

TITLE

Travel Motivations of Domestic Film Tourists to the Hengdian World Studios: Serendipity, Traverse, and Mimicry

ABSTRACT

While past studies have sought to understand the travel motivations of international film tourists, more attention can be paid to examine the motivations from domestic visitors. This distinction is critical as domestic tourists have different travel experiences, familiarity, and cultural proximity with their country than international tourists that can affect their travel motivations. To address this research gap, this study examines domestic tourists' motivations for visiting Hengdian World Studios in China via a netnographic approach. Three dimensions were identified, reflecting interpretations from tourists' voices: their desire for serendipitous experiences, to transverse and dream, and to compare the mimicry of Hengdian to real heritage sites in China. This study contributes to the literature from a psychological perspective by analysing post-trip reflections to infer pre-trip motivations. This study also provides implications for tourism marketers in other emerging countries where some of the world's largest film destinations are developing.

INTRODUCTION

Research interest in film tourism has grown significantly and a wealth of literature have examined the impacts of films on destination image as well as tourists' travel intentions, preferences, on-site experiences, and motivations for visiting film destinations (Kim, 2012; Oviedo-García et al., 2016; Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). Studies have examined the relationship between the consumption of television products and the consumption of tourism (Young & Young, 2008). Other studies have examined the influence of tourists' emotional involvement during their on-site experiences (Kim, 2012) and assessed the marketing activities that could motivate them to visit film destinations (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006).

Despite insights gained from existing literature, more research attention can be paid to examine the travel motivations of domestic visitors as studies have typically focused on the travel motivations of international film tourists; for example, Oviedo-García et al. (2016) identified the travel motivations of British and French tourists to Seville in Spain; Khan et al. (2014) examined the motivations for American tourists to Australia; more recently, Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015) examined the motivations for Thai tourists to visit Daejanggeum in South Korea. In this vein, the research question for this study is as follows: what are the travel motivations for visiting a film destination by domestic Chinese tourists? The context of the domestic film destination in this study is the Hengdian World Studios (hereafter referred to as "Hengdian") in China, the largest film studio in the world.

The impact of the domestic film tourist market is not negligible. For instance, with Hollywood as the top entertainment demand generator in Los Angeles, domestic tourists' total spending on entertainment in Los Angeles accounted for over 1.1 billion US dollars in 2012 (Weinstein & Stanford, 2013). Hengdian also enjoyed a large number of domestic visitations, with a weekly visitation of 780,000 in the single week of the National Day holiday in October 2014, of which over 80% are domestic tourists (Huang, 2014). Indeed, China's domestic tourism market is growing rapidly (Ma, Weng, & Yu, 2015). Recent studies also suggest Chinese tourists are becoming more experienced and are relatively young (Prayag et al., 2015). In this regard, this study contributes to the literature on travel motivations for Chinese tourists who are increasingly traveling in search of distinct experiences, independently – many of whom as self-driving domestic tourists reported in this study – rather than as a homogenous group (Huang & Hsu, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Film tourism

Many studies have proposed definitions for film tourism and film-induced tourism (Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). For instance, Hudson and Ritchie (2006, p. 388) defined film tourism as “tourist visits to a destination or attraction as a result of the destination’s being featured on television, video, or the cinema screen.” Many other terms also map this domain, including screen tourism (Connell & Meyer, 2009; Kim, 2010; Kim et al., 2009), cinematic tourism (Karpovich, 2010), celebrity-induced tourism (Lee et al., 2008), television-induced tourism (Connell, 2005), and movie-induced tourism (Im & Chon, 2008). Other researchers have defined film-induced tourism as visitations influenced by both television and cinema that attracts and motivates people to travel to a film location (Beeton, 2010; Croy, 2011).

Individuals who travel to a film location can be categorized into three types (Macionis, 2004). According to Macionis (2004), serendipitous film tourists are individuals who just happen to be at a destination portrayed in a film; general film tourists represent individuals who are not specifically drawn to a place just because of a film but can relate to the film set; and specific film tourists are those who actively seek out places seen in a film. For the purpose of this study, film tourism and film tourist, are used to denote actual visitations to a film destination by specific film tourists. The term, film destination, refers to the site that is or has been used for or is associated with filming (Buchmann et al., 2010).

