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# Searching for prestige: motivations and managerial implications of Chinese campus tourists

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# Searching for prestige: motivations and managerial implications of Chinese campus tourists

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**ABSTRACT**

While changes in society continue to inform understandings of what leisure is and how it manifests itself, the emergence of Chinese outbound tourists, with specific motivations, travel styles and leisure choices are having powerful impacts on multiple host destinations. While university campuses have long been marked as visitor attractions in China, this study explores the motivations and implications of outbound Chinese tourists visiting university campuses abroad for leisure. On site qualitative interviews took place with 25 fully independent Chinese tourists at three campuses in Seoul, South Korea and a campus in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The study results found that Chinese visitors mark specific university campuses as attractions and are motivated to visit because of their prestige, by novelty and exploration, emotion and nostalgia and learning and knowledge seeking. This study argues that campus tourism may be difficult to develop and manage as a well-defined product that meets the needs of Chinese tourists, university governors and university stakeholders. The study explores the implications for universities and recommends universities begin a critical evaluation of prestige markers and especially those markers present in the Chinese cultural, pop-culture and (social) media context, which may be counterproductive to the primary mission of universities.

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## Introduction

Since the late 1970s, as its market and society opened, China has been transformed from a closed socialist economy to an urban state and a global economic force with an aspirational middle class that is predicted to increase to 480 million by 2030 (Leung, 2016). Tourism scholars have sought to understand the Chinese middle classes' consumptive habits and behaviours, given outbound tourist growth has led to economic, political, and socio-cultural impacts across the globe (Connell & McManus, 2019). While 169.21 million outbound trips were made by Chinese tourists in 2019, numbers are expected to increase to 259 million by 2030 (Euromonitor International, 2019), questions remain, as to whether outbound tourists reflect Western ideas of touristic consumption and behaviour. Connell and McManus (2019) suggest that given Chinese tourist expectations, attitudes, perceptions, and practices may differ, existing theories and models from within Western literature may not provide insight and understandings that fully capture the deep-seated socio-cultural values underpinning Chinese tourist motivations and their leisure practices. As studies suggest Chinese tourists mark places as tourist attractions differently (Connell et al., 2021), a more sophisticated understanding of Chinese tourist practices at popular destinations is critical. One growing practice is campus tourism.

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While there are growing reports of a Chinese tourist presence at university campuses around the globe (McManus et al., 2021), China has already experienced a campus tourism boom (Li et al., 2021). While campus visitation in the Western world is largely centred on educational and sports elements, campus tourism is a popular touristic activity in China (Mangi et al., 2019). While it might be somewhat of a cultural stereotype to suggest Chinese cultural norms have always placed foremost importance on education, accumulated demand for university education exploded in the early 1980s as President Deng Xiaoping accelerated the pace of expansion in the domestic tertiary education sector (Gu et al., 2007). Enrolment expanded alongside funding for key subject areas, teaching and university facilities, and campus infrastructure (Ngok & Guo, 2008). As Chinese families are encouraged to prioritise higher education (Wang, 2010), there were 2,914 colleges and universities in mainland China by 2017, with over 20 million students. Today, many of these universities, such as Wuhan, Xiamen, Zhejiang, Suzhou, Sichuan, Peking and Tsinghua receive tens of thousands of visitors a year (Bowen, 2018; Jianxi, 2017). With campus visitation by Chinese tourists increasingly visible in Asia, North America, and Europe, little is known about the motivations of fully independent Chinese tourists visiting university campuses abroad in educational, leisure and tourism studies literature. Given the over emphasis of quantitative motivational research, there are few qualitative insights into the motivations, experiences, and aspirations of Chinese tourists (Connell & McManus, 2019). This paper explores the development of campus tourism, before isolating the motivational components of 25 independent Chinese tourists visiting campuses in Seoul, South Korea and Chiang Mai, Thailand. The paper then explores the meaning of campus tourism for Chinese tourists and the implications for universities and suggests a future research agenda.

