

VACATION BENEFITS AND ACTIVITIES: UNDERSTANDING CHINESE FAMILY TRAVELERS

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Family as a travel unit is an emerging phenomenon in China. This market segment, however, has not received as much scholarly attention as it deserves. This study investigated the vacation benefits that Chinese families pursue and their destination activity participation. Factor analysis revealed four dimensions of vacation benefits sought, namely, Communication and Togetherness, Shared Exploration, Escape and Relaxation, and Experiential Learning for Children. Taking pictures and videos was noted to be the most prevalent activity that Chinese family travelers were engaged in. This study further explored the interrelationships between the benefit-sought domains and destination activities. The results identified significant linkages between the two. The uncovered associations suggested that vacation activities served as a functional means to an end for Chinese families. Theoretical and managerial implications of the findings were discussed, followed by recommendations for future research.

KEYWORDS: *family travelers; China tourism; vacation benefits; leisure activities*

INTRODUCTION

Different forms of travel have been studied to advance the knowledge on Chinese tourists, a market projected to be one of the world's largest source markets by 2020 (World Tourism Organization, 1999). The first form is all-inclusive or semi-inclusive package tours organized by authorized travel agencies. This form of travel surged in popularity for Chinese tourists traveling both domestically and internationally since the implementation of China's open-door policy in 1978. The package tour has been studied extensively in earlier literature (e.g., Cai, Boger, & O'Leary, 1999). The second, more recent form is nonpackage leisure travel, which

has gained momentum as a result of China's economic and technological advances alongside its recent social and cultural changes. Research has been conducted among various receiving destinations and demographic strata such as senior (Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007), female (Li, Wen, & Leung, 2011), and college student travelers (Huang & Cai, 2011). Although prior studies on these two forms of travel have provided great insights for understanding Chinese tourists, there has been little research about Chinese family travelers, a segment that is becoming increasingly important in the travel marketplace. Family has been one of the most preferred travel companions among the Chinese urban population, as attested by empirical evidence from Shanghai (Lou & Xu, 2008), Xi'an (Zhang, Hu, & Gu, 2012), and Changsha (Su & Wang, 2007). According to a survey conducted at a Japanese airport, more than half of Chinese tourists were traveling with their families (Wen, 2012). Recognizing its market potential, tourism service providers such as cruise lines are aggressively looking to tap into the Chinese family segment during summer vacation, when children are out of school (Ma, 2012).

The prominent role of family in the Chinese culture and its impact on individual attitudes and behaviors have been compellingly noted (Bond, 1986). Confucianism, the guiding principle of Chinese society, views society as a larger extension of the family and holds that people must first successfully handle their familial obligations and relationships before they can succeed in the larger social sphere (Zhang, 2008). The fulfillment of family rituals can be reflective and predictive of one's behaviors in the society at large. In recent years, the Chinese government has endorsed this Confucian perspective and emphasized the importance of family relationships. This is a major shift from the Maoist era, in which Chinese people were expected to downplay their private life in favor of the public good (Bell, 2008). To some extent, the Confucian perspective is universal, in that nearly all cultures recognize the importance of family relationships (e.g., Carr, 2011). Despite, however, this commonality between the East and West, parenting philosophies and styles may vary greatly between them. Although autonomy is respected as an important key to a child's development in the Western families (Peterson, Cobas, Bush, Supple, & Wilson, 2004), Chinese parental guiding principles tend to be controlling and authoritarian and emphasize the notion of training (Chao, 1994; Chao & Sue, 1996). A cross-cultural comparative study by Chao (1994) revealed that European American parents demonstrated their parental responsiveness through emotional demonstrativeness, such as praising and hugging. Parents attempted to foster an open, intimate, and mutually satisfying relationship with their children through sharing conversations and experiences. In the Chinese families, a child's development tended to involve a heavier dose of parental control as the Chinese parents attempted to impart family traditions and aspirations onto their children.

The nature of parent-child relationships in China is rather paradoxical. In the traditional Chinese value system typified by Confucianism, children should abide by the time-honored notion of filial piety. Appropriate behavioral codes toward the parents, elder siblings, and younger siblings are expected from the children. In contemporary China, however, the practice of filial piety may be breaking down thanks to the "little emperor" syndrome of single-child families (Bell, 2008). Despite the

recent relaxation on the one-child policy which allows couples to have two children if one of the parents is the only child, the change will not affect a large percentage of couples in China and due to lack of a concrete timetable, it could be decades long before the updated policy is implemented nationwide. Mandated nationwide since 1979, the one-child policy has severely affected Chinese family structure and shaped the ecology of Chinese families in the past decades (Shek, 2006). The only child receives most of the attention and resources of both parents as well as two sets of grandparents. This is what Cutler (1988) described as the *4-2-1 indulgence factor* and what Goll (1995) called the *six-pocket syndrome*. Empirical evidence has shown that Chinese parents' emphasis when raising children has shifted from filial piety and obedience to emotional satisfaction (e.g., Xia et al., 2004). Instead of asking children to fulfill filial responsibilities, Chinese parents are much more preoccupied with children's development well into their young adulthood (Fablo & Boston, 1994). The child-centric syndrome seems to have made the "little emperors" an attractive consumer market in China, one that is less culture bound and more receptive to marketing schemes.

Intriguingly, family as one of the most important socioeconomic units in Chinese society has received much less attention in the tourism literature than individual travelers. The existing conceptual deliberations and empirical validations tend to treat consumers as solitary travelers or part of a package tour. Because family-based psychological functions and need fulfillment can differ significantly from individual-based ones, family travel can be distinctive from individual and other group travel. Family system theory postulates that family is an interactive system and that every member of the system affects and adapts to the rest of the system (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Family vacation, therefore, is about related individuals seeking experiences together. Such travel experience takes place away from the home environment but still within the borders of a family system. Due to the unique structure and cultural dynamics of Chinese families, family vacation as a group consumptive experience deserves explicit attention. The current study is one such attempt. It set out to examine the pursued vacation benefits and destination activity participation of Chinese family travelers.

Leisure researchers have attempted to examine the nature of leisure activities and align them with benefits (e.g., Caltabiano, 1994; Patterson & Coleman, 1996). Tourism is activity based. Linking *What do they want?* to *What do they do?* at destinations would provide baseline yet important insights into understanding the destination experience of Chinese family travelers. Of particular interest to us was the underlying dimensionality of vacation benefits sought by these family travelers. The nature of vacation benefits and the interface between these benefits and family activities were empirically assessed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family as a Consumptive Unit in Tourism

One of the most common definitions of family, by the U.S. Census Bureau, is "two or more persons living together and related by blood, marriage, or

adoption.” The definition of family varies, however, among disciplines, cultures, and times (e.g., Golics, Basra, Finlay, & Salek, 2013). According to China’s sixth national census, there were 400 million families, with the average family size reported as 3.10 in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). Although other types of families exist in China, similar to in other societies, the family structure of two parents with one child seems to be the most common.