The success of film tourism has brought benefits to both destinations and tourists. It addresses tourists’ needs for creative experiences (Richards, 2013), interactions with the film destination (Oviedo-García et al., 2016), and fulfilment of emotional stimuli (Trauer, 2006). Films also serve as an information source for tourists, suggesting them of the scenic spots to visit or the activities to do at the film destination (Croy & Heitmann, 2011). As films tend to portray attractive scenery and sentimental values, film destinations benefit from the increase in destination awareness and tourist arrivals (Butler, 2011). The visitation benefits are particularly pronounced for destinations that were initially little known to the public (Frost, 2006; Glen Croy, 2011).

A number of studies have reported the growing impacts of film tourism on enhancing awareness, image, and generating economic returns for the destination (Kim et al., 2012). In

2012, nearly 40 million international tourists selected travel destinations mainly because the destinations appeared in the films they had seen (Modiano, 2013). The long-term benefits to film destinations can also last for many years after the screening of films (Kim et al., 2012).

Travel motivations for film tourists

Many studies have examined the push and pull motivations for film tourists (Kozak, 2002). Push factors represent intangible and intrinsic desires of tourists (Kim, 2007). They are related to intellectual, social and relaxation elements and may vary according to individual characteristics (Pan & Tsang, 2014). The intellectual component comprises of vicarious experience, self-identity, fantasy, ego enhancement, learning, and novelty. Social elements reflect the desire for status and prestige, and participation in fan activities (Kim et al., 2007). The relaxation component includes the desire for reliving and escape (Carl et al., 2007).

Push components may complement each other; for example, tourists may be motivated to visit a film destination for a sense of novelty (i.e., to experience something alien that allows them to escape from the real world) while participating in interesting activities (Oviedo-García et al., 2016). Tourists may also be attracted to a film destination for imaginary or unfamiliar settings and activities that do not exist or are not easily accessible in their daily life, especially for tourists to international destinations, for they can see scenery that do not exist in their own culture and experience something new. Additionally, tourists may also visit destination to relive the experience and emotions that they experienced when they watched the film (Beeton, 2010).

Pull factors refer to the tangible features of the destination (Kim, 2007). They involve the “where”, “what”, “who”, “when”, and “how” of the destination (Pan & Tsang, 2014). “Where” and “what” refers to the destination attributes that were depicted in the film; “who” is related to the cast, characters and their lifestyles portrayed in the film; “when” is associated with the time period that the story unfolds; “how” refers to the directorship and the production of the film. For example, celebrity endorsement refers to a tourist’s desire to visit a destination to see famous actors from a film (Gjorgievski & Trpkova, 2012). In a study of international tourists to the Republic of Macedonia, Gjorgievski and Trpkova, (2012) found that the higher the tourist’s emotional attachment with the celebrity, the higher their motivation to visit. The way that the celebrity interacts with the destination in the film

also influence tourists' attitude towards the film destination (Su et al., 2012).

Furthermore, tourists could be attracted to the visual environment of the destination where certain scenes occurred; for example, in Iwashita and Butler's (2006) study, Japanese tourists who are appealed by the cultural heritage and beautiful scenery in British TV dramas expressed intention to travel to the destination to visualize the scenes. They desired to go beyond viewing the scenery on screen, and sought to transform their images into a real experience by enjoying the scenery in person.

Macionis (2004) also presented travel motivations via a "3P" framework, suggesting the factors of place, performance, and personality. Place refers to the location and scenery of the destination that are immediately identifiable, such as the natural scenery, backdrop, and the setting in the film. Performance refers to the storyline and themes that connect the audience with the film and the destination, which motivates tourists to put themselves in the situation of the characters (Heitmman, 2010). Personality refers to the human elements that attract tourists, such as celebrity and cast of the film.

The travel motives described above were largely derived from research in an international context. For example, Liou (2010) examined the influence of Japanese films on Taiwanese tourists; Su et al. (2012) focused on Taiwanese tourists to South Korea; Khan et al. (2014) studied American travellers to Australia; Iwashita & Butler (2006) focused on Japanese tourists to United Kingdom; Oviedo-García et al. (2016) examined French and British visitors to Spain; recently, Whang et al. (2015) also examined Chinese and Russian tourists to South Korea.