## Universities and campus tourism

Campus tourism has long been highly visible in China and is often integrated into institutional governance strategies that seek to achieve effective pairings between the tourism sector and university missions. The emergent visibility of Chinese campus tourists outside China, however, remains at risk of misunderstanding, mirth and even complaint (Yorke, 2017) as the primary mission of universities is to teach, research, and promote 'value' for the student as consumer (Woodall et al., 2014). However, as universities embrace a 'third mission' (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1997; Mahrl & Pausits, 2011), they are embracing social and/or enterprising activities (Montesinos et al., 2008) that include visitor infrastructure and touristic activities. Universities are exploiting campus facilities and heritage to diversify income sources, to create civic engagement and support academic events. Campus spaces, events and activities include short-term courses (e.g. summer schools, language courses), academic exchanges, activities for prospective students and conferences (Ager, 2016), as well as museums, theatres, art galleries and libraries for university and public use (Kozak, 2016; Ritchie, 2003). To succeed in educational, cultural, youth and conference tourism, universities have sought to develop more competitive positions in various market segments (Hearn, 2006; Veloutsou & Chreppas, 2015). While many of these segments are associated with lifelong learning and reflect a social third mission, universities are now active agents that employ multi-functional facilities to appeal to broader market segments as part of an enterprising third mission (Wright & Fu, 2015).

Universities are highly active in utilising tourism imageries and representations of leisure in branding and marketing strategies (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006) as they seek to differentiate themselves in various markets and segments (Barnett, 2011). The language of leisure and tourism can be found in promotion channels used by university marketers, from their websites, to student recruitment brochures and social media platforms (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Shubert, 2007). Destination attributes such as attractions, and cultural and social life are a key element in university marketing, as they provide a powerful advantage in achieving institutional objectives, such as

attracting prospective students and building a university brand (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). Leisure and tourism attributes are recognised as intangible pull factors for students, academics, and visitors (Chapleo, 2009; Lam & Ariffin, 2019).

In terms of touristic enterprises, universities are 'involved in many markets and are multi-product organisations with a potentially ubiquitous number of consumers' (Enders & van Vught, 2007, p. 25) and have sought to develop marketing competencies beyond communication with prospective students (Molesworth et al., 2010). Universities, for example, are encouraging student exchanges (Stone & Petrick, 2013), the VFR market (Kashiwagi et al., 2018) and alumni (Gibson et al., 2003). Universities are also developing full-service campuses that include visitor and tourism amenities (Hay, 2020; Powell, 2017), creating spaces and facilities where local people can exercise, meet, or eat (Albino, 2015) and/or providing conference, meeting, and training facilities. Universities are also developing special interest tourism programmes for cultural tourists and supporting tourism, hospitality, and leisure programme students through the development of training hotels and restaurants (Hay, 2020; King & Tang, 2020).

Destination marketing organisations and destination authorities also recognise that universities have the power to attribute a brand personality by influencing associations made to the brand of a destination (Brandt & Pahud De Mortanges, 2011). The reputational capital of universities is linked to the brand strategies, place marketing and tactical messaging of towns, cities, regions, and countries seeking creatives, tourists, investors, knowledge workers, capital inflows and socio-economic development (Halegoua, 2020). As universities engage in marketing collaboration with national and regional tourism organisations (Bramwell & Lane, 2003) and tourism business at different scales and spheres (Popescu, 2012), they have become key drivers of inbound movement, fabricators of destination image and co-creators in place branding (Albino, 2015). Few universities, however, have sought to engage directly in facilitating or managing leisure tourism on their campuses or developing strategies/business models that includes an acceptance of general tourists. This may be because few universities can generate their own heritage or UNESCO landmarks, such as the University of Coimbra (Portugal) and are not located in UESCO heritage locations such as Durham (England) or Heidelberg (Germany).

Regardless of any intent, universities outside these areas are becoming 'marked (tourist) places' (打卡点; Connell et al., 2021). For example, Chinese tourists began visiting Ewha University in Seoul, Korea after been recognised as one of 'Nine Tourist Attractions of Korea' by a Chinese TV show (Ahn, 2015), while the University of Hong Kong saw greater tourists numbers after Chinese travel agents began offering university tours (Mok & Leung, 2019). Universities around the world are now part of public media representations and profiled on Chinese social media platforms and apps and are graded and commented on with a proliferation of information, containing expectations, visual representations, perceptions, and memories from tourists. While highly visible in many campuses around the world, and often noted by local press, the motivations of overseas independent tourists visiting universities remains unexplored, with research focused on international student-institution choice, preferences, and behaviour. Within China, a small body of case studies on campus visitation (Li et al., 2021; Mangi et al., 2019; Wei, 2009; Xiao-Ping, Li-Ping, and Yong-Bin, 2017; Zhao, 2017; Zhi-Gui, 2011) have not explored motivations, while Connell et al. (2021) focused only on the role of social media and popular culture in Chinese tourists visiting the University of Sydney.