Family is considered a major consumer segment for various types of tourism businesses, including resorts, cruises, and attractions. This important consumptive unit has not, however, received prominent attention in the tourism and hospitality literature (Carr, 2011; Obrador, 2012; Small, 2008). Despite its intense social orientation, the dominant theories and concepts in tourism are rather individualistic, that is, they tend to treat the traveler as a solitary, disembodied subject rather than as part of a social unit (Obrador, 2012). Family travelers are different from individual travelers in many ways and may not be well served by the individual-based theoretical perspectives. The tension between “the prominence of families and children in tourism” and “the blindness of academic research towards relations of domesticity and thick sociality” (p. 402) and the lack of attention paid to the social dynamics of family vacations have been noted (e.g., Obrador, 2012).

Through an extensive review of family-related studies, Obrador (2012) addressed the place of the family and its lack of visibility in tourism research. Family tourism has been featured in four streams of research in which the conceptualizations and measures have been developed largely based on Western samples. The first stream has focused on **vacation decision-making patterns and processes**, more from a managerial perspective. This line of inquiry has examined the significance of the family life cycle (Fodness, 1992), familial agreement and disagreement (Bronner & de Hoog, 2008), adaptation and resolution (Decrop & Snelders, 2004; Kang & Hsu, 2004), and influencing parties (Kozak & Karadag, 2012). Some research has specifically taken notice of children’s role in decision-making processes (e.g., Gram, 2007; Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). Family decision-making patterns have also been used as a basis for market segmentation (Kang, Hsu, & Wolfe, 2003). These studies have revealed a more egalitarian decision-making process in contemporary Western families, in which household and gender roles are being restructured (Belch & Willis, 2002). The second stream of research has moved away from the decision-making emphasis and toward a better **understanding of family vacation experience**, and a number studies have explored children’s holiday experiences and the social construction of family (e.g., Carr, 2006, 2011; Carr & Cohen, 2009; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, & Havitz, 2008; Shaw, Havitz, & Delemere, 2008; Small, 2008). Comparative studies of the perspectives of parents and children have been undertaken. For example, Carr (2006) found that the parents demonstrated a stronger desire to visit cultural, heritage, and educational-oriented destinations, whereas the adolescents tended to focus on engaging in physical activities that were fun for them. The third stream of

research pertains to a **historic perspective of family vacation** as exemplified by the studies of Bennett (1983), Inglis (2000), Löfgren (1999), Obrador (2012), Rugh (2008), and Walton (2000). The fact that family is a sustainable and lucrative segment in the travel marketplace has to do with the unique cultural connotation of the family vacation in Western society, where the longing for a family vacation is reinforced by a need for simplicity and belongingness (Obrador, 2012; Rugh, 2008). Last, **the cultural account of family photography** has been noted, and it has been considered a functional means of family bonding and identity formation (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003; Hallman & Benbow, 2007).

Much less is known about Chinese family travelers. Although most Chinese people travel with their families, researchers have traditionally ignored the family, focusing instead on individual travelers. A search in major English and Chinese academic databases revealed a paucity of information about this population. The limited existing research has addressed such topics as **family decision-making patterns** (e.g., Bai & Fu, 2011), **family life cycles and travel attitudes** (e.g., Xu, Tian, Jiang, & Wang, 2012), and **consumption-related perceptions in a festival setting** (e.g., Zhang et al., 2012). These studies seem to have unanimously called for a more localized and less “Western” approach toward understanding Chinese family travelers. Three major aspects of Chinese family life have been presented as factors contributing to the uniqueness of Chinese family travelers, justifying why specific scholarly endeavors are needed. **First, family is such a fundamental unit in Chinese society to the extent that it defines the Chinese self-identity. One is not defined as an independent but, rather, as a member of the family he or she is from and/or affiliated with.** Therefore, family values and intrafamily dynamics tend to play crucial roles in consumer choices. When traveling with family members, personal and individual-level needs are likely to yield to family-level needs, should there be a conflict (Bai & Fu, 2011). **Second, the structural and compositional uniqueness in a Chinese family deserves attention.** The Chinese connotation of family tends to go beyond the Western definition of the nuclear family and includes the extended family, such as in-laws, who may or may not cohabit with the nuclear family. It is possible that in-law parents exert significant influence on the nuclear family’s travel decision process and outcome and on its product and service preferences. **Third, propelled by an improved living standard, longer paid vacation days, and the relaxation of government regulations, Chinese families have increasingly chosen leisure travel as a means to enhance family well-being.** Unlike Western society, however, in which the family vacation has been established as a cultural tradition (Rugh, 2008), only in recent decades has the notion of vacation been gradually integrated into the modern way of family life in China. Despite the fact that Chinese families are quickly becoming a substantial consumptive unit for the tourism industry, a systematic understanding of the phenomenon of Chinese family vacation taking has yet to be established.

Family Vacation Benefits Sought

A chronological review of tourism literature reveals two major streams of research on benefits sought, mostly in terms of individual expectations and preferences. The first cluster, represented by early studies (Crompton, 1979; Tian, Crompton, & Witt, 1996), has largely focused on tangible attributes such as amenities and activities desired by tourists. Such an approach conceptualizes benefits as “improved or desired conditions of individuals” (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991, p. 4) and was mostly undertaken in destination image studies to assess tourists’ evaluations of destinations’ offerings (e.g., Um & Crompton, 1992). The second stream of research has shifted away from the tangible and attribute-based aspects and toward the intangible and psychological outcomes expected from a travel experience (Frochot, 2005; Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983). Benefits sought have been conceptualized and operationalized as similar to travel motivation, rather than visitor ratings of tangible attributes (Lehto, O’Leary, & Lee, 2002).

Built on the classic needs-based theories of Murray (1938) and Maslow (1943), benefit has been a major area of investigation due to its important role in understanding tourist behavior and choices. Benefit is closely related to travel motivation, an abstract psychological drive (Crompton, 1979; Frochot & Morrison, 2000). As a more specific representation of *What do they need?* benefits sought provide insights into the tourists’ motivation and expectation within the decision-making process (Woodside & Pitts, 1976). Although major tourist decision-making models often represent a multistage, functional process that attempts to rationally configure individual choices (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005), benefit may suggest specific interpersonal, social, and family influences and group-level needs, a key aspect the current study focuses on. According to Wang and Pfister (2008), benefits are “essentially value domains” (p. 85). Similar to perceived value, which has both economic and noneconomic domains, perceived benefit is also a multidimensional construct. It has strong emotionally charged components, as well as rationally and intellectually constructed elements. As a product of subjective interpretation, benefit can be culturally constructed and needs to be understood in a broad cultural context. A certain benefit that is interpreted as prominent in one culture may not be regarded as such in another; it frequently is viewed as more of a society- than individual-level phenomenon.