Yet, more attention can be paid to examine the motivations from domestic tourists. The distinction between international and domestic tourists is critical for several reasons. First, travel motivations could be influenced by one's familiarity with the destination (Hornig et al., 2012). Since domestic productions are more likely to be shot at domestic destinations (e.g., films based on Chinese dynasties are likely shot at locations within China), domestic tourists could be more familiar with the target destination than international tourists.

Second, domestic film tourists would likely have closer cultural proximity with the destination than international tourists as they are brought up under the influence of the same national culture. Travel motivations could be influenced by the cultural proximity between the tourist and the destination (Chang, 2015).

Third, travel motives depend largely on one's past travel experiences (Pearce, 2011)

and the travel experiences between domestic and international tourists are likely very different. For instance, domestic tourists from China would likely have more experience traveling within China than international tourists. These differences could affect their travel approach (Pearce & Lee, 2005). The travel pattern approach suggests that there is a core layer of motives which are uniformly important for most tourists, such as desire to escape, relax, and experience novelty (Pearce & Lee, 2005; Wu & Pearce, 2014). These motives are relatively unaffected by tourists' travel histories and experiences. Extending from the core layer of motives is a middle layer, where key elements could include self-development through interacting with the host community and local environment. A final and outer layer of motives could include returning to a simpler time and place in a nostalgic quest. These motives tend to be less important for the more experienced tourists than motives in the middle layer. Overall, however, individuals with less travel experience (i.e., international tourists compared to domestic tourists within China) may tend to see all motives as quite important.

METHODOLOGY

Research setting: Hengdian World Studios in China

The geographical focus of this study is Hengdian World Studios, one of the most popular film-shooting destinations in China (Hengdian World Studios, 2015). It is located in Dongyang, Zhejiang Province, established in 1996 and developed from a remote rural area to the largest film-shooting destination in Asia (Shao & Liao, 2009). It consists of 13 separate scenic regions, connecting through thousands of years of Chinese history and traditional myths, featuring ones such as *The Qin Palace*, *Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival*, *The Great Wisdom Temple*, and *Dream Valley* (Hengdian World Studios, 2015). Over 1300 movies and television products have been filmed there, some of which are world-famous such as *Master of the Crimson Armor*, *The Opium War*, and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (Hengdian World Studios, 2015). Hengdian is an AAAAA-level destination, the highest level of tourism destination in China based on service level, destination quality, and customer satisfaction (Shao & Liao, 2009). It is also the only recognized National Film and Television Industry Experiment Base (Hengdian World Studios, 2015).

Justification of study approach: Netnography

An investigation of travel motives from domestic film tourists was conducted via netnography. Netnography is a new adaptation of traditional ethnography by using the Internet as a virtual fieldwork to obtain insider perspectives in a naturally occurring conversational environment (Mkono, 2011). This approach collects post-trip reflections to infer pre-trip motivations through written material such as blogs or personal interviews (Hsu et al., 2007). For example, in a study by Wu and Pearce (2014), the authors applied a netnographic approach based on qualitative data from Chinese blogs and analyzed these postings to identify the travel motivations of Chinese recreational vehicle users in Australia. In a similar manner, this study analyzes qualitative data from domestic film tourists who shared their experiences at Hengdian through Chinese blogs on Mafengwo.com and uses segments from these narratives to illustrate the motivation themes.

The strength of this approach lies in its spontaneity from travel bloggers, writers, and interviewees, revealing their range of perspectives and travel experiences while allowing researchers to code tourists' voices in novel ways. As Wu & Pearce (2013) demonstrated, the use of netnography based on rich blogs can further academic research and provide implications for DMOs who aim to identify important perspectives on a new market niche. Overall, this technique is gaining traction in marketing (Kozinets et al., 2010) and tourism research in recent years (Wu & Pearce, 2014).

