, such as “a beggar or a drunk guy asked money from me” (Informant 10) and “I was forced to donate to the charity” (Informant 1).

Finally, informants described that the most memorable aspect of their trip from HTIs was when the interaction made them reminded them of their “Chinese tourist identity”. For example, some informants learned of residents’ opinions of Chinese tourists and met locals who had China background. Informants also “stayed alert” or “felt weird” when locals suddenly came and greeted them with simple Chinese words such as “hello”. Informant 11

“felt surprised” when he met “an old German male who once stayed in China for twenty years and could speak fluent Chinese.” In addition, informants perceived the “conversation with local who shared his opinions on Chinese tourists” as a “glad and meaningful experience”, since it was “a great opportunity to understand each culture.”

More insightfully, besides experiencing HTIs first-hand, most of the informants also indicated that *observations* of on-site interactions among local residents themselves contributed to their understanding of the destination. Informants explained that they “learned more about local people through observing the way they interacted with each others in their daily life”. In fact, how local residents behaved either individually or with others influenced informants’ impressions. In public area such as subway stations or train stations, informants witnessed locals “being freeloaders”, “dropping litter” or “speaking loudly.” In these cases, even though no interaction happened between residents and informants, Chinese tourists’ impressions of the destination still suffered from the observed negative behaviors from locals. Nevertheless, informants also reported positive observations when they moved away from tourist-centric areas and into districts such as “a town that tourists seldom visit” or “a cabin locals live”. Here, informants could feel “the peaceful atmosphere”, “the charm of the town”, and “locals’ huge passion of life” once they observed “(locals) reading books, drinking coffee, chatting and playing with their or kids on the balcony” or “playing the accordions on the bridge”.

#### 4.3 Tourists post-travel evaluations of locals and destination image

Chinese tourists’ post-travel evaluations of destination image and (re)assessments of residents differed between whether they reported only one single HTI, or engaged in multiple HTIs with locals during their tourism experience. The following section describes single HTI and multiple HTIs, respectively.

##### 4.3.1 Single HTI

Informants who reported one single interaction with locals tended to compare the interaction with their pre-travel stereotypes of residents in a relatively straightforward manner. They assessed whether their pre-travel stereotypes were reinforced or not after their

interaction with residents. For example, Informant 6 who visited Taiwan reported: “Before visiting Taiwan I thought Taiwanese would be amiable and hospitable.” During Informant 6’s trip, he met an old local man who offered to help him at bus station. Afterwards, Informant 6 “felt even better towards Taiwanese”. This straightforward HTI shows that after the trip, the informant’s positive pre-travel stereotypes of residents were reinforced by the HTI.

Additionally, the HTI enabled informant’s impression of locals to develop from simple to complex. To clarify, the interaction could generate a total new image of locals that informants had never imagined before. For instance, Informant 16 thought Americans “were good at expressing themselves”, “straightforward”, and “ambitious.” These were her stereotypes of locals in the pre-travel stage. After the interaction, the Informant 16 viewed “Americans in another way”, and learned about “their lifestyle and their passion in sports”. HTIs also enabled Chinese tourists to develop new impressions that they applied to a broader of impressions of locals. For example, Informant 3, whose friend suffered from jellyfish’s bite on the seashore and received residents’ help with medicine, recounted:

“Even though (before travel) I thought Taiwanese were warm and hospitable, I always thought maybe it only applied to people who worked in stores or restaurants. I never expected local residents would initially help us like that, though we were total strangers to them. I felt touched.”

Finally, HTIs also strengthened tourists’ impressions of locals from general to concrete. Many informants harbored a “big picture” or “some concepts” of locals before their trip. The HTI enabled Chinese tourists to understand locals in a “more complete” way.