Although there has been much research related to vacation benefits sought in general (e.g., Lehto et al., 2002), knowledge of the benefits sought by families is limited. It is unclear whether benefits sought in family vacation experiences are consistent with those identified in the general tourism literature or demonstrate unique, family-related characteristics. In the Chinese literature, the importance of family leisure pursuits has been only conceptually proposed but not empirically examined. For example, Shi (1997) suggested that enhancement of family togetherness and social stability, recovery from fatigue, and development of the younger generation could be primary goals for family leisure pursuits. In the

context of middle school students, Feng (2007) argued that family travel could broaden children's horizons and enrich extracurricular experiences, especially when holistic learning is lacking in China's test-oriented atmosphere. Jiang (2005) postulated that travel can be an ideal form of family leisure, allowing for physical and psychological restoration, family cohesiveness, and self-development. Although these propositions shed light on Chinese family tourism, empirical assessment of these propositions has yet to be conducted. As family travelers may possess unique, family-related characteristics, a specific measurement needs to be established to account for the nature and dimensions of benefits sought by family vacationers. In an emerging market such as China, the question of *What do they want?* can reveal baseline and yet important information about this market segment.

Family Leisure Activities

Research on family vacation activity is nested within the realm of family leisure. Family leisure has been considered a form of "purposive" leisure that requires deliberate planning and resources (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). The existing literature has suggested several perspectives for understanding family leisure activities. Orthner (1975) conceptualized leisure activities as individual, parallel, or joint in nature. Activities shared with others, such as family members, are considered to be either parallel or joint, based on the degree of interactivity. Parallel activities are shared in nature but require minimal interaction for a successful completion. Some examples of such activities include watching TV, hunting, listening to music, or visiting a museum. Joint activities, on the other hand, require significant interaction among participants, as exemplified by playing games, visiting friends, playing in a park, or camping with others. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) categorized family leisure activities into "core" and "balance" groups. The family vacation is considered one of the balance family leisure activities, which are usually away from home, require more planning and organization, and take place less often.

Empirical studies have been undertaken to examine activity participation in family vacations in the Western setting. For example, a study by Carr (2006) with 54 parents and 66 adolescents revealed that parents desired to visit cultural, heritage, and educational-oriented destinations, whereas children pursued fun experiences filled with physical activities. By surveying 314 family members from a U.S. travel club, Lehto, Lin, Chen, and Choi (2012) noted that most popular activities consumed by the sampled families were swimming, dining in a fine restaurant, shopping for clothes, and enjoying nightlife and entertainment; it was shown that active, creative, and goal-oriented activities contributed to family interactivity and cohesion more effectively.

Very little is known about Chinese family leisure activities in general and family vacation activities specifically. The scarcity in leisure research is partially attributable to the dearth of leisure and vacation time in China because the

official work week was 48 hours until the government's 1995 decree (McNeal & Ji, 1996). The current 40-hour work week was implemented in May 1995 to allow more free time for citizens to pursue a variety of activities, in addition to house chores, which once consumed the only day off. In addition, the extended 11-day official public holidays, as a government-endorsed "holiday economy" scheme, further facilitated family getaway activities. Such changes have had a major influence on the leisure time and activities of Chinese families, which were limited, more home based, and of short duration until the 1990s (Wong, 1988). To examine Chinese children's influence on what the family does during leisure time, McNeal and Ji (1996) asked 618 third and fourth graders to draw their preferred weekend activities and then surveyed parents' perceptions of their children's choices. It was revealed that children's preferences for weekend leisure activities play an important role in family buying decisions. The activities most desired by children were outdoor playing and shopping, which seemed to be contradictory with the focus on education that parents have in mind. Yet, such inconsistency seemed to have been reconciled by the families' patronage of stationery and book stores, amusement parks, and zoos, where both sensory fun and educational needs can be satisfied. Overall, parents were willing to give in to children's requests and help them escape the confines of home by partaking in some playing while, preferably, still learning; by doing that, parents appeared to have granted the children more authority than the traditional culture would permit. Similar studies have also been conducted to explore evening and weekend family leisure activities such as watching TV and reading (Freysinger & Chen, 1993; Jin & Lou, 2006). Most of the activities examined tend to be home based, however, whereas those participated in at a destination remain largely unexplored. Because activities represent a major component of a destination experience, examination of Chinese family leisure activities at vacation destinations can be a solid first step toward establishing a baseline understanding of the Chinese family travel experience.

Study Objectives

The purpose of the present study was to enhance the understanding of Chinese family travelers by linking *What do they want?* to *What do they do?* at tourist destinations. This research had two specific objectives. First, this study attempted to explore the nature and dimensionalities of the benefits pursued by Chinese family travelers. Because benefits represent the desired outcome, dissecting the benefits of family vacation can provide an effective contextual understanding of the Chinese family vacation experience. A second objective was to identify the relationship between benefits sought and the activity participation of Chinese family travelers. Whereas researchers have attempted to showcase the linkages among benefits sought and some subsequent behavioral constructs such as destination choice, decision making, and satisfaction, the relationship between benefits sought and destination activities has yet to be addressed systematically. As

an essential component of tourism experience, activity crystallizes what a destination experience is about because it entails complex interactions between tourists and destination resources. It was hoped that knowledge of what families expect to gain and how those expectations manifest into what destination activities are preferred can yield an enriched understanding of the Chinese family travel experience and hence facilitate the provision of relevant family vacation products and services.

METHODS

Chinese family travelers were the population of interest in this study; thus, purposive sampling was used. The sample was limited to families in China who had at least one family vacation in the 2 years prior to the surveying period. Consistent with Chinese census data, nuclear families of two parents and one child were sampled. The data collection consisted of two phases. In the first phase, with the assistance of two real estate companies, self-administered surveys were distributed to 302 families in late 2011 in Hangzhou and Shanghai, two major cities in eastern China. The questionnaire was distributed face-to-face by a group of student assistants to individual households. The family members had to make a decision about which member would participate before the parent or child version of the questionnaire could be handed out. The completed questionnaires were collected by the same group of assistants.