Data collection and analysis

In this study, the keyword "Hengdian" was used to search relevant blog postings on Mafengwo.com. Mafengwo.com is an online community widely used by domestic Chinese tourists. It is one of the most famous online blog sites in China (Yuan et al., 2013), providing timely updated travel tips generated by other users as well as destination services such as accommodation and transportation, and embracing a high volume of blog postings (Mafengwo.com, 2015). Blog authors provided rich information about their travel, including transportation and accommodation arrangement, detailed itinerary, ticket varieties and prices, and restaurant recommendations. The large scope of coverage, the high volume of postings, and the rich content from Mafengwo.com are suitable for this study.

The timing of this study's search was between October and November in 2015. Past statistics of Hengdian in October 2014 showed that it enjoyed a large number of domestic visitations with a weekly visitation of 780,000 in the single week of the National Day holiday

of which over 80% are domestic tourists (Huang, 2014). By mid-November 2015, Mafengwo.com had a total of 231374 active blog entries for domestic travel that have been reviewed recently by multiple users, covering 209 destinations in 31 provinces (Mafengwo.com, 2015). 170 of them were related to domestic travel to Hengdian. A total of 23 most updated blogs, which were written no earlier than October 1, 2015, and contained a detailed itinerary of tours to Hengdian with multiple aspects on travel motivation and experiences were identified and retained for this study.

In an effort to safeguard the validity of the research process, only blogs that were written by the same blogger on different travel scenarios were included and treated as a single posting entry. To ensure a comprehensive set of data for this study, only detailed entries that included a mix style of pictures and text, and were read widely by other online users (Mafengwo.com, 2015) were included. Furthermore, descriptive information about the blogger were extracted from the blogs.

In an effort to safeguard the reliability of the data analysis process, the Chinese blog content were translated from Chinese to English, and then backwards translated to ensure the English transcripts stayed close to the data. For certain phrases, for example, the authors decided to retain the literal translation from Chinese such as “the residual ink reviews past scenes”, opting to emphasize the raw translation rather than risk transforming it in a way that may endanger its meaning. Codes were developed and affixed to the content of each blog. For example, for informant 5, code “Traversing002” was developed to affix the content “we started our journey of traversing” and “Scene006” was developed for the content “this is where TVB series Captain of Destiny was filmed.” Next, codes were transformed into identifiable labels and categories and data collected from the blog content was categorized into these identifiable labels. The sorted data was examined for similar phrases, meaningful patterns and relationships. For example, the content that were affixed to codes, such as “are you ready to be traversed to Fairytaleland with me” and “we travelled through Qin Dynasty in that performance”, were sorted into the same category, “traversing.”

RESULTS

Profile of Chinese tourists to Hengdian World Studios

Data regarding the bloggers’ origins, gender, travel companions, travel time, and the

length of their trip to Hengdian were collected and summarized in Table 1. Yet, no age information was disclosed for the sample on Mafengwo.com, and not all blog authors authorized the public access to their personal data and travel information.

The majority of Chinese bloggers who visited Hengdian were female and came from neighbouring provinces and regions of the destination, such as Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shanghai. Traveling with friends was the most popular although traveling alone or with family also consisted of a large percentage of the sample. The average length of their trips was 3.9 days, with the majority of tourists spending less than 5 days in Hengdian. Even though all the blogs were screened by limiting the time period between October and November in 2015, the majority of tours happened in October 2015, which was the approximate date of National Day Golden Week in China.

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

Travel motivations to Hengdian World Studios

The dimensions identified in this study as travel motivations do not necessarily pertain to specific items at the destination; in other words, this study seeks to contribute to the field by moving beyond reporting descriptive such as “castles” and “lakes” as pull motivators since these are destination-specific and contextually dependent. Furthermore, individuals could perceive the same environment in different ways to form memories of their personalized experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). The dimensions identified in this study are interpretations of tourists’ voices to infer deeper travel motives. By looking beyond Hengdian-specific elements and by focusing on deeper interpretations of tourists’ voices, this study seeks to provide implications for tourism marketers in other emerging countries that are looking to attract domestic film tourists; for example, in India and Brazil, where some of the world’s largest film destinations are developing.