## Methods

Given the scale and scope of outbound Chinese tourism, as well as their unique travel and leisure behaviours, a qualitative approach was chosen to fill a knowledge gap about a growing attraction choice, and an emergent leisure phenomenon. The choice also reflects the lack of insight into the leisure practice of Chinese tourists abroad and the need for a more critically reflexive *Leisure Studies* (Rowe, 2015). While statistics show that Thailand and Korea are popular destinations for Chinese

Table 1. Research Sites.

| Research Sites (Universities refer to all institutions of higher education). | |
|---|---|
| Ewha Womans University | Founded in 1886 by American missionary Mary F. Scranton, Ewha is South Korea's first educational institute for women. |
| Sogang University | A private research university established in 1960 by the Wisconsin Province of the Society of Jesus. |
| Yonsei University | Established in January 1957, Yonsei University is a private research university and a member of the 'SKY' universities, along with Seoul National University and Korea University. |
| Chiang Mai University (CMU) | A public research university in northern Thailand founded in 1964. It is located on a 725-acre campus. |

outbound tourists, four universities (Table 1) were chosen as research sites because are noted 'marked places' online, in social media and Chinese language guidebooks. Given contextuality is important in research (Connell & McManus, 2019), the authors explored the boom in domestic and overseas domestic campus tourism, before choosing Seoul and Chiang Mai as research locations. The fieldwork took place prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent restrictions on Chinese outbound tourists. Prior to COVID-19, the three Seoul universities were open to the public, and do not explicitly promote or manage visiting tourists. Chiang Mai University (CMU) was purposefully chosen as a site, as it is a popular marked tourist site and has developed a managed tourist experience, by requiring tourists pay for a guided tour on a shuttle bus (60 Baht/$2). After ethical approval, the authors hired and trained a Mandarin speaking assistant in Seoul and Chiang Mai to interview mainland visitors who were in the act of visiting one of three Seoul campuses and the Chiang Mai University campus during the spring of 2018. Fifteen informants were interviewed in Seoul and ten in Chiang Mai for between 40 and 50 minutes. Informants were drawn through convenience purposive sampling, with those in Chiang Mai interviewed after their guided tour. All informants were independent tourists from China, aged between 23 and 32 years and in full employment.

While campus tourism abroad has seen a relatively modest increase in scholarly focus (Connell et al., 2021; McManus et al., 2021), there is minimal empirical research related to their motivations, especially using qualitative approaches. There may be a wide range of motivations that motivate tourists to visit a university campus, with motivation referring to 'a state of need, a condition that serves as a driving force to display different kinds of behaviour toward certain types of activities, developing preferences, arriving at some expected satisfactory outcome' (Backman et al., 1995, p. 17). The decision to visit a university as part of broader touristic break is a directed action, triggered by a desire to meet a need. Many motivation studies are conceptually grounded in the work of Graham Dann (1977, 1981). They include the push and pull model (Crompton, 1979) and the escape – seek dichotomy (Iso-Ahola, 1982). This study takes a constructivist perspective in exploring visitor motivations and assumes that motivations are socially constructed by the Chinese tourists own understanding, perceptions, and interpretations.

While various motivational measurement scales have been developed, tested, and validated in relation to visiting specific tourist attractions, western motivational scales are often misapplied or unsuitable, given the specific cultural values of Chinese outbound tourists (Jiang, et al., 2019). As literature indicates cultural influences on motivation (Walker & Wang, 2008), a qualitative method was adopted to access the population of interest, enable the collection of data, and determine motivational factors. While many motivational studies use the framework of push and pull factors, which separates inner-driven needs (push factors), and outer-directed external norms (pull factors; Gnoth, 1997), this study follows Crompton (1979) who considers motivation as a single construct. A semi-structured interview approach to data collection sought to contextualise the specific discursive situation, with informant responses and stories accepted as representative of Chinese campus tourists. The core question, 'why did you visit this campus?', and further probing 'storytelling' questions sought to explore the emerging motivators (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Indirect

questions using the third person were also employed, such as 'why do you think Chinese people visit universities when travelling abroad?' (Kvale, 2008) as well as questions such as 'what impressed you most on campus?' and 'could you please tell me a story about something you experienced here?'.

