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Presenting Selves and Interpreting Culture: An Ethnography of Chinese International Tourism in the United States

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Presenting Selves and Interpreting Culture: An Ethnography of Chinese

International Tourism in the United States

by

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

I situate my dissertation research within cultural sociology, specifically the cultural phenomenon of international tourism, and social psychology, particularly the subfields of identity, interaction, and emotion. I conducted a qualitative study of participants in international package tourism and individual travelers, more specifically, Chinese tourists who travel to the United States. Main topics of exploration included tourists' experience of their trips and package tours, how they interpreted American culture and compared it to their own, how they constructed and performed identities both as tourists and as Chinese nationals, their emotional experiences and how they made sense of an environment that they were not intimately familiar with before they arrived. Also central to the research was an exploration of the interactions and constructions of meaning that happened during the trip, including interactions among tourists, between tourists and the tour guide, tourists and Americans, and between tourists and their family and friends back home. I argue that while traveling to the United States, Chinese tourists faced a situation that required them to re-categorize ideas about who they are while making sense of a new social and physical environment, which included interpreting the local cultural and emotion rules. At the same time, they constructed and maintained tourist identities in both physical and virtual settings in various ways.

Introduction Chapter

INTRODUCTION

Because of the temporary, fleeting nature of tourist relations, a tourist does not become part of long-term reciprocity structures in a society (de Kadt 1979). At the same time, tourists are not guests but outsiders, they do not become part of the visited culture's moral fabric (Cohen 1972: 220). Because of this unique feature of tourists and due to their common mission to seek for authentic experience (MacCannell 1973: 589), international mass tourism is an interesting cultural phenomenon that has developed as a result of a basic change in tourists' attitudes toward the world beyond the boundaries of their native habitat (Cohen 1972). International tourists bring their culturally established norms, understandings, and meaning-makings to a different cultural setting. Only in-depth ethnographic studies will enable us to compare data on different types of cultures, tourists, tourist attractions, and so on, so that the concrete social processes operating in any particular case can be analyzed.

Benefiting from the "opening-up" policy announced in the late 1970s by former president Xiaoping Deng, more and more Chinese people have gained the opportunity to travel internationally than ever before. Nowadays, China has become the biggest tourist-generating country in the world. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, nearly three million Chinese tourists visit the United States annually, spending over $30 billion per year (Statista 2020). Nowadays, despite the removal of travel barriers for independent travelers, joining a package tour group is still a popular way of traveling when people plan for their trips. According to China Tourism Academy's annual report on China Outbound Tourism development, in the year 2018, 55.24% of surveyed tourists traveled abroad with a tour group, and 50.65% said they would be

willing to join a tour group in the future. Traditionally, package tours have been the preferred model for Chinese tourists, especially when they travel abroad due to low-cost, safety, and the reduced language barriers (Wong and Kwong 2004).

With a population of 1.4 billion, China generates the greatest number of international tourists worldwide. According to *The Outbound Chinese Tourism and Consumption Trends: 2017 Survey* jointly issued by Nielsen and Alipay, Chinese tourists traveled overseas on 131 million occasions in 2017, with an increase of 7 percent from the previous year. Among all the destinations visited, nearly three million Chinese tourists visit the U.S. annually, spending over $30 billion per year. Even though China is an active participant in the global marketplace, shopping while traveling abroad is still a prominent trend among Chinese tourists despite most brands examined in this paper being available in China. In addition to the existing close link between shopping and tourism, the widespread use of social media applications adds another layer for the scholarly exploration of tourism, consumption, and the presentation of self.

As a cultural phenomenon arising from the context of globalization and transnational migration, the study of international tourism and tourists is gradually gaining attention across different disciplines. International tourism, as an activity that consumes not only physical products but also cultural symbols, is also closely related to the development of one's identity, topics that are currently understudied. The act of visiting another country plausibly contains a certain symbolism that is crucial to identity work (Yang et al. 2020). Specifically, when tourists travel internationally, many see themselves not only as individual travelers but also as cultural ambassadors of their home country. As a result, many international tourists use their travel experience for the construction of both personal, individual and national, collective identities.

The prevalence of smartphones and social media have added another layer of the exploration of tourism research. During the trip, tourists share urgent need to take and post photos, leading tourist agencies to start providing package tours that incorporate as many social media-worthy as possible to help tourists create successful presentations online. The act of online posting further shape the 'tourist gaze'; nowadays, tourists I interacted with no longer prioritize their gaze to what they encounter at their travel destinations but rather turn their gazes back on themselves and on presenting themselves within their social networks. Additionally, their roles as tourists and consumers are much expanded when they decide to post their shopping experiences online. With the help of social media, tourists are capable of presenting themselves as cultural intermediaries, trend-setters, and global consumers. Further, shopping is also used to promote their national identity as Chinese patriots and loyal citizens.

In summary, through the use of the much-lacking qualitative data in the field of study, including observational field notes, interview transcripts, as well as video and blog content collected from online, open access websites, this research aims to understand Chinese tourists' identity construction and presentation of self while traveling to the United States in both physical and virtual settings and the shift of traditional tourist gaze. More broadly, this research provides the readers with an understanding of how globalization and global economy operates and the complexity of current U.S. – China relations at the micro level. In the following sections, I outline the theoretical approaches, research questions, and method overviews of the dissertation; after that, I end with an overview of three chapters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In one of the most important overview pieces, Crick (1989: 314) identified three main topics social scientists tend to look into when they study international tourism: (1) the political

economy of tourism; (2) tourism in relation to meanings, motives and roles; and (3) images of tourism as a force in socio-cultural change. These three topics can be explored in their own right, but because of the nature of tourism and tourism system, they are very much likely to inter-link and interact with one another. In anthropological tourism studies, the impacts tourists have on their destinations and the 'host' cultures usually receive the most attention (see, e.g. Abram et al., 1997; Boissevain, 1996; Smith, 1989).

However, the second theme relating to tourists' meaning-making processes, is understudied. The questions about what the tourists' experiences are, what they learn during the trip and why they go overseas, have rarely been asked. According to Crick, this is because "tourists themselves are not the object of study" (1989: 326), and tourists are mostly been categorized into "tourist types and vague generalizations" (1989: 330). Since Crick and Selwyn made their observations in the 1980s and 1990s, the situation has changed. Since 2000s, there has been an emerging body of literature that examines more closely the experiences of tourists and the stories they tell about their roles, meaning making, and motivations. In the following sections, I will discuss the theoretical foundation of international tourism and tourists' experiences including the discussion of tourist experience, tourist roles, and tourist identity.

Tourist Experience: Searching for Authenticity and Gazing at Difference

Focusing on tourists' experiences and roles, one of the questions scholars usually ask is regarding how should tourist motivation be understood? Many scholars who studied international tourism contributed to the discussion in various ways. I will begin by outlining the main contributors to these debates.

My starting point is MacCannell's (1989) seminal work, *The Tourist*. In this, he claims that a tourist's experience is like that of a religious or sacred journey. The tourist experience, he

states, is normally concerned with the search for authenticity, and while they go on different trips, their everyday life back home is characterized as inauthenticity. Tourism, according to MacCannell, is a way of organizing the tourist, of bringing them into "a relationship with the modern social totality", and of providing an authentic experience (1989: 7). For MacCannell, the tourist is in search of cultural productions, sights that are viewed and visited in the same way as religious sites and relics might be visited on a pilgrimage.

The idea of seeing tourism as akin to a religious pilgrimage is also supported in the work of Graburn (1989). He argues that tourism operates in a similar way to the religious ritual of a sacred ceremony. Tourism itself represents a transcendence experience from tourists' everyday practices. For Graburn (1989: 27), the tourist emerges from the end of their holiday as a different person, feeling that they have been transformed, returning home as a "new person".

Both MacCannell and Graburn argue that tourism and tourist experience are forms of a sacred experience that is very different from the everyday practices in the homeworld. Many aspects of tourists' activities would fit into the sacred journey paradigm. For example, tourists buying new clothes for holiday, purchasing souvenirs from the host countries that might be understood to occupy the place of religious relics.

Urry also explored this paradigm from a different perspective. Contrary to McConnell, Urry (1990: 11) argues that it is "incorrect to suggest that a search for authenticity is the basis for the organization of tourism". Instead, tourism is being driven by tourists' socially constructed gaze, a way of looking for and seeing the world with the purpose to search for differences: "The tourist gaze is directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experiences" (Urry 1990: 7). Urry and Larsen have categorized what tourists tend to gaze at, which includes the seeing of a unique object, the seeing of particular signs, the seeing

unfamiliar aspects of what had previously been thought of as familiar, the seeing of ordinary

aspects of social life undertaken by people in unusual contexts, and the seeing of particular signs

that indicate that a certain other object is indeed extraordinary even though it does not seem to be

so (2011: 30-1). Tourists gaze at the world through "a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and

expectations" that are "framed by social class gender, nationality, age and education" (Urry and

Larsen 2011: 17).

What the theories discussed so far have a common tendency to meta-theorise about

tourists. They seek for authenticity, participate in the pilgrim, or gaze on the differences. Not

trying to design a "one size fits all" approach, Cohen suggests that there are a number of

categories of tourists, and their experiences need to be analyzed with more nuances. I now turn to

the review of Cohen's work.

The Tourist Roles

To better capture the nuances of the tourist experience, Cohen (1972: 167-168) proposed a

typology of four tourist roles: (1) The organized mass tourist who are the least adventurous and

remains largely in their own environmental bubble through the trip; (2) The individual mass

tourist who shares the similarities of the previous type, except that the tour is not entirely

preplanned. The tourist still has a certain amount of control over his or her time and itinerary and

is nor bound to a group; (3) The explorer who arranges the trip alone and tries to get off the

beaten track as much as possible, but still wants comfortable accommodations and reliable means

of transportation; and (4) The drifter who ventures furthest away from the beaten track and the

accustomed way of life in his or her homeworld. The first two types of tourists adopt more or

less institutional roles, while the last two types of tourists are noninstitutionalized.

For the institutionalized tourism, the tour is typically sold as a package within a mass industry. All the transportation, sleeping and eating accommodations are prepared for them in advance. The mass tourist industrial system allows tourists to "take in" the novelty of the host country without experiencing any physical discomfort, or, to observe without actually experiencing (Cohen 1972: 169). Cohen (1972: 170) also points out that the main purpose of mass tourism is the visiting of attractions, whether genuine or contrived. Even though they are genuine, the tendency is to transform or manipulate them to make them presentable and suitable for the mass tourist consumption. The mass tourism industry is able to provide mass tourists with an "ecological bubble" of their accustomed environment. The ecological differentiation of the tourist sphere from the rest of the country makes the mass tourists travel in a world of their own, surrounded by, but not integrated into, the host country (Cohen 1972: 173). This kind of differentiation id deepened by a general communication gap. Not knowing the language makes forming a conversation or acquaintances with the local residents difficult to any extent.