Participation was on a voluntary basis, and only one questionnaire was completed per family. For children who took the survey on behalf of the family, some items were phrased differently. For example, *extending children's knowledge* in the questionnaire for parents was worded as *extending my knowledge* in the children's version. Due to constraints of the Institutional Review Board and other considerations, all children who completed the questionnaire were at least 18 years old, the legal adult age in China. Regardless of whether the questionnaire was completed by the child, the response represented a family-level decision. A total of 253 valid questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 83.8%. The second data collection phase was implemented in 2013 with the intent of recruiting families with younger children, who were identified as underrepresented family groups after completion of the first phase of data collection. Fifty-three families with children of elementary school age were surveyed with the assistance of an elementary school in Hangzhou, making the total number of sampled families 306. Only parents were asked to complete the questionnaire at the second stage.

The survey instrument used in this study was developed through a three-stage process. A preliminary list of items for benefits sought and destination activities was generated through an extensive review of literature related to family systems, family leisure, and family tourism. At the next stage, a panel of eight experts, including professors and graduate researchers in the tourism field in China, contributed to the refinement of the instrument, resulting in a final list of

Table 1
Activity Participation Sorted by Mean Scores

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Taking pictures and videos	3.43	1.356
Sightseeing in a big city	2.95	1.021
Dining in an inexpensive local restaurant	2.90	1.164
Buying local specialties	2.80	1.183
Visiting a natural or ecological site	2.73	1.222
Visiting a historical site	2.68	1.171
Enjoying local food and delicacies	2.67	1.276
Shopping for clothes, shoes, and jewelry	2.50	1.194
Visiting a theme or amusement park	2.48	1.029
Visiting a zoo, aquarium, or botanical park	2.45	1.017
Visiting friends and relatives	2.45	1.006
Sightseeing in a rural area	2.42	1.075
Hiking, backpacking, and mountain climbing	2.37	1.109
Shopping for art and crafts	2.23	1.118
Visiting you-pick farms and fruit picking	2.13	1.075
Visiting a museum or an art gallery	2.12	.938
Sunbathing and beach activities	2.09	1.093
Shopping for books and CDs	2.08	1.042
Dining in a fine restaurant	2.05	1.065
Shopping for toys	2.04	1.072
Swimming	2.03	1.017
Enjoying nightlife and entertainment (e.g., karaoke)	2.01	1.070
Attending a festival	1.92	.905
Visiting a farmer's market or fair	1.90	1.018
Enjoying ocean or lake cruises	1.88	1.084
Visiting health spas	1.84	1.069
Farm visits and agritourism sites	1.84	.915
Attending a sport event	1.81	.920
Visiting a convention or exhibition	1.72	.921
Canoeing and kayaking	1.67	.831
Horse riding	1.57	.853
Attending a musical or concert	1.54	.818

Note: The activity items were measured by frequency of participation on a 5-point scale (1 = *almost never*; 2 = *low frequency*; 3 = *sometimes*; 4 = *almost every time*; 5 = *every time*).

19 benefit items and 32 activity items. A complete list of activities is presented in Table 1, and the benefit items can be found in Table 2. Before the survey was launched, it was pilot-tested with 10 Chinese residents who have traveled with family on a regular basis. Based on their feedback, some measurement items were reworked for better readability.

Table 2
Dimensions of Family Vacation Benefit Sought: Factor Analysis

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)
Factor 1: Communication and Togetherness	3.78			0.883	8.167	21.919
Increasing communication with family members	3.83	1.104	.752			
Building a stronger family bond	3.83	1.111	.698			
Making memories together	3.67	1.148	.655			
Doing things together	3.65	1.148	.650			
Having fun with family members	4.07	1.013	.637			
Finding more things in common	3.60	1.184	.613			
Sharing quality time together	3.95	1.074	.609			
Respecting family members' decision	3.64	1.128	.578			
Factor 2: Shared Exploration	3.69			0.831	1.414	14.043
Experiencing a different culture	3.75	1.040	.780			
Tasting authentic local food	3.47	1.033	.701			
Sharing the same experiences with family members	3.80	1.068	.649			
Experiencing new things together	3.75	1.059	.606			
Factor 3: Escape and Relaxation	3.59			0.780	1.160	13.929
Getting away from the demands of home	3.32	1.242	.786			
Escaping from the daily routine	3.36	1.121	.784			
Getting a change from a busy job or life	3.75	1.041	.629			
Relaxing outside the home	3.93	1.053	.623			
Factor 4: Experiential Learning for Children	3.84			0.760	1.047	12.153
Broadening children's horizon	4.00	1.040	.824			
Extending children's knowledge	3.84	1.141	.708			
Children can learn about culture, history, and people	3.69	1.132	.675			
Total variance explained (%)						62.044

Note: The benefit items were measured based on a 5-point scale (1 = *never important*; 2 = *low importance*; 3 = *occasionally important*; 4 = *very important*; 5 = *always important*).

Participants of the survey were asked to respond to the survey questions based on their family vacations taken in the previous 2 years. The 19 benefit items were measured based on a 5-point scale anchored by *never important* (1) and *always important* (5). The 32 family vacation activity items were measured by frequency of participation on a 5-point scale anchored by *almost never* at 1 and *every time* at 5. In addition, the survey instrument collected demographic information (e.g., gender, age, household role, and household monthly income) and travel-related characteristics (e.g., travel frequency and destinations).

Data were analyzed using SPSS 19.0 for Windows. First, descriptive statistics were presented for benefits sought and vacation activities. Exploratory factor analysis was then performed on the 19-item measurement of benefits to identify possible underlying dimensions. At the next stage, canonical correlation analysis was used to assess the nature and magnitude of the relationship between benefits sought and vacation activities. As a multivariate technique, canonical correlation analysis simultaneously evaluates the correlation between two sets of variables. In this study, benefits sought by Chinese family travelers were treated as one set, whereas activities participated in represented the other set. Canonical correlation analysis is deemed as appropriate and especially useful when the researcher has limited a priori knowledge about whether the two sets of variables are related and how strong the relationship is (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the respondents, 24% were fathers and 34% were mothers. A large percentage (42%) identified their household role as children older than 18 years. Out of all parents, 80% of fathers and 93% of mothers reported living with children younger than 18 years; 58% of the parents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Among the children who completed the questionnaire on behalf of the family, 67% are in school or unemployed. More than half of the respondents (59%) reported their monthly household pretax income as RMB 7000 (USD \$1133) or higher. Regarding the travel-related characteristics of the respondents, the average number of family trips was three per year, and the average trip length was 4 days. Most trips (89.2%) took place outside the respondents' residing province, among which 26.9% were overseas trips. About 27% of the families have visited overseas destinations at least once. Spring was indicated as the most popular season when most families travel (42%), followed by summer (33%), autumn (19%), and winter (5%). In vacation decision making, 62.1% of the primary decision makers were parents. The five most frequently participated in family vacation activities were *taking pictures and videos* ($M = 3.43$), *sightseeing in a big city* ($M = 2.95$), *dining in inexpensive local restaurants* ($M = 2.90$), *buying local specialties* ($M = 2.76$), and *visiting a natural or ecological site* ($M = 2.73$). The five most highly rated benefits sought by family travelers were *having fun with family members* ($M = 4.07$), *broadening children's horizon* ($M = 4.00$), *sharing*

quality time together ($M = 3.95$); *children learn about different culture, history, and people* ($M = 3.69$); and *finding more things in common* ($M = 3.60$).