In a process called 'translation – back translation', the interview data was translated and transcribed into English, and then translated into simplified Chinese to ensure accuracy. Interview records were then transcribed into Microsoft Word documents, and imported into MAXQDA 2018, a software programme designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data. Given the lack of previous motivation studies in this area, the data were analysed using a deductive thematic analysis technique (Kuckartz, 2014). Using the six-phase procedure suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the transcript data were examined, and initial codes were identified and refined by the authors. Quotations and other content in the records relating to motivation were coded and classified into seven candidate motivational themes (Guest et al., 2012). Seeking internal homogeneity – external heterogeneity (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the proposed themes were inter-rater checked by a second researcher analysing the same data. While similar themes emerged, extracts that fitted into multiple themes were collapsed into higher order themes and new candidate themes were generated. Some extracts were removed as stronger extracts that demonstrated each theme were utilised. This process continued until there was a consensus between the authors about four distinct themes. These were prestige, novelty and exploration, emotion and nostalgia and learning and knowledge. Each theme's name was chosen to reflect the data and extant literature. Given our ontological position and epistemological approach could be described as 'constructivist', and is informed by participatory and interpretative paradigms, we sought to best exploit the richness and depth of the data by selecting quotations that express the analytic points the authors wish to make. They are labelled as 'S' (Seoul) or 'CM' (Chiang Mai), along with the informant number.

## Findings

While the core motivation of all informants was vacation, broad motivations can be generalised between the campus visitors, with the findings indicating a recurrence of certain motivations, irrespective of location, age, marital status, or gender. While the motivational themes are separately defined, the themes are interrelated and interconnected to each other.

### *Prestige*

Informants drew on various prestige indicators associated with each campus. While CMU was recognised as iconic for its famous landscaping, the alumnus of Yingluck Shinawatra, the first female Prime Minister of Thailand (of Chinese descent), perceived prestige was also sustained by being featured in the popular Chinese movie 'Lost in Thailand' (2012). Out of the 40 or so universities in greater Seoul, informants saw Yonsei University as prestigious because it was a 'SKY' university. Ewha was prestigious as it is a private women's university (which do not exist in China) and sounds like 'li fa' in Chinese, which means 'profit and fortune'. Sogang is known as a Jesuit university and the alumnus of former President Park Geun-hye, the first female president of South Korea. Informants also mentioned the role of specific K-Dramas and variety shows filmed at the three universities.

> This is our first time in Chiang Mai, and we heard that Yingluck Shinawatra, the former Prime Minister, graduated from here, so we want to see what her university is like. It is also a top university in Thailand – CM2.

> A friend mentioned that there are three very famous schools in Korea, called SKY, and they explained that 'Y' stood for Yonsei, and that Yonsei has a good location, and stuff. I also know a Korean drama that was shot here in Yonsei. It feels a bit unreal, like a dream – S4.

> Ewha is very famous, and a lot of people recommend it online. I watch a lot of Korean dramas and Korean variety shows, like Running Man, which was shot here. So, I wanted to come to Korea and see it – S6.

The responses to the questions, 'Why did you visit the campus, today?' found that the prestige of the university was a primary motivational factor. The informants drew on varied, but scarce markers of prestige that made certain universities a 'must-see' (S10), 'one of the more important [Seoul] attractions' (S3), and 'on the itinerary from the start' (S1). Prestige was not wholly determined by rankings or research reputation (Brewer et al., 2002), given prestige is affected by education-based prestige manipulation in China, how universities market themselves and how universities are presented in pop culture and (social) media. Informants subverted traditional markers of university prestige by drawing on markers seen as prestigious in a Chinese cultural and even pop-culture contexts, with Connell et al. (2021) finding, for example, that the University of Sydney became a significant destination for Chinese tourists because of its perceived links with the Harry Potter multiverse. While studies have shown western tourists are not preoccupied by prestige (Correia & Moital, 2009), prestige in a Chinese cultural context is also linked to uniqueness dimensions, social recognition, and status (Hsu & Huang, 2016; Xiang, 2013).