On the other hand, the roles of both the explorer and the drifter are non-institutionalized. The explorers usually avoid the traditional mass tourist attractions, but still look for comfortable accommodations and reliable transportations. They also manage to escape the isolation and artificiality the mass tourist system imposes on the mass tourists (Cohen 1972: 175). While the drifters seek for the excitement of complete strangeness and direct contact with different people from the host country.

According to Cohen, the roles and motivations of tourists vary based on the extent and variety of social contacts the tourists have during their trips. The social contacts of the institutionalized tourists are extremely limited, and the individual tourists, being somewhat more independent, make more social contacts.

As I have suggested, the socio-anthropological approach to tourists has been shaped by a number of key theorists who have presented valuable insights into the nature of tourism. However, what's missing in most of the previous literature is that they all are lacking a dialogue with actual tourists. Although the ethnographic material on tourists is limited, there have been some attempts made to study tourists in this manner. The work of Wagner (1977) and Passariello (1983); van den Berghe's (1994) work titled Quest for the Other; and work Harrison (2003) titled Being a Tourist. Because of the scarcity of ethnographic work on the topic of international tourism, more studies are needed to understand tourists from the point of view of what they do and say. This marks a move away from a concentration on the textual that the earlier social science theories foreground and, on the other hand, highlights the performative nature of tourism. Ideas of tourism and performance have gradually become the mainstream in the tourism studies literature (e.g. Coleman & Crang 2002, Bruner 2005), as well as literature of embodiment (e.g. Morgan et al. 2005, Andrews 2011, Pocock 2006). These kinds of literature represent a more nuanced and micro-level scales of theorizing and provide depth into the understanding of tourists and their behavior, within the context of their tour and the wider world.

Tourism, Mobility, and Identity

In Crompton's 1979 study on travel motives, two broad categories were identified: the socio-psychological and the cultural motives. Seven motives were classified as socio-psychological, namely: escape from a perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships, and facilitation of social interaction. The two remaining motives, novelty, and education formed the alternate cultural category. Among the socio-psychological motives identified by Crompton, the motive of "exploration and evaluation of self" has been most widely adopted by the tourist agencies, travel

magazines as well as travel bloggers in developing products and coming up with promotion strategies. The relationships between tourism and concepts of self are frequent topics of discussion and debate within tourism studies (Crompton 1979, Desforges 1998, 2000; Bell and Lyall 2002, Breathnach 2006, Cohen 2010). Tourist agencies promise "the journey of self-discovery", and young travel bloggers constantly talk about how their travel experiences help them become the ideal version of themselves. Identity is driving tourism consumption because of the desire to evade or approach a certain possible self. The individual feels that by making a certain trip – or trips – they will achieve the desired or avoid the undesired possible self as the outcome. Although tourism literature has long recognized that people's travel experience is rarely the result of one single motive, the connection between tourism and identity is unavoidable.

One of the more frequently cited work discussing the connection between identity and tourism was from the sociologist Erik Cohen. Cohen (1979) argues that tourism provides an opportunity to escape from everyday life to find space for reflection and either develop a new sense of self or rediscover some lost sense of self (Muller and O'Cass 2001). The different modes of travel are often referred to in the body of literature as 'transition' or 'transformation' focused tourism. Studies under this theoretical approach conclude that one of the most primary and important motives for people to travel is the desire to construct a new temporary identity through the travel experience (Uriely et al. 2002, Richard and Wilson 2004, Burns and Novelli 2006, Maoz 2007). Therefore, through the experience of travel, individuals hope to become more self-aware and independent (Elsrud 2001, Yiannakis and Gibson 1992). Such journeys have been shown to play an important role in the construction of the self (Desforges 1998, 2000; Galani-Moutafi 2004, White and White 2004, Maoz 2007). On the other hand, there is also literature

suggesting that despite the claims travel agencies made on self-discovery and identity reconstruction, the very opposite occurs in experience, that the tourist self is changed very little by the tour, while the consequences of tourism for the native self are profound (Bruner 1991).

Subsequent empirical research has focused on the construction of personal identity during tourism, for example, Zhang et al. (2017) studied the construction of backpacker identity in the Chinese context; Stein's research (2019) centered on the American vacationers' construction of their short-lived "vacation identity" when they take time off; Munt (1994) learned about how Western tourists construct their middle-class identities through their experiences traveling to developing countries, and Husting (2015) discussed travelers' strategies managing face and emotions in a foreign country. In addition to the personal-level identity construction, tourism activities and experiences are also used by tourists to construct collective identities.

Meanwhile, tourism is a migration experience, and mobility is an integral and fundamental aspect of social life, especially in today's globalized world. Easthope argues that both mobility and place are essential components of identity construction and there exist complex inter-relationships between mobility, place, and identity (2009). The removal from the familiar home environment gave tourists freedom from cultural and familial expectations and the opportunity for self-discovery, while exposure to a new culture offered them the chance to improve their cross-cultural communication skills (Brown 2009). However, the identity construction and reconstruction might require tourists to stay at one place for a longer period of time without the assistance from someone like a package tour guide or a local hosting family.

Overall, it is well reported that travel is important in shaping the perception of self, positively or negatively, through experiences of other people and places (Bruner 1991, Crompton 1979, Desforges 2000, Noy 2004, Urry 2002). However, very little has been written with a more

comprehensive body of tourists. Most of the previous work exploring the relationship between travel experience and identity focused on individual travelers such as backpackers, or gap-year solo travelers but did not pay enough attention to the experiences of package tourists.

In my review of the literature, I have found very few qualitative or context-specific studies on cultural comparison or cultural exchange. Most existing studies are quantitative in nature. Culture is typically used as a simplified explanatory variable to predict human behaviors, but it is not explored in depth. I contend that Chinese tourism in the United States is, in many ways, an ideal topic for a qualitative and cross-cultural exploration that goes beyond what the literature currently offers.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

My dissertation contains three stand-alone chapters, each being an individual publishable paper. Chapter 1 of my dissertation is titled *Global Citizen and Proud Chinese: How Chinese International Travelers Construct Multifaceted Tourist Identities*, and it involves a more general discussion about the Chinese package tours and tourists in the United States. The research question I am asking here is: how do Chinese international travelers construct and manage their multifaceted tourist identities? My analysis for this chapter drew from two types of qualitative data: 23 in-depth interview transcripts with Chinese international tourists during their package tours in the United States; and participants observation that generated the primary ethnographic field notes that include documentation of conversations, interactions, as well as tour guides' explanation of U.S. culture and customs.

The stories I presented in the paper illustrate Chinese international tourists' construction of their identities both as global citizens and patriotic Chinese nationals during their package tours in the United States. On the one hand, it appeared that the Chinese tourists in this study

used different strategies to separate themselves from various Chinese elements, including Chinese-made products and experiences that are also available in China, to assert their global citizenship through the tour. On the other hand, tourists constructed their identity as "proud Chinese patriots" while comparing infrastructure, values, and cultural customs between U.S. and China. Although seemingly contradictory, both identities were activated and boosted in the context of international, cross-country tours. I also argue that to understand the multifaceted tourist self, we should situate it within the social context of both China and the United States. As a direct result of China's economic growth, the purchasing power of its citizens has greatly increased. The economic development at the national level and "the power of purchasing power" at the individual level during international tours together feed the national pride of Chinese tourists. Meanwhile, the multifaceted tourist self should also be understood within the tension between China and the U.S., especially during the Trump administration; as well as the culture of neoliberalism that encourages individuals to apply a market logic and maximize their profits on every aspect of their lives.

Chapter 2 is titled *"I Spent Two Minutes Sightseeing, Three Hours Retouching My Photos": The Shifted Gaze of Chinese Package Holiday Tourists in the Age of Social Media*, and it focused on one important aspect of tourism: taking photos. The research questions I ask in this chapters include: Is the tourist gaze shifting its direction in the context of a social media-centric tourism experiences? How does social media platforms and the behavior of instant sharing promote such shift? Will tourists still choose to look out and gaze at the views of the destination, or only gazing at their own self-presentation within that landscape? My analysis in this article is based on three sets of qualitative data: participant observation that generates primary ethnographic data including field notes and photos; 23 in-depth ethnographic interviews with

Chinese tourists who joined the same tours as I did; and materials from five travel agencies' websites.

While previous research on international package tourism has tended to examine tourists' behaviors and travel motivations, this chapter suggests that Chinese tourists' package tour experiences in the United States are, to a large extent, social media-focused and centered on interacting with friends and family back home. Through the analysis of ethnographic observations, interviews, and documents, this chapter contributes to the scholarly debate surrounding the 'tourist gaze' by arguing that the original definition of this concept shall be extended to better reflect the use of modern technology. As a result, tourists' corporal experiences and gazes are deeply influenced and shaped by the interaction and connection that exist in the virtual world. Simultaneously, the culture of instantaneity has taught people to both conduct self-presentation and expect feedback immediately. Valuing the precious and even privileged traveling experiences, tourists' global self constructed and sustained during the tour need to be presented and validated instantly. All these mentioned factors point towards a new kind of the touristic performativity: Chinese international tourists explored in this paper are not only aware of the presence of the cell phone or camera while taking photos, but also expect to receive feedback instantly from their virtual audience on whether their self-presentation was successful or not, thus, further adjust their next performance. Previously, tourists gazed at the different cultural affairs and natural landscapes at their travel destinations, while nowadays, when their entire tourism experiences were immersed in SNS, such tourist gaze shifted direction and became an observation pointed to themselves. In the process of posing, retouching pictures, using selfie sticks, and carefully selecting who gets to see those photos at what time, the tour itself is somehow dispensable.

The third chapter is titled *"You Are First a Chinese Citizen, Then A Consumer":* *Presenting and Balancing Identities Online as Chinese International Tourists.* The research question I aim to answer in this chapter is: How do Chinese international tourists present themselves in virtual settings through the discussion of their shopping experiences? In this chapter, for the purpose of analyzing Chinese international tourists' presentations of self on different virtual platforms, data was collected from four popular social media sites where tourists share their shopping experiences and tips: Mafengwo (www.mafengwo.cn), a Chinese social media site for travelers to share tips, pictures, and travel logs about their worldwide traveling experience; Red, a social media and e-commerce platform that allows users to share product reviews, travel blogs and lifestyle stories via short videos and photos; Weibo, a Chinese microblogging website similar to Twitter that allows word, picture and video-postings; and Bilibili, a popular video-sharing social media platform that many Chinese tourists use to post longer travel video logs or 'vlogs' and 'haul' videos.

Through the analysis of data, I argue that Chinese international tourists present themselves first as good community members by discussing how they select different souvenirs and gifts for friends, family, and colleagues, thus maintaining healthy relationships with people around them. Further, they discuss their shopping strategies and share tips about what and where to shop when they travel abroad to the U.S. By doing so, they present themselves as affluent and smart global consumers. Social media platforms and the utilization of hashtags or labels allow them to ascend to trendsetters by informing their Chinese audiences what is popular in the U.S., with some tourist resellers serving the role of cultural intermediaries between potential customers back in China and brands in the U.S. Finally, posting about how they use their purchasing power

as political leverage enables many Chinese tourists to present themselves as good and loyal Chinese citizens.