#### 4.3.2 Multiple interactions

For Chinese tourists who encountered multiple HTIs, they usually evaluated the interactions together by emphasizing what they experienced and their general feelings as a whole, instead of analyzing each interaction separately. The overall impact of the HTIs could be seen on residents’ strong changes of affections towards locals after the trip. This change was based on the content of the interactions indicated, and specifically, whether informants were harmed from the HTIs. If the multiple HTIs that an informant experienced were of similar nature (i.e., informants either benefited or suffered from all interactions), then their

experiences worked together to generate a cumulative effect. For example, Informant 5 had three negative HTIs in Greece: “The more interactions I experienced, the more I was impacted. Let’s say I felt more disappointed and had less positive image of Athens.” In addition, the cumulative effect also contributed to changing informant’s image of the destination. For example, Informant 14 who held a rather positive destination image of Italy prior to travel, suffered a robbery, scam, and even failed to receive help from police during the trip:

“The interactions I suffered made me felt Italy is not a safe destination.... I never expected it could be as dangerous as it was. Even now I consider South European countries or even the whole Europe continent as unsafe, or at least they are more dangerous than China.”

For informants who benefitted from some HTIs but suffer from other interactions, they considered their post-travel evaluations more comprehensively, including other factors such as whether they suffered economic loss; whether it was the first such experience in their life; whether it was their first experience in the destination; and whether aid from locals (e.g., police) were readily available. These factors, representing the aforementioned components of on-site HTIs (e.g., environment, actors, and content), played an important role in facilitating the strength of the impact generated from the HTIs.

The impact of on-site HTIs on changing tourists’ post-travel evaluations of destination image was also influenced by informants’ pre-travel impressions of the destination. In other words, destination image acted as a ‘buffer’ especially when informants suffered from negative interactions. For example, two informants traveled to Italy and suffered economic losses. However, they demonstrated opposite evaluations of the interactions as they harbored different pre-travel images of Italy. Informant 14, who had a rather neutral pre-travel destination image, expressed that “the two misfortune accidents ruined my whole journey and made me feel very dissatisfied with the travel...I will definitely not consider a second trip to Italy”. In contrast, Informant 12 held an extremely positive destination image of Italy prior to travel, and explained “suffering from theft and robbery in Italy are ‘inevitable’ experiences”. After the negative experience, Informant 12 “still wanted to revisit Italy and recommended Italy to friends”.

## 5. Discussion

The objective of this study is to explore the influence of Chinese tourists' *pre-travel* stereotypes of residents, *on-site* HTIs, and their subsequent *post-travel* evaluations of locals and destination image. The findings suggest that tourists' pre-travel stereotypes, on-site HTIs, and post-travel evaluations could be presented sequentially (see Figure 1).

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As shown in Figure 1, a number of Chinese tourists had either positive or negative pre-travel stereotypes of local residents. For individuals who did not have pre-travel preconceptions of locals, they anticipated residents based on their pre-travel image of the destination. On-site HTIs encompassed several dimensions, including environment, actors, and content. Positive, pre-travel impressions of locals played a role in triggering tourist-initiated HTIs. Tourists who had rather positive impressions of locals had a desire to interact with residents and were motivated to initiate contact. This finding supports past research that impressions are important social motivators that could positively influence the occurrence of HTIs (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Additionally, female tourists' considerations, especially towards male residents, influenced HTIs. This suggests that the expression of too much involvement in an initial interaction from a stranger could potentially result in negative considerations for females.

An interesting finding of this study is that tourists reported two ways on how on-site HTIs influenced their post-travel destination image. In the first way, HTIs primarily influenced tourists' degree of affection towards locals, changing their pre-travel stereotypes of residents from single to complex as well as from general to detailed, thereby reducing post-travel evaluations of negative stereotypes and destination image. In this regard, tourists typically recognized that they harbored biases toward locals before travel, and admitted that HTIs helped them change their opinions. Interestingly, tourists' pre-travel *positive* stereotypes were hard to change after the trip. Some tourists considered positive stereotypes as "national spirit" or "basic characteristics". The second way in which HTIs influenced tourists' post-travel destination image was through 'cumulative effects'. Tourists evaluated multiple interactions as highlights of their memorable tourism experiences. They also considered multiple HTIs as motivations for their next trip. This finding is consistent with previous

research that suggested the long-effects of HTIs in influencing future destination selection (Su & Wall, 2010).