Factor Analysis

To assess the dimensionality of vacation benefits sought, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 19 benefit statements. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity were first conducted to determine the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis. The KMO value was calculated as 0.912, which revealed a good level of interrelations among the variables (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett’s test result was significant, indicating significant correlations among at least some of the variables in the matrix (Hair et al., 1998). Overall, the data set demonstrated that factor analysis was appropriate for the data. Principal component analysis with the Varimax rotation method was used to derive a reduced number of factors that accounted for most of the variance in the observed variables. Two major criteria considered for factor retention were scree plot and eigenvalues greater than one.

The factor analysis procedure resulted in a four-factor solution with eigenvalues ranging from 1.047 to 8.167 (Factor 1 = 8.167; Factor 2 = 1.414; Factor 3 = 1.160; and Factor 4 = 1.047) (Table 2). Items within each factor were tested for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. All four factors demonstrated reasonable alpha values (Factor 1 = .883; Factor 2 = .831; Factor 3 = .780; and Factor 4 = .760), suggesting that the dimensions are credible. The four factors together accounted for 62.044% of the total variance. The first factor, labeled *Communication and Togetherness*, contains the largest number of items. It consists of eight items, such as *increasing communication with family members* and *building a stronger family bond*. This dimension highlights the benefits desired of vacation for enhancing family communications and cohesiveness. The next factor, *Shared Exploration*, contains items such as *experiencing a different culture* and *sharing the same experiences with family members*, emphasizing the desire for a mutual experience of exploring unfamiliar and novel settings through vacation. The third factor of *Escape and Relaxation* represents the desired benefits of escaping one’s daily routine and obtaining relaxation with items such as *getting away from the demands of home* and *escaping from the routine life*. The fourth factor, *Experiential Learning for Children*, which includes items such as *broadening children’s horizon* and *extend children’s knowledge*, pertains to the benefits sought to fulfill children’s educational needs through the family vacation.

Canonical Correlation Analysis of Benefits and Activities

Using canonical correlation analysis, the current study examined the relationship between benefits sought and activity participation of Chinese family travelers. Before conducting the analysis, baseline statistical assumptions including

sample size, linearity, and multicollinearity were checked to ensure the appropriateness of canonical correlation analysis for this study. Four separate analyses were performed between the benefit items of each of the four benefit factors and the 32 activities. Each benefit dimension was treated as one set, and activity items constituted the other set. The multivariate tests revealed that only the first pair of canonical variates in all four analyses accounted for a statistically significant portion of the relationship between the benefits sought and activity participation (at $\alpha = .05$, all redundancy indices $> .01$), with $F(256, 1712.69) = 1.39809, p < .0001$; $F(128, 885) = 1.29891, p = .02$; $F(128, 885.80) = , p < .0001$; and $F(96, 668.45) = , p < .0001$, respectively (Table 2).

The first canonical variate pair shows a significant relationship between *taking pictures and videos* and four items under the factor of Communication and Togetherness: *having fun with family members* (.78), *respecting family members' decision* (.75), *finding more things in common* (.67), and *sharing quality time together* (.44). In other words, these four benefit items are positively associated with *taking pictures and videos* (.56). This variate indicates that the pursued benefits of enhanced communication and togetherness seem to be related to the activity of digitally capturing and recording family trip experiences.

The second canonical variate reveals a significant relationship between Shared Exploration and activity participation. Specifically, the benefit items of *experiencing a different culture* (.94), *sharing the same experiences with family members* (.71), *tasting authentic local food* (.65), and *experiencing new things together* (.64) are all positively linked to *visiting a historical site* (.65), *shopping for art and crafts* (.54), *enjoying local tastes and delicacies* (.48), and *dining in an inexpensive local restaurant* (.46). In addition, the activity of *taking pictures and videos* (.44) is correlated with the four benefit items as well. This suggests that the sought benefit of sharing and exploring new things together is matched with a set of family activities that contribute to both intellectual exploration and utilitarian gratification.

The third significant canonical variate pair consists of two benefit items, *escaping from the routine life* (.75) and *relaxing* (.62), both from the factor of Escape and Relaxation, and two activity items, *canoeing and kayaking* and *farm visits and agritourism sites* (.42). This result suggests that families who consider escaping and relaxation as important vacation benefits are more likely to participate in physical activities offered in outdoor, nature-based environments.

In the fourth canonical variate, a significant relationship exists between the three items in the benefit dimension of Experiential Learning for Children and seven activity items. More specifically, the three benefit items of *extending children's knowledge* (.92), *broadening children's horizon* (.67), and *children can learn about culture, history, and people* (.46) appear to pair with seven activities items, namely, *visiting a historical site* (.63), *visiting a natural or ecological site* (.62), *taking pictures and videos* (.58), *shopping for art and crafts* (.54), *dining in an inexpensive local restaurant* (.51), *enjoying local tastes and delicacies* (.50), and *buying local specialties and souvenirs* (.48). These results show that