Three dimensions were identified, reflecting interpretations from tourists’ voices: their desire for serendipitous experiences, to transverse and dream, and to compare the mimicry of Hengdian to real heritage sites in China.

Desire for serendipitous experiences

The first travel motivation describes tourists' desires for serendipitous experiences. It is important to begin by clarifying that the term, "serendipity", used in this study, reflects one's expectations for the unexpected. This definition contrasts the interpretation of the "serendipitous moment" as the very instant of awareness and self-representation when one goes beyond being a tourist (Cary, 2004). In Cary's (2004) exploration of the serendipitous moment – also referred to as the tourist moment – the moment simultaneously produces and erases the tourist-as-subject, representing a spontaneous instance of self-discovery and belonging. In this study, informants expressed their desired to "take a chance" at Hengdian, hoping ahead of time that they may have a "chance" to meet celebrities or filming crews at the destination.

To clarify, the target element (e.g., celebrity) in and of itself is not necessarily the travel motivation; instead, the motivation is the desire to expect the unexpected. For example, tourists recognize that celebrities are not always stationed at the destination. As Informant 19 explained:

"When having meals in the restaurant, tasting tea in the tea house, or even just walking on the street, I might run into celebrities anytime anywhere."

The celebrity is only the catalyst in which tourists' expectations for a serendipitous experience may occur. In other words, tourists' motivations for serendipitous experiences represents the intersection between expectations and the desire to be surprised. Table 2 provides examples of tourists' motivations for serendipitous experiences by separating the context from the catalyst as well as the outcome of the tourism experience.

There are other types of catalysts for serendipitous experiences in addition to "celebrities", including the chance to meet filming crews and to see the film production process. For example, informants indicated their desire to discover what was so far unknown to them in the film production process, especially the backstage mysteries that are usually undisclosed to the public. They were motivated to learn about the intricacies of the production process by watching the work of filming crews if they happen to be filming at Hengdian at that time. Both Informant 1 and Informant 7 were fortunate to have experienced this occurrence: "I got to see many filming crews this time"; "It was the first time for me to see the daily routine of a filming crew, and it felt so wonderful!" Some informants were students studying film and television directing, or passionate amateurs who were strongly interested in film production. They were particularly motivated by opportunities to see film

shooting scenes at Hengdian, and were greatly satisfied when they actually managed to witness the process.

Nevertheless, serendipitous experiences are not inevitable. While some informants were privileged to encounter the celebrities and filming crews they hoped to see as described by Informant 8: “I managed to catch up with the press conference for the new TV series WuXin: The Monster Killer there, and I got to meet Dongjun Han and Chen Jin in person”, other tourists only saw “pictures of celebrities” at the destination, leaving them with negative memories as their expectations for serendipity experiences were unfulfilled. Informant 13 strongly noted: “The biggest regret for this tour to Hengdian was that I did not manage to meet celebrities.” This succinct example illustrates the salience of negative emotions and expectations during recall of memorable tourism experiences when travel motivations – in this instance, expectations for serendipity – were left unmet.

--- Insert Table 2 here ---

To traverse and dream

The second travel motivation, to traverse and dream, reflects what tourists described as desires to experience “fairy tales.” As Informant 17 described:

“Why is it called Dream Valley? We guess it is because this is a dreamy world, just like what we see in dreams. Right now my dream is about to come true. Let’s traverse to a dreamy world and wander in fairy tales.”

Many informants described activities at Hengdian that allowed them to travel back in history. Experiences at Hengdian oftentimes included performances by actors, which created an exotic atmosphere and brought tourists to an imaginative environment that do not exist in their daily life. For Informant 13, “there was nothing cooler than the last show, Time Travel. It traversed me through Qin Dynasty with special effects and was even more real and exciting than roller coasters.”

The setting and atmosphere of the destination also invoked past emotions, and tourists’ desires to traverse into storylines could be particularly salient for those who have a high level of emotional involvement with the film content as they could be motivated to visit the destination to experience the emotions as a leading actor in the storyline (Whang, Yong,

& Ko, 2015). For example, as Informant 7 described: “When all the scenes in the films reappeared in front of me bit by bit, I could not help feeling astonished and sighing with emotions about the fates of the characters in the story, so that I did not even want to leave this place.” Another informant also brought a picture of the television series, *Nirvana in Fire*, to the shooting destination to strengthen her recollection of the series.