### Novelty and exploration

Informants sought to experience moderate and sensory novelty, through activities such as interacting with students, sitting in the library, eating canteen food, exploring the campus, and experiencing the spatial ambience and atmosphere in an autonomous manner. The informants found the campus experiences novel relative to their prior campus experiences in China. In Seoul, informants specifically valued the open nature and natural landscape, mountain backdrops, the trendy campus fashions, and youthful energy. For informants, the reward was experiencing the differences between was already familiar from their university experiences and the new campus environment.

> My undergrad campus [in China] was built shoddily. Its natural surroundings are an advantage here . . . it has mountains, like, it's on a hill and the buildings feel kind of Western – S1.

> I think foreign universities are freer than Chinese universities. I think Chinese universities are constrictive, like, different Party organisations and subcommittees, they constrict the growth of a university student. In these foreign countries, there's a freer atmosphere, where students can develop individuality. Foreign universities are better than Chinese ones in terms of environment, facility, and benefits. You can feel the difference here – S2.

> Yes, Chinese students are, you know, are studious, and they don't put so much effort into dressing up. In China, we know that Koreans are very trendy. So, I'm curious, and want to see what the campus life of young Koreans are like. And especially since we watch Korean dramas, that happen in schools, stories like that, so we want to experience it for ourselves – S14.

Informants noted that Chinese campuses are often walled, with students living in dormitories of four, six or eight students. As most universities have a curfew for students, lock gates and have gate security at night, they found the open nature of the campuses in Seoul novel and worth exploring for between 1–3 hours. Novelty derived from the environment (Li et al., 2021) and possible interaction with students, stimulated curiosity, and motivated exploratory behaviour (Skavronskaya et al., 2020).

### Emotion and nostalgia

As active meaning and sensation seekers, the informants engaged in a degree of self-reflection and self-interpretation about their campus experience. For some, the mere sight of students was emotional with S9 noting '[w]hen I first arrived in the morning, and I saw all the students walking into the school, then. I felt like I was part of it', whilst S11 noted that '[w]hen the students were

reading textbooks on campus, it made me think of my university memories'. While S4 noted that 'It feels very relaxing, as if I'm back in my student days, it makes me want to go back to school'. S8 noted that '[w]hen I went into the library, and walking along that road, it made me feel nostalgic'. The vicarious and stimulated nostalgia felt by the informants in Seoul and Chiang Mai was also expressed by a wish to be a student again. For informants, emotion and nostalgia is steered by their own memories of university.

> I added Ewha to the itinerary, because I just graduated, and I still have a lot of feelings for schools. So, I wanted to come and see it. And I'm curious about all-women's colleges to begin with, because I think there's almost none in China – S1.

> Um, I think it's . . . when I was in this school, and I was touring the library, and other places, it made me feel like I was back in university. Because I've graduated several years now, having a chance to return to a school — I think Korean schools, from the way they are designed, it's all pretty special – S11.

> Seeing the other students rushing to class, and discussing problem sets, reminded me of me talking about professors with my friends as we were going to class in university – S15.

> Just seeing them walking around with books, we used to do that when we were in school, like walking to class carrying books and stuff – S6.

> When you walk in the academic buildings, when you open the door, and you find yourself — because some students are there for self-study sessions, and when you sit beside them to read, you feel like you are back to your student days, and you are a student here – S3.

While nostalgia is an important motivation (Dann, 1996), it was not a historical nostalgia or fantasy about past eras in China (Li & Ryan, 2015). The informants expressed a deeply personal nostalgia that reconnected them to their younger days (Li et al., 2021), which then influenced their campus experiences. Informants were motivated to form, broaden, or relive their own personal university experiences, as their sense of identification with their past was awakened. The campus visit invoked emotional and psychological resonance, and familial, personal connection to values, decisions, and past lives. Driven by its relatability, novelty, and authenticity (Chi & Chi, 2020), this type of nostalgia previously manifested itself in CMU by tourists who cosplayed on campus by dressing up as students (Thai students wear a uniform). Invoked by the campus environment and repeated social media exposure, the issue led to the arrest of two Chinese students in 2014, and a warning that wearing a CMU student uniform without proper reasons is punishable by a maximum penalty of 1 year in prison or THB100,000 ($3,198) fine (Fredrickson, 2014).