Table 3
Overall Results for Canonical Correlation Analysis

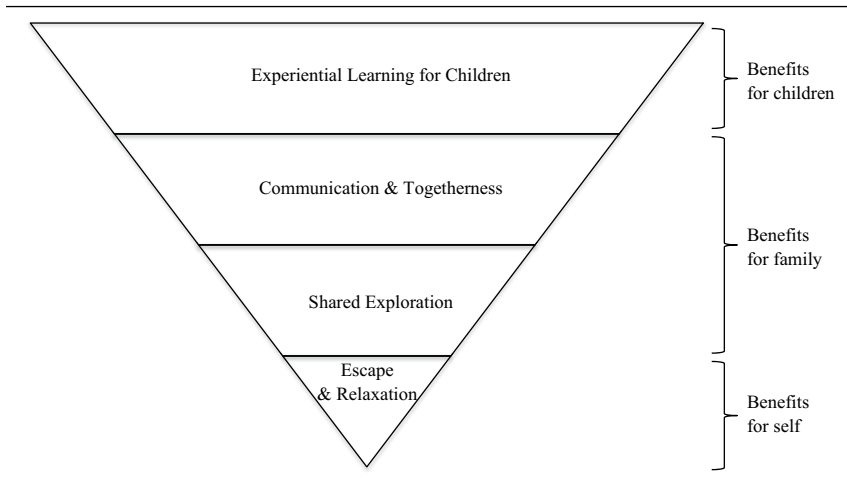
	Eigenvalue	Canonical Correlation	Squared Canonical Correlation	F Statistic	Probability
Canonical Function 1	.40451	.53666	.28801	1.39809	< .0001
Tests of Significance	Value	F Value	Num DF	Den DF	Probability
Wilks' lambda	1.31679	1.38537	256	1800.00	< .0001
Pillai's trace	1.66715	1.40828	256	1730.00	< .0001
Hotelling-Lawley trace	.22850	1.39809	256	1712.69	< .0001
Roy's greatest root	.28801				
Canonical Function 2	.41641	.54221	.29399	1.29891	.02
Tests of Significance	Value	F Value	Num DF	Den DF	Probability
Wilks' lambda	.60957	1.26415	128	900.00	.033
Pillai's trace	.77525	1.33550	128	882.00	.012
Hotelling-Lawley trace	.50444	1.29891	128	885.00	.020
Roy's greatest root	.29399				
Canonical Function 3	.28493	.47090	.22174	1.52314	< .0001
Tests of Significance	Value	F Value	Num DF	Den DF	Probability
Wilks' lambda	.71571	1.53225	128	900.00	< .0001
Pillai's trace	.87852	1.51340	128	882.00	< .0001
Hotelling-Lawley trace	.45322	1.52314	128	885.80	< .0001
Roy's greatest root	.22174				
Canonical Function 4	.43832	.55204	.30475	1.87818	< .0001
Tests of Significance	Value	F Value	Num DF	Den DF	Probability
Wilks' lambda	.62996	1.85768	96	675.00	< .0001
Pillai's trace	.82255	1.89928	96	665.00	< .0001
Hotelling-Lawley trace	.48925	1.87818	96	668.45	< .0001
Roy's greatest root	.30475				

benefit items relating to children's intellectual development and holistic learning are associated with mostly culture- and nature-based activities, as well as some consumptive activities at the destinations (Table 3).

Understanding Benefits Sought

The identified benefits appear to encompass four levels, as illustrated by Figure 1. The primary benefit sought by Chinese family travelers is to enrich children's learning and life experience. Most families seem to seek a strong child-centric focus during leisure travel. This pattern can be understood in light of the characteristics of the Chinese parenting style. Researchers (e.g., McNeal & Ji, 1996) have noted that Chinese parents place high importance on enabling children to venture beyond the limits of the school environment and broaden horizons and life perspectives. Parents are willing to invest based on children's

Figure 1
Pursued Benefits of Chinese Family Travelers



needs, especially if they are education related, whereas children exert substantial influences on families' consumptive choices. For instance, historical and cultural literacy has been deemed as an essential component in Chinese children's intellectual development (Jiang, 2004). Vacation, therefore, serves as a functional means to such ends.

Although the first level of pursued benefits seems to revolve around children, the second and third levels seem to address the need of the entire family. Vacation is expected to be a conduit of effective family communication and bonding. It also provides an opportunity for family to explore and experience the novelty of a destination and engage in activities that are different from the home setting. Such roles of family leisure travel in enhancing cohesion, interactions, and relationships within the family system have been similarly noted in previous studies (e.g., Lehto, Choi, Lin, & MacDermid, 2009; Lehto et al., 2012). In the Chinese family context, they seem to be addressed to a lesser degree than the children-centric needs. The fourth level of pursued benefits appears to pertain to individual well-being. In addition to pursuing children- and family-oriented beneficial outcomes, family members seem to seek personal relaxation outside the home environment. They expect leisure travel to be a time off from the routine duties and obligations. Although escaping and relaxation have been consistently identified as a baseline benefit sought in the general tourism literature (Pearce, 2011), such desires seem to be emphasized by Chinese family travelers to a lesser degree, as indicated by their relatively lower overall mean scores. Overall, the four identified levels present a holistic view of desired benefits that intertwine the children-centric needs, self-based needs, as well as needs of the family as a whole. It needs to be noted, however,

that the ordering of benefits was based on the overall mean value of each benefit construct and needs to be further substantiated empirically by future research endeavors.

Linkages Between Benefits Sought and Activity Participation

Among the significant canonical variates, linkages that are distinct to the Chinese context warrant deliberations. The prominence of picture and video taking as a vacation activity for Chinese family travelers is evident from both its high mean value and its significant correlations with benefit factors. Picture taking has been noted as a distinctive characteristic of Asian tourists and can be understood as a core interpretation of the tourist's role and a very tangible and observable behavior of these market segments (Pearce, 2011). It is not surprising that the Chinese group tourists have been described as "sleeping on the bus, photographing off the bus" (You, 2012). To Chinese family travelers, taking pictures seems to be more than just a synonym of touring; it is a multifunctional activity that relates to many desired benefits. The results of this research show that the act of taking photos and videos reinforces the sense of family, seals the moment of shared experiences, and plays a role in fulfilling children's learning needs. The process of picture taking represents an immersion into the destination environment (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and forms an important aesthetic or escapist experience for family travelers. The pictures and videos taken would become lasting mementos that help tell a family story and help one reminisce about the good times shared on a trip.

Another notable observation is that the benefit-seeking and vacation activity choices of Chinese families may be influenced to some degree by the child-centric and education-centric disposition of the culture. Chinese families appear to resort to vacation as a holistic learning experience for children. The only-child generation's needs and experiences can be front and central in the eyes of Chinese parents. Zhang and Carrasquillo (1995) found that in addition to the influence of traditional cultural values, Chinese parents are renowned for their willingness to sacrifice for the sake of their children's education. The test-oriented educational system in China appears, however, to inhibit holistic learning (Zhao, 2007). Therefore, Chinese parents seem to deliberately seek informal educational platforms such as vacations in which children can see beyond books and learn about history, society, and nature. In the vacation setting, the education-oriented needs seem to manifest in both the learning component of *to see and contemplate* and the entertainment component of *to do*. This suggests that Chinese parents' child-centric practice extends from the home environment to the vacation sphere, in which parents expect children to play and learn. The active pursuit of holistic experience as observed in this study seems to corroborate Wolf's argument (1970) that for Chinese families, training the children to become the future adult members of the family and society was seen as a basic function of the family.