Other informants were motivated by dreams of experiencing a different life in China when they were at Hengdian. They expressed their desire to go somewhere with fewer people and “infrequently-seen scenery” so they can see “the mottled walls” and listen to “the rhythm of the falling rains.” Indeed, the environment of Hengdian is a large contrast to the nature of populous urban areas in China. Informant 14 further recollected: “I walked alone in the palace and felt traversed. I’ve always preferred peace and quietness to noise and excitement, and I’ve always loved places where there are fewer people. There was no one else around me and it felt really good.”

Insightfully, one informant suggested the destination acted as a medium for her to reflect on her “own” dreams. In the following example, Informant 14’s reflection into her own dream was triggered by a serendipitous encounter with the filming crew at Hengdian, which emotionally connected her with the storyline of a film she saw. As Informant 14 described: “When I came to Hengdian, I saw how tough the real cast and crew worked. The film, *I Am Somebody*, truly revealed the life of these people...As long as we have a clear goal, we can still chase our dreams no matter how chaotic the environment is. Don’t look down upon your dreams, for they might be the purest part of your heart.”

When mimicry is flattery

The third travel motivation is the desire to see imitations at Hengdian. Even though tourists were well-aware that the architecture at Hengdian were manmade based on ancient artefacts, many informants still expressed a strong desire to see the mimicry and compare them to the real, ancient heritage sites in China. Interestingly, many tourists actually live in areas where the historical relics are located or have been to the heritage site; yet, they were flattered by how the replicas mimicked the real objects. As Informant 3 indicated: “They were all familiar scenery, for actually we live to the south of Yangtze River and these scenes could be found in any park.” This was also noted by Informant 4: “The four major varieties of traditional Chinese architecture, namely capital palace, royal garden, feudal office, and

Hutong dwelling, could all be found here. They truly reproduced the original appearance of the Forbidden City and former Beijing dwelling with vivid landscaping, and artistically revived the local features of Guangzhou and Hong Kong after the 1840s.”

Here, it is important to note that domestic tourists’ cultural familiarity with their home country acted as an interface to help them realize this travel motivation. Cultural familiarity was interpreted as an interface that stimulated domestic tourists’ interest in exploring, understanding, and appreciating the mimicry involved at Hengdian. Cultural familiarity also influenced how domestic Chinese tourists perceived their tourism experience at Hengdian.

For example, domestic tourists described their capacity to contrast the mimicry at Hengdian based on their knowledge of traditional Chinese history. Many have read and learned about the architectural style that Hengdian reproduced. For instance, Informant 17 explained: “The reason why it is called Ming Qing Palace is that the place is a fortified point of the architecture, culture and history of Ming and Qing Dynasty. The painting, *Riverside Scene at Qingming*, was created in the most prosperous dynasty in Chinese history. We learned that in school and our art textbook even had this painting on it.”

In addition to the physical mimicry of architecture, domestic tourists were also motivated to mimic the characters in Chinese history by cosplaying them at the destination: “Standing from this point, I felt like an emperor with the momentum to unify the country (Informant 9)!” Informant 13 further described: “I did experience the feeling of the empress and concubines accompanying the emperor to tour the royal garden.”

Informants also demonstrated knowledge of the stories behind heritage replications at Hengdian, where some were reproduced based on accounts from ancient Chinese paintings. These informants were motivated to see a revisualization that mimic ancient Chinese narratives, which may not wholly, partially, or even exist in physical form elsewhere. For example, *Riverside Scene at Qingming* appeared frequently in tourists’ reflections: “The scenic region, *Riverside Scene at Qingming*, was constructed based on the great painting by the famous artist Zeduan Zhang from the Song Dynasty. The scenic region took the essence of the painting and integrated the architectural characteristics of Earlier Song Dynasty (Informant 9).”