Finally, the conclusion chapter discusses how my dissertation represents a significant addition to the growing body of work in the relatively new area of research on international tourism in today's globalized age, especially focusing on tourists coming from developing to developed countries. Many previous studies on international tourism learned about how Americans, or tourists from other developed countries, traveled to third-world, developing countries, and focused on their interactions with the local residents. However, with China becoming the second largest economic body in the world, more and more Chinese tourists are willing and able to spend a rather big amount of money to travel internationally, experience American culture and consume various products in the U.S. I believe the qualitative investigation of international tourism can provide a micro-level understanding and reflection of the macro-level topic of globalization and the global economy.

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Chapter 1: Global Citizen and Proud Chinese: How Chinese International Travelers Construct Multifaceted Tourist Identities

ABSTRACT

While most of the previous research on Chinese tourism focused on tourists' behaviors, travel motivations and expectations, this research explores Chinese international tourists' identity construction while traveling in the U.S. More specifically, this paper takes a look at how Chinese tourists construct and maintain two types of seemingly contradicting identities: on the one hand, the tour was used for them to boost their identity as global consumers and citizens; while on the other hand, the tour in the U.S. also led them to feel prouder of being a Chinese, thus, enhancing their national identity. Through the analysis of around 350 hours of public observations and 23 interviews during three different Chinese package tours in the United States, this paper illustrates that the understanding of Chinese international tourists' multifaceted tourist identities should be situated within broad social and cultural contexts, including the social context of China's economic ascendence and the accompanying national pride, the current tension between two nations, as well as the neoliberal logic that pervades modern society.

INTRODUCTION

Benefiting from the "opening-up" policy announced in the late 1970s by former president Xiaoping Deng, more and more Chinese people have gained the opportunity to travel internationally than ever before. Nowadays, China has become the biggest tourist-generating country in the world. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, nearly three million Chinese tourists visit the United States annually, spending over $30 billion per year (Statista 2020). As a cultural phenomenon arising from the context of globalization and transnational migration, the

study of international tourism and tourists is gradually gaining attention across different disciplines. Previous research on international tourism has focused on understanding tourists' travel motivations, expectations, satisfaction, and consumption behaviors (see Li et al. 2011; Liu, Jun, and Yang 2015; Li, Xu and Weaver 2009; Tsang, Lee and Liu 2014; Chan et al. 2014; Correia, Kozak, and Kim 2018; Xu and McGeHee 2012). International tourism, as an activity that consumes not only physical products but also cultural symbols, is also closely related to the development of one's identity, topics that are currently understudied. The act of visiting another country plausibly contains a certain symbolism that is crucial to identity work (Yang et al. 2020). Specifically, when tourists travel internationally, many see themselves not only as individual travelers but also as cultural ambassadors of their home country. As a result, many international tourists use their travel experience for the construction of both personal, individual and national, collective identities.

China's economic takeoff and the growth of nationalism happened almost simultaneously. As indicated by Callahan (2004), Chinese nationalism is not just about celebrating the glories of Chinese civilization but also commemorates China's weakness and past humiliations. The idea of humiliations and "a hostile West" was also reinforced by media and Western politicians. Many U.S. policymakers, especially during the Trump administration, see China's rise as a threat to the West (Callahan 2004). Public narratives in both countries constantly regard each other as enemies. The study of Chinese tourists visiting the U.S. is particularly interesting given the tensions between both nations. Chinese tourists visit with great curiosity about a culturally dominating Western country, yet also with a mild hostility toward the U.S. based on coverage and propaganda in the domestic media. They want to embrace the American culture and lifestyle during this trip yet also carry a strong sense of national pride.

To further explore the complexity of international tourists' identity work, this study aims to understand how Chinese international package tourists seemingly use their travel experience to construct and negotiate two conflicting identities. I argue that the international travel experience as package tourists results in the creation and enhance of both global and national identities: after the trip, tourists not only present themselves to be better global citizens but also prouder Chinese patriots. In the following section of the paper, I begin by outlining previous research concerning identity and its connection with tourism, with a specific focus on national identity in the Chinese context. Following a brief explanation of my research methods, I examine how Chinese package tourists' use their experiences in the United States to simultaneously to boost their global and national identities. Finally, I discuss the implications and limitations of my analysis and suggest avenues for future research on the topic. It is worth stressing that this current research was conducted before the tourism industry was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the final section of the paper, I elaborate on the subsequent studies that can be conducted on the post-pandemic tourism industry.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

My analysis of Chinese international tourists' identity constructions during their trip to the United States is situated within the theoretical framework of sociological identity theories. In the following section, I first review two approaches of identity theories within sociological social psychology including the classic identity theory developed by Mead and Cooley, as well as a more contemporary Social Identity Theory. Following that, I review literature that discusses the connection between tourism and identity, with a specific focus on how Chinese national identity was constructed and maintained through both inbound and outbound tourism.

Identity Theories

The discussion of self and identity in the field of sociology asks the question of "who am I"? From the symbolic interactionist perspective, one's self and identity, although sound intimate, and internal, is unavoidably constructed through the identification with others. As Charles Horton Cooley suggests when he discusses the concept of the "looking-glass self", the self operates in the imagination, drawing from, reflecting upon, and responding to real and imagined others (1983[1902]). Building on Cooley's work, Mead (1934) suggests that one's self is born out of reflexive actions from interactions, and the base of the self is an awareness of the generalized other.

A more modern/contemporary perspective that looks at the contextualized and social aspects of self and identity is Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory, developed in the 1970s and 1980s by Tajfel and Turner, sees actors as having multiple identities that can be activated in different social situations. When actors self-categorize themselves into different groups (e.g., race, gender, nationality, educational background, socioeconomic status), they are motivated to make comparisons that favor the in-group, and sometimes disparage the out-group. Social Identity Theory typically focuses on who differentiates in the social situation and influences the content of the operative meanings for the in-group and out-group. This also applies to how actors activate different identities while being in-group or out-group members.

Although coming from different perspectives, both theoretical frameworks are built upon constructionism and assume that identities are neither natural nor static, but are dynamic and socially rooted. Therefore, to better understand how Chinese tourists construct and maintain different, sometimes conflicting, identities during their trip to the United States, it is crucial to pay more attention to tourists' different identity practices within social contexts. In the following

section, I discuss the connection between tourism and identity construction, with a specific focus on how tourism has been impacting the construction of Chinese national identity.

Tourism and Identity

As an activity that consumes experiences, products, and cultural symbols (Colton 1987), tourism is a significant arena for the study of identity. Many previous empirical studies on tourism and identity focus on the "leisure" aspect of tourism activities. The set-aside time for vacation tends to imply a more relaxed way for both feeling and behaviors (Adler and Adler 1999:35; Cohen 1973:89; Graburn 1983:13). At the same time, leisure activities, along with the consumption of both culture and products in the travel destination, allow tourists the symbolic expression and affirmation of their desired self (Dimanche and Samdahl 1994). While some of their everyday roles have been temporarily removed during vacation, some other roles and identities may be strengthened (Stein 2019).

Subsequent empirical research has focused on the construction of personal identity during tourism, for example, Zhang et al. (2017) studied the construction of backpacker identity in the Chinese context; Stein's research (2019) centered on the American vacationers' construction of their short-lived "vacation identity" when they take time off; Munt (1994) learned about how Western tourists construct their middle-class identities through their experiences traveling to developing countries. In addition to the personal-level identity construction, tourism activities and experiences are also used by tourists to construct collective identities. In the following section, I focus on the nexus between tourism and the collective national identity.

Two macro-level principle theories regarding national identity were formulated by Smith (1991) and Anderson (1983). According to Smith (1991:7), national identity helps individuals to define and locate themselves in the world through the "collective personality and distinctive

culture; while on the other hand, Anderson (1983) views nations as an imagined community attached to shared symbols and rituals. On the micro-level, Billig's concept of "banal nationalism" (1995) discussed the everyday practices and routines that help create and maintain people's sense of national pride. On a similar note, Palmer (1998) argues that collective national identity is also experienced on the personal level, and the construction and maintenance of national identity have to rely on people's efforts from the bottom up.

For Chinese tourists, national identity could be especially important considering China being a historically collectivist society that spent many centuries in isolation (Yang et al. 2020). Historically, China has gone through a significant national identity crisis since the mid-19th century largely due to the Opium Wars, the Sino-Japanese War, and a series of foreign invasions (Gries 2004). In the 19th century, China was portrayed as the "sick man of East Asia", and as Scott notes in his 2008 work, contemporary Chinese national identity still grows out of China being the victim of the hostile West. Because of the strong anti-foreign feeling together with a victim complex (Wu 2007), many Chinese nationalists tend to frame and rationalize their behavior based on past humiliations (Gao 2012) and collective memories of past national experiences (Carlson 2009). Previous studies have also explored tourists' expression of nationalism through consumption behaviors (Baillargeon and Gélinas 2011, Pretes 2003). In China, while modern consumption developed alongside the rise of the nation-state, government officials, businesspeople, and activists sought to persuade Chinese individuals to only purchase Chinese-made goods to further advance Chinese nationalism (Gerth 2008).

Much previous research has paid attention to the role of tourism, especially heritage tourism, in promoting national identity in the great Chinese context. In his 1997 study, Liu learned about how the heritage sites developed for Hong Kong inbound tourism facilitate the

negotiation of national identity for Hong Kong residents. Henderson's comparative study of heritage tourism sites both in Hong Kong and Singapore indicated that heritage attractions can "assist in the exploration, discovery, and assertion of national and cultural identities" (2001: 341). Building on Henderson's work, Zhang et al. (2019) looked at how cultural festivals contributed to the construction of hybrid collective identity in post-colonial Macao. In regard to outbound tourism and the construction of national identity, Yang et al. (2020:1) looked at Chinese international tourists' expression and affirmation of their national identity while traveling to Malaysia, Taiwan, and Japan through "the symbolic interaction between them and the world outside of China."

However, by comparison, there is significantly less empirical work that helps understand the connection between outbound tourism and the construction of national identity in a globalized and complex context, especially when Chinese tourists nowadays travel to Western countries that are historically perceived as the "hostile West." To fill this gap, this study aims to learn Chinese tourists' identity construction when they travel internationally to the United States. More specifically, I try to understand how they use their tourism experience to construct and maintain conflicting identities in a global context.

DATA AND METHOD

This study is part of a larger investigation of Chinese package tourism and tourists in the United States. My analysis for this article drew from two types of qualitative data: 23 in-depth interview transcripts with Chinese international tourists during their package tours in the United States; and participants observation that generated the primary ethnographic field notes that include documentation of conversations, interactions, as well as tour guides' explanation of U.S. culture and customs.