This study also contributes to the tourism literature by suggesting that the outcomes of HTIs could simultaneously affect tourists' evaluations of post-travel stereotypes and destination image. This finding supports previous research that HTIs contribute to tourists' perceptions of visited destinations. Yet, what is unique to this study is the identification of different approaches in which HTIs change tourists' destination image. In the first approach, tourists' direct interactions with locals could affect their post-travel evaluations towards residents, either positive or negative. Here, positive HTIs could reduce negative stereotypes as per past research findings (Marsh & Henshall, 1987; Skipper, 2009). In the second approach, even if no direct HTIs occurred between tourists and residents, tourists' image of the destination could still be influenced by tourists' observations of local residents' behaviors. In this regard, tourists' destination image could be transformed through observations of interactions, despite the lack of direct contact with local residents.

Previous studies have argued for further research on HTIs, and this study contributes to the literature by identifying the factors that facilitate the relationship between HTIs and tourists' post-trip evaluations of local residents. The findings in this study are consistent with past research suggesting tourists would make comparisons between their stereotypes and experienced HTIs to generate post-travel evaluations (Marsh & Henshall, 1987). Additionally, this study found that the actors and environment surrounding the HTI all contributed to the impact of post-travel evaluations. Furthermore, this study supports Su and Wall's (2011) argument that tourists' demographic factors such as gender could play a role in influencing this effect.

There are managerial implications from the findings of this study for DMOs. One of the central tasks for DMOs is to facilitate memorable tourism experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), oftentimes by involving residents in HTIs. For example, DMOs can invest more resources to encourage and educate local residents not only to interact with tourists, but also to show their enthusiasm and sense of hospitality. To achieve this objective, DMOs can design relevant public service advertisements and communicate these messages across various channels to reach residents, such as local television networks, social media, and the DMO's official website. For instance, policymakers in Hong Kong have launched public initiatives including a promotional video on television that featured youth with the Hong Kong ex-Financial Secretary to communicate the importance of demonstrating a warm spirit



of hospitality toward tourists (Sun, 2016). Instead of acting indifferent when tourists ask for help, residents can build a stronger and more positive image for themselves and for the destination if they are willing to take initiative to identify tourists that require help, such as tourists who look confused and lost. Additionally, DMOs need to inform locals of the importance of behaving in good manner in public since the present study findings suggest that what residents do in daily life could also influence tourists' impressions of the destination.

Furthermore, this study found that tourists require a safe environment to better enable positive HTIs to occur. DMOs are strongly suggested to cooperate with local police to ensure a safe environment, thereby minimizing potential threats from theft and robberies. For example, the Chinese government established and promoted a "1+3 comprehensive regulatory system" in most tourism attractions (China National Tourism Administration, 2016). The system relies on the cooperation of tourist police taking enforcement actions against illegal tourism activities, combined with a tourism circuit court that mediates tourism disputes and public procurators that provides consultation service to tourists.

Through destination marketing activities, a DMO can promote its amazing local residents as a selling point to strengthen overall destination image and attract potential tourists since positive stereotypes could impact on-site HTIs. Tourists who generally have positive pre-travel impressions of locals tend to approach residents, and HTIs could help locals be aware of the potential social advantages (e.g., learning about other's culture) from tourism. For example, New Zealand's DMO promoted their local residents on their official website as "New Zealand's friendly and down-to-earth people [who] will be one of the things you treasure most about your visit" and encouraged tourists to "strike up conversations at a bar or restaurant or local market" to "make new life-long friends with local Kiwi lingo" (Tourism New Zealand, 2017).

There are limitations and opportunities for future research. First, the sample size was limited and only focused on young tourists. Pre-travel stereotypes and on-site HTIs with local residents could be different for the senior travel market. Second, the influence of HTIs on post-travel evaluations of destination image could be different for tourists with various levels of travel sophistication. For example, on-site HTIs could be viewed differently for individuals who travel often (e.g., several times each year) compared to those who travel infrequently (e.g., less experienced tourists who only travel once or twice overseas every several years). Third, tourists with different travel motivations (e.g., to learn about the culture

and history of the destination versus to relax and recover) could have different evaluations of HTIs.

In addition to addressing the above limitations, future research could examine the influence of HTIs with service providers across different market segments. Future research could also adopt a quantitative approach to assess the influence of local residents and service providers during HTIs on tourists' post-travel evaluations. These efforts could further the field's understanding of the significance of HTIs in building positive destination image.

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