### *Learning and knowledge*

As informants sought out an experience that incorporated an element of learning, informants perceived a campus visit as an opportunity to expand knowledge, feel the campus environment, ambience and atmosphere, its history and heritage and explore how students' study and live. As informants learned and gained knowledge about the university as they experienced it, they felt it was a means to know Korean/Thai culture better.

> I like looking at architecture, odd ones and well-designed ones. I wanted to see them, and learn more about how students' study here, their university culture. My main goal is to learn about the local culture, coming to Korea, experiencing the college culture, and experience the youthful energy here – S13.

> Well, when we went to Ewha, there were a lot of students performing, something like traditional Korean dances. So, we gained a bit more understanding about Korean culture – S12.

> On one hand I want to learn more about the culture, and on the other I want to learn more about the history. [Visiting the campus] enables me to learn more about foreign students' culture: how they study, how it differs from China. And to see the architecture. Also, to learn more about their history, and to look around, and add to your knowledge – S5.

> I think the university is one of the important places for a city. And when you come [to a university campus], you are not going to an amusement park, and playing isn't the goal. The crucial thing is to experience the atmosphere of the university and experience the atmosphere of learning. Universities, its library, classrooms, places have strong atmosphere of learning – S3.

While the theme partially overlaps with the search for prestige as well as novelty and exploration, learning and knowledge reflects the need to satisfy intellectual needs through interaction with others, participation in knowledge-based events and other campus experiences. While Crompton (1979) identified the importance of learning, studies show Chinese tourists take a knowledge-based approach towards learning and have been found to take ownership of learning and self-instruction (Chen & Huang, 2018). In Seoul, informants were constrained regards this motivation, as they could not expand learning and knowledge through campus events, tours, and serendipitous interactions with students. While Ewha did have a visitor centre and information point, it was not mentioned by informants.

> I would like to have experienced some event. Like an event organised by the students, or by the university, targeting people from outside of the school – S3.

> I would like to have a student in the university introduce the university, Maybe telling some interesting stories or something. Having some interactions with the students — this would be great – S5.

Informants in Chiang Mai felt the search for knowledge, novelty and exploration was constrained by the rigid, controlled nature of the tour, and would have preferred the opportunity to roam independently and have room for human interaction. While informants in Seoul delighted in the freedom that their self-organised visit afforded them, informants at CMU entering the main gate are confronted by Mandarin-speaking volunteers who direct them to a line of tour vehicles (Figure 1, Figure 2).

> It is not that meaningful because we visited the campus by taking a tour bus. There were only simple introductions, like what the university is etc., so we have no chance to get to know it deeply - CM2.

> By taking a tour bus, you are not able to learn more about it, but simple introductions, like the building's name etc. - CM4.

> Because basically nothing for us to visit. It took about half an hour for us to queue and take the bus, we stopped by the lake there, then got on the bus again and return - CM5.

Falk and Diercking (2000) argue that non-school-based learning and meaning making should be free-choice and be characterised by a judicious amount of choice and control over what, where, when, with whom and why they learn. Given the CMU visit was not self-paced, engaging, personal, sensation-rich, or voluntary (Falk et al., 2012), the overall satisfaction with the campus experience was extremely low (Figure 3). Connell et al. (2021) also concluded that freely gathered knowledge and meaning making should not be top-down and one-size-fits-all, given the meaning that Chinese tourists give to campuses may not be the meaning envisaged by university authorities. The motivation for learning and knowledge remains a strong driving force affecting the Chinese middle-class (Ponzini, 2020), given is also a reinstatement of ones continued appetite for learning and ones *suzhi* (human quality). This demands that the campus experience be designed and managed for co-creation, immersion, and participation (Li et al., 2021)

## Discussions and implications

While the popularity of campus-based tourism is yet to be quantified, there are a growing number of Chinese blogs, travel platforms (e.g. trip.com), social media posts and travel agent packages representing a growing number of campuses worldwide in very desirable and seductive terms. While this study found that motivations to visit a campus were an expression of each informant's own history, prior knowledge, and values, it also found that Chinese tourists are attracted to specific


Figure 1. The tour explanation banner at Chiang Mai University. Source: authors. used with permission.