According to the popular U.S. travel tips I have read on Chinese social media sites, there are three types of tours that are most popular among Chinese tourists: the East coast tour that travels to big cities like New York City, Boston, Washington DC, and natural scenery such as the Niagara Falls; the West coast tour that incorporates cities and attractions like Los Angeles, Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone National Park; as well as regular and cruise tours to the tropical region like Orlando and Miami. Generally speaking, the busiest time for tourism in North America is during the spring and summer months of the year. Starting in March and April, the tourism industry in the south, such as in Florida, begin to take in Chinese tourists coming from China or other parts of the United States to join cruise and tropical tours. As the weather warms up in May and June, the tourism industry in the rest of the more northern regions starts to recover and welcomes more domestic Chinese tourists. Chinese international tourism in the United States usually peaks in July and August, and the Chinese National Day holiday at the beginning of October normally marks the last big wave of Chinese tourists annually.

Between April and August 2019, by myself, I joined three of the most popular package tours in the U.S. that cover the three types of the most favorable destinations for Chinese tourists: city, tropical, and national parks. The three tours I took can be seen as the epitome of the most popular types of Chinese package tours in the U.S. The first tour I took in April 2019 was a Florida tour that took us to Miami, Key West, and surrounding attractions and beaches over the course of seven days. Compared to the summer, this particular tour was not as large, with all tourists in a van of roughly twenty seats. In such a small group of twenty people, there would not normally be a designated driver, and the tour guide will take the roles of both driver and guide. On top of that, I took two package tours that included city and national park itineraries during the peak tourist season of July and August. In the Mountain west/Rocky Mountains tour tours, we

departed from Las Vegas and visited the Grand Canyon, Antelope's Canyon, Horseshoe Bay, Bryce Canyon, Salt Lake City, and Yellowstone National Park along the way; and the other East coast tour began with a tour of New York City, reaching as far north as Niagara Falls and finally ending in Boston. No matter how big or small, what the package tours had in common was - the packed itinerary, the short period of time spent at each attraction, long road trips, early departures, late returns, and tiredness and fatigue amongst the tourists.

The three package tours I was on were all described as "all-inclusive". In most cases, package tourists are less willing to interact with the local people, and in some rare cases when interactions did happen, many of them appear to be shy because of the language barrier. Tourists who booked their tours from different travel websites or tour guides were grouped together through a third-party intermediary agency. Because of this, people in the same tour group might have not paid the same amount of money. When I was on the East coast tour, I was approached by the tour guide privately and told that because I was traveling alone and was more flexible, they had put me on this "deluxe tour" at a regular price of 300 dollars. I was also kindly reminded not to share how much I have paid for the tour with other people within my group. Overall, the fee paid by tourists covers transportation and hotel expenses, while all entrance fees to the attractions need to be paid out of the pocket. At the end of each day, the tour guide and the bus driver charge a service fee of ten dollars per person. On top of that, meals are not included as well. Generally, the tour bus will take the entire tour group to a service area and leave about half an hour for a meal. This means that the tour guide, who can speak Chinese and understand American culture, becomes the most important source of information for most of the Chinese tourists in this study.

Ultimately, I ended up spending a total of roughly 350 hours in the field. When I was on tour, I used a small notebook as well as my cell phone to jot down field notes depending on the occasion. Generally speaking, I used the notebook to document what I saw and heard on the tour bus, and when we got off the bus for the tour, I chose to use my cellphone because of its convenience. The main body of my field notes documented interactions and conversations that happened during the trip, as well as my thoughts and reflections at the time. Meanwhile, since all of the package tourists spend a lot of time on the road, I would frequently chat with my fellow group mates and tour guides as we make our way from one attraction to the next. I also obtained permission from each tour guide to audio-record their explanations of different attractions and U.S. culture on the tour bus, and these records were transcribed and translated verbatim as another part of my field notes. In the end, my field notes totaled 94 single-spaced pages of approximately 60,000 words.

Besides these observations, I conducted 17 interviews with 23 Chinese package holiday tourists I met during the tour. Constrained by the conditions of completing the interviews on the tour bus, about one third of the interviews were conducted in small groups: I would ask questions to tourists traveling together in a group, and they would respond to my questions individually, as well as supplement each other's answers over the course of the interview. The tourists who participated in my interviews ranged in age from 19 to 79, nine of whom were male and fourteen were female. Most of them had come to the U.S. solely for leisure purposes, but a few had come for the primary purpose of attending business meetings or visiting families. Due to the often-long hours spent on the road, 21 interviews were conducted on the tour bus, while the other two were completed in a hotel lobby. Typically, each interview lasted between 45 to 100 minutes. All 17 interviews were conducted in Mandarin, and the excerpts included in this present paper were

translated from Simplified Chinese to English. All of the interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim in Mandarin and translated into English by myself for this paper. My field notes contain a mixture of both English and Chinese, as well as some sketches and photos. Meaning-loss is inevitable, but I mitigated against this to preserve the meanings contained in its original language by providing necessary context and annotations.

Although being categorized as "Chinese tourists" in this study, there was diversity within the tourists that I interviewed and interacted with. Tourists in this study came from all regions of China, but in general, their hometowns were mostly big cities. One mother traveling with her two sons came from Canada, but according to the mom, she still identify herself as Chinese. At the end of my interview, I would ask them to choose their own class status, and almost all of them indicated that they were middle class. Among these tourists, there are parents who took their teenage children on a summer vacation, middle-aged men and women who came to the United States to visit their relatives, young people traveling together after graduation, and elderly couple in their late 60s and 70s who came to the U.S. to help take care of their grandchildren and were gifted the tour by their son or daughter. The tourists in my groups also have different travel goals and purposes: parents who travel with their children value the educational purpose of the tour, and would require their kids to listen attentively to every point of knowledge to ensure that they have learned something; young people who travel together cherished the shopping opportunities, because the prices of many everyday brands in the United States might double or triple if bought back in China; and there are also tired tourists who have already joined three other tours previously, and would want to just quickly finish the trip and depart for home.

Because of my positionalities both as a solo traveler and fluent English speaker, fitting into smaller groups within the package tour was not difficult. Although all tour packages claim to

be 'all-inclusive', there are still many circumstances that require the use of English. In these moments, I would become the translator for many of the group members helping them order food, purchasing souvenirs, or connecting to hotel Wi-Fi. During the three package tours, I interacted and talked with more than 100 tourists and seven tour guides., I developed deeper and closer relationships with about 20 tourists, which meant we shared conversation topics beyond the package tour that include each other's lives and education, personal interests, ideas about love and marriage, and even the customs and superstitions of our hometown culture. On one occasion, a middle-aged couple I traveled with and interviewed insisted on taking me out to dinner on the last night of the Florida tour. The wife told me that she and her husband had come to Chicago to help with their grandchildren, and I was the person that they have had the longest Chinese conversation with in the past two years.

The friendships formed in the field helped me obtain data and schedule interviews more easily. As a result of the intimate friendship, I was also able to gain a deeper understanding of my interview participants' tourism experiences. However, those rather strong relationships have also affected my perspective as an outsider and observer. There were times when I could not get my field notes written down in time because I was too busy helping others. In addition to that, I sometimes took some information for granted without asking further during formal interviews because I assumed that I have already known it based on the daily conversational exchanges with particular interview participants. In my study, the most common travel unit is family including heterosexual couples and their kids. It was also because of my positionality as a female tourist that I ended up with more female interview participants than male.

I take an inductive approach for the data analysis of this; specifically, grounded theory was used to analyze the two sets of qualitative data paper (see Glaser and Strauss 1967). As

Charmaz (2004) indicated, researchers need to take an active role in the coding process, and the process of coding needs to be conducted sequentially. Preliminary data analysis should also be used to inform future data collection. For this study, ethnographic data collected after each tour was analyzed immediately to illuminate the next round of data collection. I also wrote theoretical memos to creatively analyze the data and link the emerging categories to the existing literature. After the initial stage of data collection and analysis, I integrated the theoretical notes into analytical memos to further develop different categories.

Table 1: Tourists' Demographic Information

Tour Route	Pseudonym	Gender	Age
Florida Tour (5 interviews with 7 interviewees in total)	Sun	Male	25
	Zhao	Female	26
	Zhang Female 40 Wang Male 45 (Interviewed together)		
	Chun Female 50s Li Male 50s (Interviewed together)		
	Zhu	Male	79

Table 1 (Continued)

Las Vegas – Yellowstone Tour (11 interviewees in total)	Ling	Female	19
	Zhong	Female	19
	Che	Male	20
	Ming	Female	20
	Zha	Female	25
	Jiang	Male	42
	Lai	Female	50
	Rong	Male	55
	Lou	Female	56
	Ding	Male	60
	Zang	Female	62
NYC – Niagara Falls Tour (5 interviewees in total)	*Chang*	Male	24
	Wan	Female	27
	Fan	Female	28
	Chan	Female	30
	Zhan	Female	30

In my analysis, I found that Chinese international tourists tended to use their international travel experiences as identity boosters, however, the identities they enhanced appeared to stand in opposition with one another. Through international travel, Chinese tourists in this study constructed identity as qualified global citizens by visiting U.S. attractions, consuming Western brands, and participating in American life. At the same time, observing the American ways of living and the American values in comparison with China, in turn, led to the reaffirmation of their national identity as Chinese. The tours they took simultaneously boosted their global and national identities. This contradiction seems illogical but makes sense when understood within a broader social and cultural context. At the same time, it is worth pointing out that not all of the Chinese tourists in this study used the same strategies throughout their trip. There were some strategies that were more pronounced among specific groups of people. For example, the desire to expand resume and develop cv-worthy skills through travel is particularly evident in parents with young children; and buying Western brands to make oneself a global consumer is more often observed in female travelers. Although traveling as a group, I also did not observe the form of tourists' group identity mainly because tourists mainly interacted with the small group with whom they were traveling with. In this section, I elaborate on this phenomenon in two parts using data I drew from my ethnographic work.

The Global Self

The first dimension of the globalized self created from the travel experience was shaped by the crossing of cultural and geographic borders. For many of the Chinese tourists in this study, the trip to the United States was their first experience away from the Asian continent. Despite their

knowledge of American culture and history, the trip across the Pacific Ocean was a first-hand experience of globalization for many in this study.

The construction of their global selves started before their departure by going through a series of pre-trip rituals. Many informants of this study mentioned going through a long to-do list before leaving home for the U.S.: applying for a tourist visa; booking the tour; learning some simple English for interacting with flight attendants on the plane; purchasing new digital cameras or go-pros; watching American sitcoms to get used to the American ways of living.