The replications at Hengdian also elicited tourists’ shared memories of historical moments. “Rainstorm and Mountain Torrents was the first experiential disaster performance

in China, and it really made me tremble in fear,” Informant 3 described. Informant 17 also provided another example of a shared memory that was monumental to domestic tourists: “The second door is Tiananmen, where Chairman Mao announced the establishment of People’s Republic of China in 1949.” Indeed, this cultural connection reflected the cultural upbringing of many Chinese tourists.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated domestic Chinese tourists’ motivations for visiting Hengdian World Studios. A netnographic approach was used to gather qualitative data from tourists who shared their experiences, and the findings reflected segments from their narratives to highlight travel motivations. Interpretations from tourists’ voices reflected three broad travel motivations: their desire for serendipitous experiences, to transverse and dream, and to compare the mimicry of Hengdian to real heritage sites in China.

This study contributed to the literature from theoretical, methodological, and managerial perspectives. From a theoretical perspective, previous studies have suggested a number of travel motivations for international film tourists, including the desire to experience a new setting that do not exist in their own culture or are not easily accessible in their daily life (Oviedo-García et al., 2016). However, these travel motives, among others, could be paradoxical for domestic film tourists who have high cultural proximity and knowledge of the heritage of the destination compared to international tourists (Chang, 2015). For example, Hengdian includes a replica of the Forbidden City, a World Heritage Site from Beijing (Hengdian World Studios, 2015). Compared to the ancient site, Hengdian is already more difficult to access for domestic visitors; in fact, Li et al. (2008) examined the geographical distribution of World Heritage Sites and their spatial relationship to tourist origin cities. Their results indicate the Forbidden City as having one of the highest net field potentials, suggesting it is one of the most accessible sites in China. Yet, narratives from domestic film tourists described their efforts and motivations to see the imitation at Hengdian. Furthermore, some tourists even acknowledged they have already seen the real World Heritage Site but was still drawn by the mimicry of Hengdian. By capturing this interesting phenomenon, the study contributed to the literature from a psychological perspective, collecting post-trip reflections to infer deeper levels of pre-trip motivations (Wu & Pearce, 2014).

From a methodological perspective, this study also added to recent tourism research on the use of netnography to identify travel motivations. Netnography is a new adaptation of

traditional ethnography that has been applied to tourism research in recent years, using the Internet as a virtual fieldwork to investigate naturally occurring conversations among tourists (Mkono, 2011). The strength of this approach lies in its spontaneity from travel bloggers, writers, and interviewees, revealing their range of perspectives and travel experiences while allowing researchers to code tourists' voices in novel ways. This technique is gaining traction in marketing (Kozinets et al., 2010) and tourism research in recent years (Wu & Pearce, 2014).

From a managerial perspective, this is one of the first studies to examine tourists' travel motivations in the context of Hengdian in China. Hengdian is an AAAA-level destination, the highest level of tourism destination in China based on service level, destination quality, and customer satisfaction, as well as the the only recognized National Film and Television Industry Experiment Base (Hengdian World Studios, 2015). It is the filming location for many movies such as *Master of the Crimson Armor* and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. Hengdian consists of 13 scenic regions connecting through thousands of years of Chinese history (Hengdian World Studios, 2015). It is an important film destination given the volume of movies produced and the large number of domestic tourist arrivals (Zhang & Huang, 2011). Yet, the number of visitations to Hengdian is still in its infancy compared to established attractions and World Heritage Sites (Li et al., 2008). This study provided insight into a growing tourism product in China, contributing to efforts to understand how domestic tourists may be motivated to disperse to other destinations in the country.

Furthermore, current tourism marketing strategies for film destinations frequently rely on the pull of celebrities and casts, focusing on the allure of celebrity endorsements at the site (Gjorgievski & Trpkova, 2012; Su et al., 2012). Yet, tourists are oftentimes only left with billboards or photos of celebrities at the destination. As an alternative to the "promise of celebrities", this study suggests tourism marketers can consider motivating tourists by conveying "serendipity" to supplement "celebrity" to facilitate realistic pre-trip motivations and opportunities for surprises in the minds of tourists. For example, many informants indicated their underlying travel motivation was the "chance" to experience the (un)expected. While they "expected" a serendipitous encounter to occur, they also recognized that specific encounters with catalysts (e.g., celebrities) may be "unexpected" as they may not always be present when they are visiting.