Figure 2. The shuttle tour embarkation points at Chiang Mai University. Source: authors. used with permission.


Figure 3. A shuttle tour with passengers at Chiang Mai University. Source: authors. used with permission.

university campuses because of their prestige, by novelty and exploration, emotion and nostalgia and learning and knowledge seeking. Visitation is a structuring element for collective and individual action, where movement and proximity to campus spaces, lives, objects, and events are seen to be significant. While our research found informants motivations can be generalised, their motivations are culturally intermediated and an expression of a broader socio-cultural background and socialisation. Campus tourism does not follow traditional tourist lines, as the motivations reflect Chinese society, culture and the values and attitudes of younger Chinese independent travellers who have grown up in the post-reform period.

The informants all belong to the *jiulinghou* generation, born between 1990 and 1999, a travelling segment associated with the financially independent, middle class (Li, 2020). The findings confirm existing motivational research that finds that tourists from this generation are higher degree holders (70%) and residents of first- and second-tier cities (China Tourism Academy (CTA), 2014). They are the first generation that grew up with expanding tertiary education, smartphones, social media, and a preference for independent travel. Despite their increased appetite for travel, the prevalence of 'education for quality' (*suzhi jiaoyu*) campaigns in China, and the importance given to Chinese traditional Confucian values at university, means university experiences and educational attainment are a formative part of their life, and central to their understanding of life. This generation has not broken with intergenerational values that places education foremost (Fu et al., 2018), and visitation to university campuses abroad reflects similar findings in China (Li et al., 2021). As Chinese tourists effectively undertake their own organic marketing (Connell et al., 2021), some Western universities, such as the University of Sydney, have responded to visitation by offering 'heritage tours' (McManus et al., 2021). However, this study found that Chinese tourists prefer more active, immersive campus experiences.

The growth in Chinese outbound tourism around the globe, and the importance of university visits to many, requires universities to consider if tourism can or should be facilitated through a social and/or enterprising third mission or stymied. Proponents may argue that the evolution of the university mission has always been resisted (Montesinos et al., 2008). As universities are subject to constant processes of evaluation, league tables and government funding cuts, they face unprecedented competition for resources and visibility. With 21,451 registered HEIs in over 180 countries (International Association of Universities, 2014), higher education is now 'situated in an open information environment in which national borders are routinely crossed' (Marginson, 2006, p. 1). Universities already compete for relative position within different strata (e.g. top teaching university), using positional markers, such as university rankings, tuition cost and selectivity.

While rankings may impact a universities own definition of prestige, prestige amongst informants is not built from its teaching and scientific rankings alone. Universities would need to take a more active role by completing a situational and demand analysis in the Chinese market, to understand its current presence and attractiveness and explore whether opportunities to create a position by manipulating markers of prestige exists. As motivations were 'Chinese' specific, marketing can invoke prestige and nostalgia to segments that include international students, exchange students, the family segment (parent and child) and alumni (Cho et al., 2020). Universities could also utilise tourist testimonials, video, and photographs as part of a broader promotional mix. While online content shared by tourists cannot fully take the place of rankings, teaching and research quality, tourist testimonials and user generated content can become an element of differentiation. For international students and those families seeking study tour and abroad opportunities, independent sources of information and images in additional to that presented by the universities and educational agencies might influence their decision and subsequent recruitment (Connell et al., 2021; Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011). By creating profiles and monitoring Bilibili, Sina Weibo and other Chinese social media channels, universities can leverage this 'free' form of word-of-mouth promotion (Amaro et al., 2019), which may support the prestige and symbolic power of the university (McManus et al., 2021).