In some cases, tour guides will deliberately emphasize the difference between them and other Chinese citizens who do not have the opportunity to come to the U.S. In this way, it makes tourists more willing to purchase additional programs or services not on the itinerary just to experience things that are not available in China while feeling good about their global self. For example, when we visited the Grand Canyon on our first day of the tour, the tour guide tried to sell us an additional program to take a small plane ride down to the bottom of the canyon. The program was not included in the original tour package and was somewhat expensive. In order to convince more of us to purchase the ride, the guide described it as something that "is unique in the U.S." telling us, "This type of rides is definitely only available here, and when you go back to China and people ask what you did, it could be embarrassing that you were only talking about things that can also be done back home." During the trip, tour guides often use different strategies to make tourists feel that they should seize the once-in-a-life opportunity of traveling abroad to broaden their horizons, learn about different culture and customs, and become more qualified global citizens. Most importantly, these U.S. - only experiences will help them develop a global self that is unique and irreplaceable. The construction of the global self, under this

circumstance, involves participating in the uniquely American events while separating themselves from the less global population back home.

In addition to that, some also mentioned utilizing this travel opportunity to build some cv-worthy skills in preparation for future competitions in the global context. The construction of an international image or global identity is particularly common among parents who travel with their children. Zhang, a 40-year-old mother traveling with her two teenage sons, mentioned the pragmatic purpose of the tour in preparation for their kids' future education in the U.S.

> They are probably going to study abroad in the future; therefore, this tour is for them to gain some first-hand experience living in the U.S. and to familiarize themselves with the environment. Plus, this can also be mentioned in their application material as a study-abroad experience, right? The admission committee might see this as a plus and see them as well-traveled global citizens.

Zhang's idea is not uncommon. Almost all of the parents I interviewed and observed during my fieldwork saw the experience of visiting the U.S. as an investment to make their children more competitive in the future global setting.

For instance, when we were on our way back to Boston from Niagra Falls, the group passed by some Ivy League universities. Campus visits were not listed on the itinerary but were offered as a paid program. All four parents in my East Coast tour paid extra money to take the campus tour along with their children. One of the mothers told her daughter that the purpose of visiting the Harvard campus was to encourage her to go to school here in the future. Lin and Zheng, a middle-aged couple traveling with their teenage daughter, constantly reminded their daughter to take notes while listening to the tour guide's explanation of U.S. culture and history. "When you return back to China next semester, you need to show your classmates and teachers what you saw in the U.S. as we paid for you to travel internationally." Overall, many of the

parents I met on the trip especially valued the educational aspect of the tour, hoping to utilize the

tourism experiences to brush up their children's "soft skills" needed for future global citizens.

In addition to educational and motivational purposes, parents of younger children tend to

emphasize the importance of having their children "familiarize and understand American

culture" through the trip. Even though the package tour requires almost no interaction with the

outside world using English, some parents took every opportunity to have their children speak

English with American people to improve their speaking skills. In general, many tourists would

value the practicality of the tour and utilize it as a way to boost their children's global identity

and competitiveness later in life.

Many tourists in this study feel particularly global while interacting with their friends and

family back in China. The experience of traveling and shopping in the U.S. has separated them

from them from their friends and family back home, thus helped them develop a global self that

is unique and not shared. For almost all of the tourists I have interacted with, sharing their travel

experiences instantly in group chats and on social media is essential. By sharing photos, videos,

and travel insights with people who do not have the same opportunity, many are simultaneously

presenting their cosmopolitan and global self. Lai, a middle-aged female tourist I interviewed

and interacted with, told me that she has to post live updates in her group chat while keeping up

with posting on her social media, and this all leads to her feeling global and Western (YangQi):

> Lai: They are the ones who told me to share more photos! My family back home told me
> to post photos so that they could see what it's like abroad. I have been traveling and
> bombing them with photos for a month now, and it was those moments that made me feel
> YangQi [Western], as you know. It's like I'm seeing something that they are not able to
> access.
> Interviewer: Can you elaborate on that, especially YangQi, what does that mean?
> Lai: That phrase? You know when you were a kid, if your parents took you out to eat
> Western food, or bought you the Western-style dress, then you are YangQi, you are
> Western. I have never had the chance to feel that way when I was a kid, but now I do
> while updating my family about the tour I am taking.

Similar to Lai, almost all of the Chinese tour mates I have met and interacted with shared their travel experiences with friends and family back in China instantly on their social media and as said proudly by one of the tourists, "Photos of foreign travel always give me the most likes and compliments, even from friends who I lose touch with." Presenting the global aspect of their identity to people back home seems to be an important task for many tourists I interacted with. By sharing photos and texts of their outbound travel experiences in the United States, tourists can separate themselves from others who have not traveled abroad. In this contrast between themselves and the generalized other who lack this experience, the global aspect of their identity became more obvious and revealing.

Although the tours I have been on almost always have only one outlet shopping trip, I can still observe how tourists' global self emerged from them deciding what products to purchase. One of the most obvious examples is that many tourists in this study would carefully avoid purchasing products that are "made in China" and will check the label for the place of manufacture to make sure the item is made in the USA. I spoke to one of the tourists named Rong in my group about avoiding products that are made in China, he commented, "Why would I travel across the ocean, take a 12-hour flight, and then come to the U.S. to buy clothes that are made in China?" I then said that many products that are made in China are actually only available in the U.S. Rong went on to say, "Well, I could not care less. I just don't want to go home and give someone a gift only to have them find out that these items are made in China." In these cases, the global self is highlighted by drawing a clear line from purchasing products that are made in their home country during their trip in the U.S. The attempt to distinguish products that are "Made in China" vs. "Made in USA" and their obvious preference for one over the other,

especially when giving people gifts when they return, can reflect how some Chinese tourists manage to highlight their global identity through consumption.

Another aspect of using consumption to construct their global, specifically Western, identity during the tour was tourists' strong interests in Western luxury brand. Overall, the most popular products among Chinese tourists in this study are almost all from the first-tier Western luxury brands including but not limited to Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Coach, Michael Kors, Kate Spade, and Tory Burch. Many of the informants came prepared, having made a list of the products they want to buy before joining the tour, and even learning in advance the location for the major brands in the outlet. Similar to the idea of not buying Chinese goods when traveling abroad, buying Western-made luxury products not only avoids embarrassment when gifting people back home but also gives tourists the opportunity to showcase their purchasing power as global consumers. One middle-aged female tourist I interacted with kept sending shopping updates with her girlfriends back home in a group chat during the East-coast tour. When asking about this, she mentioned, "My girlfriends pretty much only want to know about the shopping-related experiences, they don't care much about different touristy sites. I also try to help them keep an eye on products that are not available in China such as handbags, skincare products, and cosmetics." The choices of consumption during the tour helps tourists to boost their global identity, especially when they share such experiences with friends and family members back home.

Overall, Chinese tourists in this study managed to construct and enhance their global selves in a variety of ways at all stages of their journey. These strategies, overall, revolve around somehow separating oneself from other friends and relatives who have not traveled to the United States, thus constructing a global self while comparing oneself with the generalized other. No

matter it was learning some simple language and American culture, choosing programs that are only available in the U.S., or helping their children develop CV-worthy skills to be more competitive globally, purchasing everyday and luxury products that are made in the U.S., the Chinese tourists in this study were trying to maximize the value of the trip and thus make their global selves more compelling to their audiences.

The Patriotic Self

In this section, I examine how tourists cultivate an apparently diametrically opposed, patriotic self on the tour. This patriotic self grows out of the daily inconvenience and cultural shocks encountered on the trip, from constantly comparing the U.S. with China, and from the lack of recognition of American values. Meanwhile, this patriotic self stems from and is sustained by the ways tour guides present and relay American culture in the process of actively catering toward Chinese tourists' existing views and biases. Specifically, the tourists' patriotic self first came from the daily inconvenience they experienced while staying in the United States and their disapproval of some American culture and customs; in the process of the tour, they started to feel more proud of being a Chinese while comparing different aspects of U.S. society to China; finally, with the help of the tour guide, tourists' disagreement with the core U.S. values deepened during the trip, thus leading to them feeling even more patriotic during the international travel.

To begin with, the most direct source that feeds the patriotic self among Chinese tourists in this study was the daily struggles and discomfort felt during the trip. Some of the examples being their dislike of American food, language barriers, and unfamiliarity of navigating most of the public space by themselves. One of the most prominent examples I noticed among all three tours was the accessibility of hot drinking water. In the course of my research, more than ten tourists complained to me about the inaccessibility of hot water everywhere. Although most of

the tours I joined took place in spring and summer, "drinking hot water" is widely considered a healthy practice in Chinese culture. As one middle-aged female tourist once told me, "Why do Americans only drink iced beverages? I tried to get the hotel receptionist to help me fill up my water bottle with boiling water before I left today, and they were so confused and looked at me as I was a weirdo." Another tourist mentioned trying to use the hotel's coffee maker to boil water, saying, "I tried to use the coffee maker provided in my hotel room to boil hot water, but it was too small that I had to do it back and forth a dozen times to fill up my water bottle. You know, that was the moment when I missed China and wanted to go back immediately."

In addition to the lack of hot water, quick cashless mobile payment, which was still not as common in the United States, was another point that made Chinese tourists feel proud of and miss, their home country. On one of the outlet shopping trips that I took for this study, a tourist once told me that when she saw some stores put up signs like "We accept UnionPay and Alipay", she felt a great sense of pride because this "symbolizes the rise of our home country." When they went shopping, most of my tour mates needed to use cash as they do not have local credit cards to make transactions without an international fee. At one time on the tour bus, when the tour guide said that many Americans still use paper checks, a middle-aged male tourist in my group openly expressed his surprise:

> What? Still using checks? I cannot believe it. We have not even used cash for a long time in China. When you go out, you simply use WeChat Pay or Alipay for everything. How come Americans are so backward?

In many participants' eyes, cashless mobile transactions represent an efficient and more advanced way of life. When told that Americans still use cash or even paper checks, tourists feel proud of their home country in comparison.

The resistance to the American tip culture also played a big role in promoting Chinese tourists' patriotic self in the United States. As a Western courtesy that most of the Chinese tourists were hardly ever exposed to, tour guides would introduce the American tip culture at the beginning of the trip. In general, tour guides reminded tourists to leave tips for the service person at restaurants, hotel rooms, or after taking a small guided tour. As put by one guide named Jiang, "It does not need to be a lot of money. Three or five bucks is fine. What's more important is to tip people for their service and not make the Americans think the Chinese are stingy."

Meanwhile, being a solution for the resistance of tip culture, tourists are required to tip the tour guide ten dollars at the end of each day as specified in the itinerary. Despite being introduced as an important part of American culture, tipping is not at all popular among Chinese tourists in the study. As one person in my group put it:

> I am really not a fan of tipping. It's just too expensive! If you multiply three or five dollars by seven according to the exchange rate, you have to give a tip of 20 to 30 RMB (the Chinese unit of currency) each time, not to mention the tax. It is times like this that made me feel homesick. Our logistics industry is so developed and fast: takeout is delivered to your doorstep in half an hour, online shopping can arrive the next day, but we Chinese people do not have to pay a penny in tips.