CONCLUSION

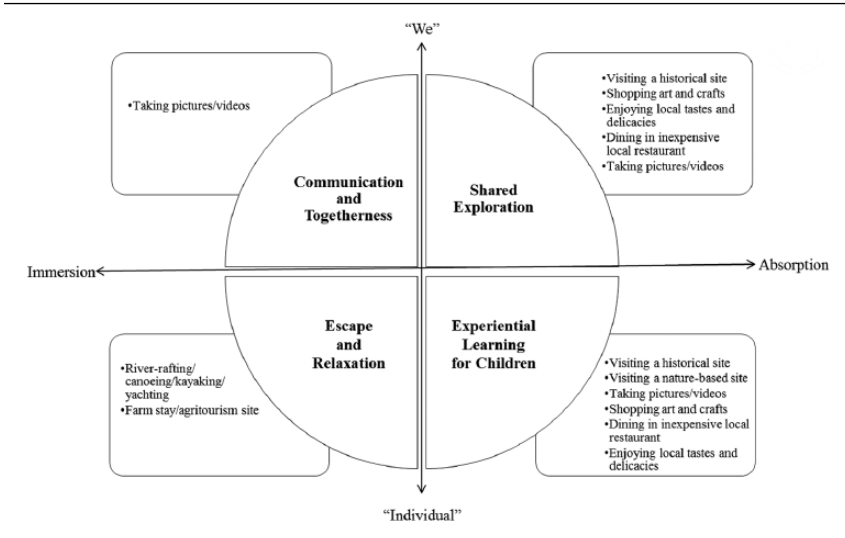
The significance of family to one's identity and the strong distinction between family insiders and nonfamily outsiders, as anchored in the Confucian doctrines, have made family the most important socioeconomic unit of Chinese society (Doctoroff, 2012). Little is known, however, about Chinese family travelers, whereas the existing knowledge base illustrates an individualistic view of tourism and fails to account for the social dynamics of the family. This study initiated a pioneering empirical inquiry of Chinese family travelers by generating insights into their needs and experiences. The discovery of family vacation benefits sought dimensions and the linkages between benefits and destination activities can lend both theoretical and pragmatic ramifications.

The current study makes several contributions to the body of knowledge about the Chinese travel market. The first contribution rests in the identification of the four benefit dimensions among Chinese family travelers. The pursued benefits of Chinese family travelers reveal three levels of needs: those of children, the family as a whole, and the self. Although the coexistence of parent- and child-level needs may be similar to previous qualitative findings in the Western context (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), Chinese families exhibit much more pronounced child-centric tendencies. This finding sheds light on the changing and paradoxical nature of the Chinese family and its impact on tourism, especially how the social phenomenon of the "little emperor" syndrome plays a role in family vacations. Because the benefits sought by tourists provide insights into the underlying reasons of actual consumption and subsequent behaviors (Woodside & Pitts, 1976), the discovery of the three-level, four-dimensional structure of family vacation benefits sought sheds light on Chinese family travelers by illustrating both collective interests and individual-level desires. The second contribution lies in the identification of the linkages between the pursued benefits and destination activities of Chinese family travelers. This research empirically aligned the psychological aspect of family travel (as manifested in *What do they want?*) with the behavioral aspect (as displayed in activity participation), and such alignment provided useful insights into the destination experience preferences of Chinese family travelers. Specifically, the four validated associations may serve as an initial framework for future studies that aim to better understand this market segment.

A Framework of Family Vacation Benefits and Activities

By dissecting the associations between destination activity participation and benefits sought by Chinese families, a framework of family vacation benefits and activities was proposed to elucidate Chinese family vacation behavioral dynamics (Figure 2). The examination of the benefit dimensions together with destination activities yields interesting insights. The pursued vacation benefits and activity characteristics can be understood using a two-dimensional plane along two continuums: I–We and Immersion–Absorption.

Figure 2
Family Vacation Benefits and Activities



A closer scrutiny of the family vacation benefits sought suggests that although the four identified benefit dimensions appear to overlap with baseline benefits sought by the general travel population, they also demonstrate family-level benefit pursuits. Escape and Relaxation seems to be more individual based, whereas Experiential Learning for Children is other-directed to the parents but self-directed to the children; both dimensions can be understood as individual-level vacation benefits. Communication and Togetherness and Shared Exploration are more family-oriented factors, however, stressing benefits that are commonly pursued at the family level. These two benefit dimensions seem to pertain to the *we* perspective rather than the *I* perspective. The existence of the *we* perspective differentiates the family vacation from individual travel in that one of the main purposes of spending time together is to promote family well-being and expand children's knowledge and horizon. This can be interpreted in light of the *crescive bond*, which signifies a durable family bond that can be reinforced throughout time and space (Lehto et al., 2009). Shared experiences and memories, as enabled by the family vacation, help nurture having a collective sense of family and thinking in terms of *we* instead of *I*. This concurs with previous propositions in the study of Obrador (2012) that a family vacation represents a complex, joint leisure pursuit characterized by thick sociality.

The correlations between family vacation benefits and activities can be understood in light of the concepts of absorption and immersion (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Absorption experience is defined as "occupying a person's attention by bringing the experience into the mind," whereas immersion is about

“becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself” (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 31). The difference between the two rests in the level of involvement because immersion implies a more intense indulgence in the sights, sounds, and smells of the surrounding environment. For example, tourists can absorb the entertaining and educational experiences at a destination and immerse in the aesthetic or escapist experiences (Oh, Fiore, & Jeong, 2007, p. 120). The four dimensions of family vacation benefits sought and related activities can be situated along the absorption–immersion axis. On one hand, Shared Exploration and Experiential Learning for Children tend to align with the absorption experience. The activities related to these two dimensions seem to open opportunities for new knowledge and experiences for all family members or for children explicitly. For example, visiting a historical site and shopping for art and crafts seem to contribute to intellectual enrichment by allowing a family to appreciate and learn about history. Savoring local delicacies, by contrast, tends to speak to more direct and bodily enjoyment. These can be understood as the absorption dimension, in which tourists are absorbed by consuming both the entertaining and educational offerings of a destination.

On the other hand, Communication and Togetherness as well as Escape and Relaxation appear to attest to the immersive aspects of a destination experience of family travelers. The vacation environment has been found to be restorative in that it contributes to one’s physiological and psychological balance (Lehto, 2012). A retreat from the daily routine and an immersion in the destination environment help relieve unhappiness, arouse positive attitudes toward life, and enable vacationers to return with a better sense of well-being (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1982). Bearing general similarities to travelers in known Western studies, the Chinese family travelers seem to expect and welcome the opportunity to escape from their fast-paced life by immersing in nature-related activities, including water sports and farm visits. Such relaxing environments allow for a joint getaway in which the activities of simply appreciating the scenery and taking pictures and videos seem to contribute to the functionality and sociability of a family unit.