Tourism marketers can work with other catalysts such as filming crews and backstage

producers, for example, to purposefully plan other types of film-based, serendipitous moments. This form of partnership could be mutually beneficial for the destination and for the promotion of a film. Indeed, it can be argued that even today, tourists still subtly seeking surprises; they are purposefully awaiting and anticipating (un)expected, positive surprises during their tourism experiences (Abrahams, 1986). The affective and spontaneous elements of surprise can also influence word-of-mouth and overall satisfaction (Vanhamme, 2000).

Domestic tourists were also motivated to visit Hengdian to see imitations of ancient heritage sites in China. Their deep level of cultural familiarity with their home country acted as an interface that stimulated their interest in visiting and appreciating the mimicry at Hengdian. Cultural familiarity, in-and-of itself, is not a travel motivation per se. In contrast to international tourists (Oviedo-García et al., 2016), domestic film tourists were not necessarily motivated to travel to Hengdian to become familiarized with the Chinese culture. Instead, cultural familiarity was the enabler for this travel motivation to be realized.

Tourists demonstrated knowledge of the stories behind heritage replications, contrasted the imitations based on their knowledge of traditional Chinese history, described their shared memories of historical moments, and mimicked the characters in Chinese history by cosplaying them at the destination. In this study, effort was made in the interpretation of the findings to connect the relationship between domestic tourists' culture and the destination culture at the film destination (Bogari et al., 2004).

Taken together, the findings suggest that tourism marketers have an opportunity to target their unique domestic market by arousing cultural familiarity with the destination. For instance, tourism marketers can strengthen the cultural representativeness of the destination, and demonstrate close relationship with cultural sites through co-branding opportunities. Since domestic tourists generally have broader exposure and access to films and television products of their own country compared to foreign ones (Zhang, 2015), tourism marketers can integrate the history from objects and settings from domestic films into their marketing mix.

Finally, the reader is reminded that the context of this study is based on domestic tourists from China. There are other countries such as India and Brazil with growing film destinations that can also attract domestic film tourists. In this study, *Riverside Scene at Qingming*, was used as a Chinese example of domestic tourists' understanding behind heritage replications at Hengdian. Tourism marketers in other destinations are also

encouraged to arouse their own tourists' cultural familiarity through the use of narratives, portraying stories that are contextually relevant and meaningful to their own audience. They can also work with local cultural events organizers to demonstrate awareness and arouse emotional connections with domestic tourists' shared knowledge and memories. Overall, tourists' culture alignment with the destination can increase their tendency to visit a site (Chang, 2015).

There are limitations in this study that needs to be acknowledged. First, the findings of this study are based on a relatively small sample and the timeframe was limited to October and November of 2015. Future research could examine a broader sample of tourists' recollections to provide additional depth to the analysis. Second, due to the limitations of online information disclosure, the types of demographic data that were collected was limited; for example, the age and past travel histories of informants were undisclosed. Third, the data collected from the online blogs were also based on individuals who contributed online regularly and does not represent the voices of other domestic tourists who have visited, but have not written about Hengdian. Fourth, the trustworthiness of the data analysis process in this study could be enhanced by assessing the key methodological advantages and disadvantages of this approach in a non-Western culture within the tourism context (Wu & Huang, 2014).

The scope of this study was limited to the discussion of the three motivations (i.e., serendipity, traverse, and mimicry) but the salience of these motivations were not assessed. There are opportunities for future research to measure the importance of these motivations on a larger sample of domestic tourists within China or abroad.

As noted in the discussion section, the geographic focus of this study is the Hengdian based on domestic Chinese film tourists. This perspective provides insight into a growing tourism product in China and contributes to the field's understanding of travel motivations for Chinese tourists who are increasingly traveling in search of distinct experiences. On the contrary, this context is also a limitation as there will be national and ethnic differences regarding domestic tourists' travel motivations to film destinations in their own countries.

Finally, current research in film tourism have largely focused on the perspectives of international film tourists. While this study focused on travel motivations, future research could also explore other aspects, such as travel preferences, destination selection, and the on-site experiences of domestic tourists.

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