According to him, not having to tip while enjoying better and more effective services are what made him feel especially proud for his country during the foreign tour, and his opinion is widely shared among other group members in my observation.

Since we spent a lot of time commuting from one location to another during the tour, Chinese tourists often spotted and compared the similarities and differences in infrastructure development between the U.S. and China, as well as the walkability and convenience of the place they visit. These comparisons will often lead to the boost of their national pride. In some cases, they even mock the "backwardness" of the U.S. infrastructure and its sparseness, with one question tourists often ask the tour guide being, "How come there are no skyscrapers or elevated

bridges in America?" When I tried to explore the source of this pride more deeply by asking "Why do you think the U.S. is so slow to build tall buildings and bridges?", some would attribute China's fast and efficient infrastructure development to the superiority of a centralized social and political system. As one person put it, "We can focus on making decisions fast without having to go through layers of democratic voting and approval as the U.S. does." In this way, the superficial infrastructure comparison has actually led to a deeper level of pride for the Chinese socio-political system.

The constant comparisons during the trip were also present in observations and comments about the American people, and such comparative comments have often led to tourists exacerbating and reaffirming their own past biases. As an example, many of the tourists I have spoken to have expressed surprise at the body sizes of Americans. One of them said: "I think many of them just look unhealthy. Especially considering that the food here is also pretty bad. I would not have wanted to only eat junk food and grow fat here in the States." Comments about obesity and being overweight came up a lot in my observations, and tour guides would often use it to make jokes. One time when a tourist was caught eating burgers instead of Chinese food when we were on a service-station break, the tour guide jokingly said to him, "Be careful that you end up as fat as Americans!" These forms of comparison and evaluation also somehow made some Chinese tourists feel better about their own living environment back in China.

In addition to this, many tourists deepen their previous race-related prejudices during the trip, which often led to feeling lucky and proud of China remaining a mono-ethnic country. Racial biases, especially racism toward Black people, were present at all stages of the tour: Before the tour begins, the tour guide's itinerary often highlight "Black neighborhood" to remind visitors to be more alert while exploring alone at night; during the tour, the guides often make

racist comments while commentating about the big wealth gap in the United States; and as a result of that, tourists in my group are, at various times, extremely wary and cautious of racial minorities, to the point of feeling lucky and safe that China is not a multi-racial melting pot like the United States. When I was on the Florida tour, one middle-aged female tourist I interviewed, Chun, has brought up the topic of race and Black people in her son's neighborhood during the interview:

> Interviewer: How do you like visiting your son in Chicago? It's a very big city.
> Chun: The city is beautiful, but the problem is that I don't feel safe at all compared to when I live in China! The good thing is that we just moved to a white neighborhood, so I feel much better now, even though the rent is higher and we have a smaller space. We used to live in the black neighborhood, and I was constantly terrified to go out. You know, this afternoon when we were on the airboat in Everglades, the black man sitting behind us was shouting and screaming the entire time. I was terrified on the boat! I'm afraid that he might do something so our boat will sink. They make me feel uncomfortable.
> Interviewer: Chicago has a big black population, right?
> Chun: Yes, but I'm still not used to being around black people or living in or near a black community. I'm just not very comfortable when I see them. I don't know, that's just how I feel. I think they are dangerous, and they always walk and dress like a gangster. I've also heard a lot about them shooting people in Chicago.

Chun was gifted the package tour by her son and daughter-in-law for taking care of the grandkid in Chicago, and she has developed strong feelings of dislike for Black people in the U.S. both on the tour and while living in Chicago. According to her, China is the place that made her "feel safe."

Chun's view was constantly echoed in the tour group. In my observation, I could often hear discussions about different racial groups in the U.S., which often led to conclusions like "Black people are indeed a destabilizing factor of the society." In some cases, such comparisons between China and the U.S. did make some tourists feel really proud of their mono-racial home country.

Last but not least, tourists' patriotic self also grows out of their disagreement with the American values. In this particular strategy, the role of the tour guide in promoting and sustaining such patriotic self cannot be underestimated. Tour guides tend to oversimplify American values and state them selectively catering towards Chinese tourists' pre-existing biases. Topics that are censored in mainland China, such as democracy and democratic elections, freedom of speech, as well as diversity and equality, were never brought up by the tour guides, even though they also represent American values. In one exchange I had with a tour guide, he specifically pointed out that one of his core tour-guiding principles is to "never talk about politics, especially the merits of the U.S. political system or anything like that" to "avoid unnecessary trouble." According to him, when you are not sure of the political leanings of the tourists and want to minimize conflict, "praising China while disparaging the United States" seems like a perfect strategy to lead conversations on tour.

Another discussion about the U.S. value happened on our way to Yellowstone. The tour guide, Jiang, spoke to the tourists about everything from homeless people to the U.S. welfare system, eventually landing on the contrast between American values and Chinese values regarding work. The following paragraph is a conversation that I documented in my field notes, and in this case, the tour guide and two tourists on the bus went back and forth commenting on homelessness, welfare, and work ethics in the United States. The exchanges among them started with the tour guide pointing out that many homeless people they saw on the street were abusing the welfare system:

> Jiang: In the U.S., there are a lot of homeless people who take advantage of the welfare system: they do not go to work and are able to rely on food stamps and welfare. They will use the resources that you work hard to provide for them. We can see a lot of homeless people in the U.S. When you come to the U.S., you suddenly see a lot of homeless people that are physically healthy.

Lin (A male tourist in my group roughly in his late 40s): Yes! Why don't they work? They are physically capable of working.

Jiang: That's because it is something that they chose. It's their life choice. It's not that they do not have options. If they want to work, they can always find a job. They just look for food in various places every day and rely on welfare for money. We cannot understand this, but for them, it is their choice.

Then, their conversational exchange started to focus on why able-bodied people did not want to work for money but chose to live on the street instead. This exchange eventually led toward a discussion about the U.S. working ethics as compared to China.

Lin: I saw people who are physically healthy becoming homeless on the street, they can just go and work in fast-food restaurants or supermarkets, but they simply don't want to do that.

Jiang: I agree, they can totally do that but they refuse to work…You can go to McDonald's and sell burgers, work 40 hours per week and you will be able to have $400 per week.

Miu (A male tourist roughly in his 50s): It's not that much! If you only work for 20 hours every week, you will not be able to support yourself.

Jiang: No, it's enough. There are not that many expenses in the U.S. Many people do that.

Lin: But you need to work! You cannot just do nothing and complain.

Jiang: Yes, but that's our Chinese traditional value. It does not apply to everyone. Some people do not like pressure: so you can either be extremely rich and face no pressure, or live like a homeless person with no money and no pressure.

Miu: I don't agree with the American value at all. In Chinese society, you first need to work and exhaust all your options before turning to the government or welfare system for help. Our way of doing things does not support idle people, and that's the way it should be.

Hard work has always been regarded as one of the traditional Chinese values and excellent quality of Chinese people. In this documented dialogue, we could see how the tour guide, step by step, elevated "the problem of homelessness" seen by the tourists to "lazy and unmotivated American work ethics", thus forming a sharp contrast with the hard-working and striving Chinese. As a result of these tailored comparisons, as tourist B put it, they were instead able to feel prouder of their country's values as opposed to the American values.

Similar to this, many times, the small talk between the tour guide and tourists on the bus landed on the contrast between hard-working Chinese vs. lazy Americans. In the midst of such

conversations, Chinese tourists ended up feeling prouder of their national identity and their home country.

Another example I recorded in my field note that related to the differences between Chinese and American values came from the oldest tourist I have spoken to for this study. Zhu was a 79-year-old male who came to the U.S. to visit his children in Seattle and went on this gifted package tour by himself. Both traveling alone, Zhu and I paired up on the day when we visit Key West. During our conversation, he asked me about the different approaches and attitudes toward supporting the elderly in China and the United States:

> Interviewer: Yes, I'd say most elderly couples in the U.S. do not live with their children. They don't expect to be taken care of by their children when they are old as well.
> Zhu: So, they are all willing to go to nursing homes?
> Interviewer: I'm not sure, but I'd say the percentage of Americans who are willing to move to a nursing home when they are old is definitely higher compared to Chinese. In China, if you send your parents to a nursing home instead of taking care of them by yourself, you will be seen as a bad kid. But that's the reality. Especially if you were born during the one-child-policy era, you and your spouse are expected to take care of four parents, and maybe one or two children when you are forty. That's a lot of pressure. I hope you don't mind me saying this.
> Zhu: No, not at all. That's very true, so young people in China today don't want to have children anymore, even after the government ended the one-child policy. We have a very strong and different family value, and many Westerners cannot understand or relate to that. In China, even if people within this big family have disagreements with one another, on the surface, you still have to maintain this "good-looking" presentation. This is just the traditional value, and this is what I am more used to.

After this conversation, Zhu, despite trying to be understanding and supportive of his son, has repeatedly expressed his concerns about his future life. He did not share the American values of sending the elderly to nursing homes, yet his own son has been studying and working in such a culture for over a decade. Zhu's feeling toward his home country was much more complex: on the one hand, he was proud of the Chinese traditional values of taking care of their elderly when he noticed on the tour that Americans simply "send their parents to nursing homes"; on the other

hand, since his son works in the United States, Zhu was also concerned that he would spend his older ages in a nursing home, as Americans do.

In general, the patriotic self that tourists developed and sustained during their trips in the U.S. comes from multiple sources, ranging from the inconvenience they felt on a daily basis, to their disdain for American infrastructure, as well as their biases and disapproval of American culture and values with the help of the tour guide. The entire trip can be seen as a "feel-good" experience that made them feel prouder of being a Chinese citizen.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The stories I presented in the previous section of the paper illustrate Chinese international tourists' construction of their identities both as global citizens and patriotic Chinese nationals during their package tours in the United States. On the one hand, it appeared that the Chinese tourists in this study used different strategies to separate themselves from various Chinese elements, including Chinese-made products and experiences that are also available in China, to assert their global citizenship through the tour. On the other hand, tourists constructed their identity as "proud Chinese patriots" while comparing infrastructure, values, and cultural customs between U.S. and China. Although seemingly contradictory, both identities were activated and boosted in the context of international, cross-country tours. As I show in the data, the "tourist self" is not static, but multifaceted and dynamic, and needs to be understood within the context of both China and the U.S.