Managerial Implications

Because China’s basic societal unit is the family rather than the individual (Yau, 1988), and family consumption in leisure and travel is spiraling upward (Lou & Xu, 2008), understanding family as a consumptive unit is especially pertinent for destinations. The outcomes of this study provide practical insights for destination marketers looking to tap into this segment. Marketing strategies should be aligned with three separate and yet somewhat intertwining aspects of vacation benefits sought, including child-centric learning and experience, family-level interactions, and personal-level relaxation. First, the changing nature of the Chinese family and its implications for tourism are highly relevant. Given the child-centric Chinese family reality, an educational dimension may be

explicitly incorporated into destination experience design and highlighted in marketing communications. Destinations can consider featuring itineraries with well-known folkloric and historic narratives and experiential episodes. Visits to heritage sites associated with legendary figures or past events are examples of this (Masberg & Silverman, 1996). Such marketing efforts may be particularly appealing to parents seeking extracurricular learning opportunities for their children. For example, illustrative, informative stories from tour guides about the past and present of the sites will be welcomed and appreciated. In addition, learning-while-playing programs can be attractive.

The tension between an individualistic view of tourism and the social reality of the family holiday deserves explicit managerial attention. Although most people travel with their families, both tourist and hospitality studies have traditionally ignored the family, preferring instead to focus on individual travelers and group tours. Like in many other places, the Chinese family vacation is not just about a group of individuals visiting a destination; it is more about the family. The social nature of the family holiday requires managers to think beyond just a collection of individual wills and care for this unique consumptive unit. As such, our study findings are highly relevant. Because family travelers expect to cultivate a sense of togetherness while enjoying family time, vacation experiences should be designed to accommodate family-level needs. Destinations may offer a variety of family-friendly activities that can engage all family members. Considering the family togetherness needs along with the strong children's learning needs expressed, it seems that experiences encompassing both elements of education and entertainment should be effective in gratifying both children and parents. Last, findings of this research seem to suggest the restorative and stress-relieving roles of a destination environment. For family travelers seeking relaxation, a rural setting may provide a relaxing, therapeutic vacation for each member and yet a learning experience for the children, especially considering that the current family traveling population is predominantly urban residents (Guo & Hu, 2012).

The implications of our findings may well extend beyond the tourism domain and inform public policy making. Vacations have been acknowledged as an important means to contribute to modern family life "as an opportunity for productive and beneficial family bonding" (Carr, 2011, p. 21). Shared leisure experiences have been shown to play an important role in conditioning relational dynamics such as the cohesiveness, adaptability, and resilience of a family unit (Hornberger, Zabriskie, & Freeman, 2010; Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause, 2007; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Successful management of the family vacation, a unique "on-the-move" form of family leisure, would in many ways lead to beneficial family outcomes in contemporary Chinese society. Results from this study demonstrated that benefits pursued during family vacations may coincide with many aspects of family life in general, including relationship, education, family legacy, and search for continuity. In fact, the essential role of vacation in family welfare has been increasingly recognized in China, demonstrated by the

revised vacation policy to spread holidaymaking throughout the year and accommodate family gatherings. Many national public holidays, including the Spring Festival, Tomb Sweeping Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival, commemorate and celebrate family heritage.

Overall, the study calls for explicit managerial and public attention to the Chinese family segment, a fast-growing one to both domestic and international destinations (*China News*, 2013). As evinced in this research, this population exhibits unique needs, desires, and preferences for a quality time spent together during vacation. Thus, the generic, undifferentiated destination experiences designed for mass tourists may not be able to meet the needs of family travelers. The benefits desired as demonstrated in the current study need to be addressed in vacation product design to provide the greatest rewards to Chinese family travelers.

Limitations and Directions of Future Research

The Chinese travel market is quickly growing in size and sophistication (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010). The conventionally held assumptions of organized mass tours being the dominant travel mode and sightseeing being the main focus of the Chinese tourist experience are being challenged. Chinese tourists have become more independent in their travel style, and the preferred experiences for different market segments are becoming more diverse. These market tendencies demand a more refined investigation of Chinese market characteristics. To that end, this research is timely. This study, however, bears limitations that need to be acknowledged and points to future research directions that need to be addressed.

First, given the fact that this study depends on a structured survey, the social and cultural dynamics of the family vacation may not be captured fully. This study does not, however, presuppose an individual-based, rational mode of family vacation behavior. The family unit was studied as a whole, and the construction and development of measurement items in this study were drawn from prior qualitative investigations of family vacations (e.g., Carr, 2006; Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Future research needs to explore the more social and cultural dimensions of the family vacation. That will allow a much fuller and deeper understanding of family sociality.

The second concern is that the survey was executed in the more developed areas of China, where residents have greater financial means. Therefore, the benefits sought and activities identified may not capture all possible family vacation needs and experiences. Third, activities are setting specific because the same activities could be conducted in different destination settings. Due to their uniqueness, activities were not conceptually grouped into certain subdimensions. As a result, the present study preserved the original variance of activities variables without further abstraction. Future empirical research is encouraged to zoom in on destination activities and explore the potential dimensionalities.

Fourth, the ratings on activity items tend to be close to the midpoint of the 5-point scale. This has to do with the Chinese tendency to use the middle

response categories on ratings scales, as suggested in previous empirical research (Harzing, 2006). Compared to other cultures, Chinese respondents tended to be more reserved, rather than overly endorsing or elaborate, when using rating scales. To address such limitations of measurement, future empirical validation could benefit from a comparison of scale reporting between 5-point scales and 7-point scales.

Fifth, the activity items were adapted from existing family vacation research and localized through a panel of Chinese tourism experts and a series of pilot tests. In addition to the listed activity items, respondents were also asked to indicate other activities not listed in a section titled *other*. The open-ended responses were content analyzed; however, the section did not have a significant, new category emerging. The overall conservative response in activity participation may suggest that Chinese travelers are more pensive and in a more reflective mode while on vacation. Zhang, Gu, and Kavanaugh (2005) indicated that most destination offerings in China are sightseeing oriented and that the majority of tourists take part in organized tours. They tend to sample the vacation more through sightseeing in multiple places, rather than experiencing it in a more recreational way. In the current study, the activity items were measured by frequency of participation instead of intensity, which is another important measure of activity participation. Future research needs to be done to develop alternative measures to capture activity intensity and not just frequency, as well as examine relations among activity frequency, intensity, and experience satisfaction. In addition to an observational approach, a phenomenological approach can also be an alternative to further understand tourist activity participation and travel experiences. Such further empirical evidence would provide insights to practitioners.

Sixth, it would also be a logical extension to validate the findings from the current study among different types of families, based on the presence or absence of male or female children and on different children's ages, as well as among different family trips such as domestic versus outbound travel. Along similar lines, comparative studies between Chinese family travelers and travelers of other nationalities represent an additional meaningful avenue for future research. Last, due to financial constraints, the study was unable to develop a more sophisticated design to address perspectives from different household roles. Future studies are encouraged to compare and contrast the vacation experience among the different members of the family (e.g., the mother, father, and children).

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