Some universities are redesigning themselves as semi-public space, hoping that a controlled environment has the potential to facilitate a mix of tourists, day-trippers, prospective students, alumni, staff, and residents (Soares et al., 2020). Soja (2000) found that the expansion of the University of Los Angeles in California, for example, was designed not only for study and research but also as tourism and leisure. By partnering with the business sector and other national and international institutions (Hall, 2019), universities are creating links to what they consider the 'real world', by building relationships with external communities which may view universities through the lens of leisure and tourism (Martin & Samels, 2019). While such linkages may facilitate knowledge transfer by linking leisure and tourism with teaching and research (Hay, 2020; Plasencia, 2020), improve campus services, internationalisation, outreach and recruitment goals, campus tourist requires building the appropriate physical staging and human interactions to enable tourists take part in the university experience, as well as the active support of student bodies, staff, and local businesses (Connell, 1996).

University management and staff may rightfully see tourism as a threat to the student focused function of universities. Given campus tourism reflects dominant tourism discourses driven by processes of neo-liberalisation, globalisation, capitalism and marketisation (Hill, 2011), sceptics may view any investment or support as another wasteful 'positional arms race' (Schwier, 2012). There is a concern that campus and student life may become objectified and exploitable as it becomes constituted into an element for visual consumption (Svendsen & Svendsen, 2017). Woodward (2013, p. 268) suggests that when there are multiple users on campus, the result can be a 'conflict between public (tourist) access to university spaces and the use of those spaces for learning by students and faculty'. For example, tourist flows, primarily from China, have caused management and security issues in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and Korea (Lumby & Pengelly, 2018; Maitland, 2006; Yorke, 2017). In China, certain universities have closed or limited tourist access (Jianxi, 2017; Shuli, 2012), whilst others have invested in online reservation systems and directional signage (Yang, 2018). There are additional concerns over impacts on rental prices, security risks, interruptions to classes and unrealistic portrayals of campus life (Saichaie, 2011). Despite findings that indicate the search for novelty and exploration, emotion and nostalgia and learning and knowledge may be a cause for conflict between experience seeking tourists, students, and broader communities. Southwest Minzu University in China, for example, opened a student dormitory to tourists in 2017 with access to the school's canteen and library (Li et al., 2021).

While this may indicate the commercial pressures on universities and/or a means to improve brand recognition, Giroux (2014) argues that universities need to be protected against commercial and private interests, spaces, and settings, to enable students to learn about noncommodified values, and become engaged, active citizens. Universities should work with local communities, students, community activists, and other socially concerned groups, whose resources, knowledge, and skills have often been viewed as marginal, into university life. They should be involved in reviewing significant prestige markers (e.g. colonial era monuments, high tuition fees, university rankings), and developing new markers, such as sustainability, inclusivity, and social justice (Van Marle, 2022). Rather than rejecting tourists, universities would consult with university stakeholders, before beginning a critical evaluation of prestige markers present in the Chinese cultural, pop-culture and (social) media context, which may be counterproductive to the primary mission of universities. As campus tourism can evolve without marketing or deliberate co-creation (McManus et al., 2021), universities should, if seeking internationalisation, be proactive in managing positional markers in China, by vetting commercial TV/movie filming on campus (Shen, 2017), proactively engaging with Chinese key opinion leaders, while restricting tourist visits during term time.

## Conclusions

This study reflects upon outbound Chinese tourist visitation to university campuses in popular destination such as Chiang Mai and Seoul after endowing them with distinct but invented value. This study found that outbound Chinese tourist consumption choices and behaviour are influenced

by markers, that sees universities as spaces where tourist and leisure activity can take place. While universities are contested spaces by way of government interventions, neoliberal discourse and marketisation of education and teaching (Kamola, 2019), and are already 'centrally implicated in many global spheres and processes' (Marginson, 2004, p. 176), such markers may inhibit the primary mission of universities, and institution as a broader cultural force. This paper, while exploring the motivations behind growing form of niche tourism, more broadly, contributes new understanding of a leisure activity with high value and status amongst outbound Chinese tourists. By identifying universities as tourist places with the capacity to generate new geographies of tourism, this paper concludes that despite possible benefits, universities must be proactive, and involve broader stakeholders, in managing the downsides of campus tourism. Future research must explore new and emergent leisure practices, within Chinese and other outbound tourists, as well as how places, such universities, generate new tourist geographies, and whether they have authority and support to do so.

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