This multifaceted tourist self is, at first, situated within a broader social context that highlights China's economic ascendance. As a direct result of China's economic growth, the purchasing power of its citizens has greatly increased, and as mentioned above, China is not only the largest tourist-generating country in the world, but Chinese tourists also bring big revenues to

the destination countries. The economic development at the national level and "the power of purchasing power" at the individual level during international tours together feed the national pride of Chinese tourists. Confidence in the country's economic strength and Chinese tourists' enormous purchasing power bring a sense of superiority to the travel process: upon stepping into the United States, many tourists feel that they should be reviewing rather than understanding the culture and people of the United States. As one woman in my tour group complained, "Why do we still have to follow their tipping culture when we are the ones spending money in the U.S.? Aren't consumers supposed to be God?" This sense of national pride also comes from the elite and middle-class perspectives of tourists as examined in this study. Despite being on a rather cheap package tour group, a trip abroad still costs a lot of money. Especially when making observations about the less-than-ideal aspects of the United States, such as homelessness or underdeveloped infrastructure, this elite positionality might lead them to feel prouder of their country's rapid development and their own fortunate current state of life.

The globalized yet patriotic tourist self constructed during the tour should also be situated within the tensions between U.S. and China, especially during the Trump administration. The global political and economic order created after World War II was greatly challenged by Donald Trump. As the two largest economies in the world, the relationship between China and the United States has gradually turned from interdependence to hostility, and the tension keeps exacerbating until today (Boylan, McBeath, and Wang 2021). Due to this tension and the accompanying negative coverage of the U.S. in Chinese news, Chinese tourists tend to enter the U.S. with preexisting biases and stereotypes. On top of that, the tour guides also deliberately cater to these biases to keep the tourists happy and reduce potential conflicts of opinions, thus collectively enhancing their national pride during the trip. On the other hand, the eagerness to

construct a "global self" can be seen as a consequence of a neoliberal logic that pervades modern society (Lemert and Elliott 2006). In other words, neoliberalism encourages individuals to apply a market logic to their own lives and see themselves as calculated consumers. In this particular case, despite their prejudices against the United States and its people, "appearing to be global" is still a good way to win current and future competitions in a global setting. Similar as how middle-class American parents who arrange volunteer-tourism opportunities for their kids in third-world countries, some Chinese tourists in my study, especially parents who travel with their kids, also wish to gain some CV-worthy skills in preparation for their children's future competitions (Molz 2017). The experience of traveling to the United States, on some level, make them more qualified global citizens, thus, simultaneously equipping them with "globalness" that expected to be cherished in the future.

Like most qualitative studies that do not aim to generalize their findings, one limitation of my study is that it only focuses on the travel experiences of Chinese package holiday tourists in the United States. Similar findings may not be extended to other tourist groups such as solo travelers or backpackers. However, the paradox I have uncovered in this study can not only provide insight on Chinese tourists but can also be seen as a snapshot of how globalization and China-U.S. relations operate at the micro-level. Despite the grand narrative and tensions portrayed in the news, the actual interactions contain more nuances and subtleties. As suggested in the theoretical framework, individuals' identities need to be interpreted within social and cultural contexts, and this study provides the much-lacking thick descriptions in the field of international tourism and identity construction. My hope is that this initial exploration can encourage future researchers to delve more deeply into the empirical practices of package tourism, and to shed more light on how individuals' practices are shaped by the broad dynamics

of neoliberal globalization. Meanwhile, the near-destructive impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry cannot be overlooked. 2019 saw approximately three million Chinese tourists to the United States, while in 2020, the number has decreased to 370,000 (Statista 2020). Coinciding with the global pandemic are discrimination and violence against Asians. In this context, future research should further explore the current state of tourism under the impact of the global pandemic, as well as the discrimination that Asian-looking tourists and tour guides may face in the near future.

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Chapter 2: "I Spent Two Minutes Sightseeing, Three Hours Retouching My Photos": The Shifted Gaze of Chinese Package Holiday Tourists in the Age of Social Media

ABSTRACT

While previous research on international package tourism has tended to examine tourists' behaviors and travel motivations, this article suggests that Chinese tourists' package tour experiences in the United States are, to a large extent, social media-focused and centered on interacting with friends and family back home. The paper contributes to the scholarly debate surrounding the 'tourist gaze' by arguing that the original definition of this concept shall be extended to better reflect the use of modern technology. Through the analysis of ethnographic observations, interviews, and documents, this study illustrates that Chinese package tourists, aided by tour organizers and guides, direct their gaze inward instead of outward during their corporal tours in the United States. Their travel activities do not aim at seeing tourist attractions but rather are orchestrated to constantly check how they look in pictures and whether their self-presentations are successful in the eyes of people back home. Equipped with modern technology, tourists studied in this paper have successfully shifted their gaze away from looking outward to a backward self-examination.

INTRODUCTION

As a mass social phenomenon, tourism has existed at least since the late nineteenth century, while the expansion of road transport infrastructure and a decrease in the cost of air travel have encouraged the industry's expansion. According to *The Outbound Chinese Tourism and Consumption Trends: 2017 Survey* jointly issued by Nielsen and Alipay, Chinese tourists traveled overseas on 131 million occasions in 2017. Among all the destinations, nearly three million

Chinese tourists visit the U.S. annually, spending over $30 billion per year. Nowadays, despite the removal of travel barriers for independent travelers, joining a package tour group is still a popular way of traveling when people plan for their trips. According to China Tourism Academy's annual report on China Outbound Tourism development, in the year 2018, 55.24% of surveyed tourists traveled abroad with a tour group, and 50.65% said they would be willing to join a tour group in the future. Traditionally, package tours have been the preferred model for Chinese tourists, especially when they travel abroad due to low-cost, safety, and the reduced language barriers (Wong and Kwong 2004). All-inclusive package tours incorporate almost all aspects of international tourists' traveling experiences by providing meals, transportation, accommodation, sightseeing, and shopping guide (Wong and Kwong 2004). The guided package tour not only promises novice, inexperienced tourists with adventurous travel experiences but also gives them assurance and a sense of security (Schmidt 1979).

With the prevalence of social media and smartphones, as well as many tourists' almost urgent need and desire to take and post photos, many agencies have started to provide package tours that incorporate as many social media-worthy attractions (attractions that are popular on social media, and will generate more clicks and attention if posting on social networking sites) as possible to help tourists create successful presentations online. In this paper, I look into the collective effort from the travel agency, the tour guide, and Chinese package tourists themselves in the creation of social media-worthy travel experiences using three sets of data: participant observation field notes in three different package tours, 23 in-depth interviews with Chinese package tourists, and the analysis of five travel agencies' websites. I argue that the package-tour experiences for Chinese tourists investigated in this paper were largely built around the strategic construction and maintenance of successful social media presentations. Moreover, I aim to explore

how the persistent use of smartphones and the act of online posting further shape the 'tourist gaze'; nowadays, tourists I interacted with no longer prioritize their gaze to what they encounter at their travel destinations but rather turn their gazes back on themselves and on presenting themselves within their social networks. These are evidence that the tourist gaze in the age of social media has gradually become a backward self-gazing.

In the following section of the paper, I begin by outlining previous research concerning the tourist gaze, highlighting the discussion of tourists' photo-taking behavior and how it has extended the gaze. I then review the growing body of scholarship addressing connections between Web 2.0 and modern tourism. Following a brief explanation of my research methods, I demonstrate how Chinese package tourists' tourism experiences in the United States are highly social media-centered, and how this form of immersive social media experiences has reshaped the tourist gaze. Finally, I discuss the conclusion and limitations of my analysis and its implication for future research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

With China being one of the biggest tourist-generating countries in the world, topics related to Chinese international tourists have been explored across multiple disciplines. Some main themes include the investigations of tourists' travel motivations (see Li, Xu and Weaver 2009), their expectations and level of satisfactions (see Li et al. 2011, Liu, Jun, and Yang 2015), and consumption behaviors (see Tsang, Lee and Liu 2014, Chan et al. 2014, Correia, Kozak, and Kim 2018, Xu and McGeHee 2012). Based on the experiences of Chinese tourists traveling to the United States in package tours, the thesis of this paper takes on a different approach and focuses on a central concept within the tourism literature – the tourist gaze. In the following section, I first review the literature on the tourist gaze and present that the gaze is not something organic, but

socially constructed. Then, I review literature focusing on tourists' photo-taking behaviors and discuss how technology, such as cameras, further extend the tourist gaze in modern times. Following that, I look at how social media and the culture of instantaneity further shape the tourist gaze. Lastly, I review a theoretical framework that examines the performing of self in tourism and identify gaps in current literature.

The Classic Tourist Gaze

In Urry and Larsen's book *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2012), they argued for the fundamentally visual nature of many tourism experiences. When tourists travel, they "look at the environment with interest and curiosity" (2011: 16). In other words, tourists gaze at what they encounter during their trips. MacCannell (1999) has also pointed out the gazing characteristics of tourism experiences by comparing tourists as contemporary pilgrim who seek authenticity in places they visit. Meanwhile, as such authentic experiences can only be found backstage, the gaze of the tourist can sometimes be intrusive or unacceptable. According to MacCannell, anything can potentially be a tourist attraction as long as one person can "take the trouble to point [it] out to another as something [that is] noteworthy, or worth seeing" (1999:192). It is the tourist gaze that organizes the relationships between the various senses while we travel, and it helps tourists identify out-of-the-ordinary things (Urry and Larson 2011).

Urry and Larsen have categorized what tourists tend to gaze at, which includes the seeing of a unique object, the seeing of particular signs, the seeing unfamiliar aspects of what had previously been thought of as familiar, the seeing of ordinary aspects of social life undertaken by people in unusual contexts, and the seeing of particular signs that indicate that a certain other object is indeed extraordinary even though it does not seem to be so (2011: 30-1). Heideggar has also emphasized how experiences of other places are transformed into 'an object ready-at-hand for the

viewer' to gaze at (2005:42). Generally speaking, the concept of the 'tourist gaze' stresses the visual aspect of the tourism experiences and looks at tourists' tendency to look at the external natural and social environment in places that they traveled to.

The tourist gaze is not organic or something that happens automatically, but socio-culturally framed. "We never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (Berger 1972: 9). Tourists gaze at the world through "a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations" that are "framed by social class gender, nationality, age and education" (Urry and Larsen 2011: 17). Therefore, many previous works on the tourist gaze have focused on how tourist attractions are developed, reproduced, or even staged (MacCannell 1999, Boorstin 1964, Eco 1986, Baudrillard 1988, Pearce and Moscardo 1986). Despite that some recent literature has critiqued the idea of 'tourist gaze' because it neglects tourists' other bodily experiences and senses (see Everett 2008, Gillespie 2006), it is undeniable that the visual aspect is still central to the tourism experiences, especially with the help of various technology. In the following section, I review literature that examines the intimate connection between photography and the modern tourist gaze.

Tourism, Photo-taking, and the Modern Tourist Gaze

Modern technology, such as digital cameras and cell phones with cameras, has greatly extended the tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011: 170). Osborn has described "the ultimate inseparability of the medium [of photography] from tourism's general culture and economy and from the varieties of modern culture of which they are constitutive" (2000: 70). With the act of photo-taking, tourists are capable to frame their gazes and "produce tangible memories to be cherished and consumed well after the journey" (Urry and Larsen 2011: 171).

While photography has greatly extended the tourist gaze, it also shapes people's tourism experiences. Much tourism becomes "a search for the photogenic" (Urry and Larsen 2011: 193). Tourism experiences are democratized by translating them into cheap images (Sontag 1979: 7, Tagg 1988: 55-56). During their trip, tourists search for opportunities to snap photos and frame a 'Kodak moment', and they anticipate that cameras can help them transform the fleeting gazes to long-lived memory travel (Haldrup and Larsen 2003). In this way, much of the tourism experiences can be turned into precious material objects that symbolize tourists' memories and emotions (Haldrup and Larsen 2003; Rose 2010).

Many previous studies have explored tourists' photo-taking behavior by investigating the content of their travel photos (Van House 2011, Lyu 2016, Feighery 2009, Garlick 2002) and motivations of their behavior (Chalfen 1979, Jenkins 2003, Galí and Donaire 2015, Li et al. 2019). The tourist gaze and photo-taking are not separate processes, but "each derives from and enhances the other" (Urry and Larsen 2011). However, with the fast-paced development of social media sites and the growing popularity of using smartphones to take travel photos, 'snapping a photo' is no longer the last step to frame the memories of the trip. After taking the photos, tourists are eager to post and share these photos instantaneously. In the following section, I further examine the impact of Web 2.0, websites and social media platforms that emphasize user-generated content, on tourism and identify the gaps in the current literature on the tourist gaze in the age of social media.

Web 2.0: From Photo-taking to the Instantaneous Act of 'Posting'

Photo-sharing, as one of the most basic and commonly used features of SNS, has been explored in previous literature across numerous disciplines. Empirical studies of tourists' photo-sharing behaviors usually fall under two broad categories: first, the investigation of their motivations

behind posting photos online (Cheng, Liang and Leung 2014, Leung 2013, Park, Kee, and Valenzuela 2009, Urista, Dong, and Day 2009, Hollenbaugh and Ferris 2014, Quan-Haase and Young 2010, Smock, Ellison, Lampe and Wohn 2011, Papacharissi and Mendelson 2011, Li 2020); and second, the exploration of how tourists' various demographic variables have impacted their SNS-based photo-sharing behaviors (see Dhir and Torsheim 2016, Malik, Hiekkanen and Neiminen 2016).

In addition to that, many also looked at tourists' posting their travel photos on social networking sites and photo communities using smartphones or digital cameras. Tomblin (2007) has looked at the difference between traditional photo albums and the exhibitions of photographs on social media sites such as Facebook and Flickr. He argued that the act of sharing photos on Social Network Service (SNS) tends to reflect a "culture of instantaneity" where people expect "rapid delivery, ubiquitous availability and the instant gratification of desires" (2007: 74). Compared to the photo album, photos tourists post on SNS tend to be short-lived, "transitory, ephemeral" images (Van House 2007: 4, Murray 2008). Meanwhile, digital photography makes photographs instantaneous, mobile, and instantly consumable on screens (Lister 2007, Larsen 2008, Murray 2008, Rubinstein and Sluis 2008). Whereas traditional photo albums were directed at a future audience including friends, family members and oneself after the trip, digital camera-phone photographs travel 'timelessly' so the audiences and receivers of these images can look at events unfolding roughly in real-time (Gye 2007; Hjorth 2007, Villi 2007, Larsen 2008). Thus, tourism experiences transformed from the search for Kodak moments to events that are 'Instagrammable' (things that are worth posting on the photo-sharing social media app Instagram). Moreover, the fast development of Web 2.0 further enables tourists' display of "conspicuous leisure" to their friends and families virtually that signals the results of abundant leisure time and activities (Veblen

1898). Following that, I review the theoretical framework of touristic performativity to situate the investigation of touristic looking and photo-taking.

The Performance of the Self in Tourism

The exploration of tourist photography and the tourist gaze should be placed within the broad theoretical framework of the performance of self in tourism (Edensor 2000, Haldrup and Larsen 2010, Larsen 2005). According to Scarles, tourism includes "a series of active performances" (2009: 481) that tourists not only participate but also create. While tourists can be considered to enact various performances on different stages (Edensor 2000), the tourist self as performativity is reinforced by the act of photo-taking and photo-sharing: in many cases, "tourists are not only aware of the camera, but also accept to perform different versions of the self" (Dinhopl and Gretzel 2015: 133). For example, family members often engage in the performance of their intimate relationship by hugging or standing close to each other in family travel photography (Larsen 2005). In many cases, tourist photography becomes "less visual but more embodied" in order to produce and reflect social relationships (Larsen 2005:416).

Meanwhile, the self-directed tourist gaze has been explored in the studies of selfie-taking during the tour. Selfie, defined as "a fast self-portrait, made with smartphone's camera and immediately distributed and inscribed into a network", is an instant visual communication that documents "where we are, what we are doing, who we think we are, and who we think is watching" (Saltz 2014). As a new way of touristic looking, selfie-taking enables tourists to other and objectify themselves by putting the self in visual frame (Dinhopl and Gretzel 2015). Selfie-taking accelerates the performance and consumption of self – "it is the visual media of themselves that tourists travel to and consume" (2015:136). However, the shifted tourist gaze is not only due to the popularity of smartphones' front-facing cameras and tourists' enthusiasm for snapping selfies,

but rather the result of an ongoing, interactive process happened before and during the tour. Tourist agencies, tour guides, tourists' imagined audiences back home, as well as technology collectively shaped the tourist gaze; therefore, it calls for a closer examination of tourism experiences empirically and interactively. Beyond that, a methodological gap can also be identified as the majority of the previous literature on tourists' photo-sharing behavior was quantitative. As a result, this present paper attempts to use ethnographic data to fill these identified gaps and answer the following research questions: Is the tourist gaze shifting its direction in the context of a social media-centric tourism experiences? How does social media platforms and the behavior of instant sharing promote such shift? Will tourists still choose to look out and gaze at the views of the destination, or only gazing at their own self-presentation within that landscape?

DATA AND METHODS

This study is part of a larger investigation into package tourism and Chinese tourists in the United States. My analysis in this article is based on three sets of qualitative data: participant observation that generates primary ethnographic data including field notes and photos; 23 in-depth ethnographic interviews with Chinese tourists who joined the same tours as I did; and materials from five travel agencies' websites.

According to the travel agencies' websites, the most popular package tour routes designed for Chinese and Chinese-speaking tourists in the United States usually fall under three categories: the East coast tour that travels to big cities like New York City, Boston, Washington DC, and natural scenery such as the Niagara Falls; the West coast tour that incorporates cities and attractions like Los Angeles, Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone National Park; as well as regular and cruise tours to the tropical region like Orlando and Miami. Travel agencies allow people to choose from different packages based on their goals and budgets. For the package

tourism industry, the primary season for their business is roughly between March and October. In March and April, as the weather may still not be warm in most parts of the U.S., many tourists will choose to travel to tropical areas or take a cruise, while in July and August, most of them will opt for city and national park tours. Generally, the busiest months for package tours are between June and August in the summer, when, according to the tour guides I spoke to, all of the 60-seat tour busses in their agency depart every single day. Unlike other forms of tourism, package holiday tourists normally enjoy less agency: they have a fixed itinerary that must be completed every day, they cannot choose their own travel routes, and largely due to language barriers, they rarely interact with local people during the tour. At the same time, there was a range of diversity among Chinese package tourists I encountered. For instance, some tourists are "information seekers" who need to constantly ask the tour guide questions and seek for answers; there are parents traveling with children who value the educational purpose of the tour; young couples and friends taking summer vacations together, as well as elderly couple who are gifted with the tour as a thank-you for their labor taking care of the grandchildren.

Between April and August 2019, by myself, I joined three of the most popular package tours in the U.S. that cover the three types of the most favorable destinations for Chinese tourists: city, tropical, and national parks. The three tours I took can be seen as the epitome of the most popular types of Chinese package tours in the U.S. The first tour I took in April 2019 was a Florida tour that took us to Miami, Key West, and surrounding attractions and beaches over the course of seven days. Compared to the summer, this particular tour was not as large, with all tourists in a van of roughly twenty seats. In such a small group of twenty people, there would not normally be a dedicated driver, and the tour guide will take the roles of both driver and guide. On top of that, I took two package tours that included city and national park itineraries during the peak tourist

season of July and August. In one of the tours, we departed from Las Vegas and visited the Grand Canyon, Antelope's Canyon, Horseshoe Bay, Bryce Canyon, Salt Lake City, and Yellowstone National Park along the way; and the other East coast tour began with a tour of New York City, reaching as far north as Niagara Falls and finally ending in Boston. No matter how big or small, what they had in common were - the packed itinerary, the short period of time spent at each attraction, long road trips, early departures, late returns, and tiredness and fatigue amongst the tourists. Ultimately, I ended up spending a total of roughly 400 hours in the field.

When I was on tour, I used a small notebook as well as my cell phone to jot down field notes depending on the occasion. Generally speaking, I used the notebook to document what I saw and heard on the tour bus, and when we got off the bus for the tour, I chose to use my cellphone because of its convenience. The main body of my field notes documented interactions and conversations happened during the trip, as well as my thoughts and reflections at the time. Meanwhile, since all of the package tourists spend a lot of time on the road, I would frequently chat with my fellow group mates and tour guides as we make our way from one attraction to the next. I also obtained permission from each tour guide to audio-record their explanations of different attractions and U.S. culture on the tour bus, and these records were transcribed and translated verbatim as another part of my field notes. In the end, my field notes totaled 94 single-spaced pages of approximately 60,000 words.

Besides these observations, I conducted 23 interviews with Chinese package holiday tourists I met during the tour. The tourists who participated in my interviews ranged in age from 19 to 79, nine of whom were male and fourteen were female. Most of them had come to the U.S. solely for leisure purposes, but a few had come for the primary purpose of attending business meetings or visiting families. Due to the often-long hours spent on the road, 21 interviews were

conducted on the tour bus, while the other two were completed in a hotel lobby. Constrained by the conditions of completing the interviews on the tour bus, about half of the interviews were conducted in small groups: I would ask questions to tourists traveling together in a group, and they would respond to my questions individually, as well as supplement each other's answers over the course of the interview. Typically, each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. All 23 interviews were conducted in Mandarin, and the excerpts included in this present paper were translated from Simplified Chinese to English.

To supplement my interview and fieldwork data and provide triangulation, I also analyzed the web pages of five tourist agencies in depth. The five chosen websites includes http://wannar.com, https://www.eworldtours.com/zh-hans/, https://uvbookings.toursbms.com, http://www.seagullholiday.com.cn/, and http://www.americaasia.com/. These five sites were frequently mentioned by my interview participants, and many of them had booked their package tour through them. Through researching different tour websites, I found that although the websites of Chinese tourism agencies are different, the tour packages offered are somewhat similar. In many cases, these websites serve as an intermediary agency that bring different groups of tourists together. Another reason for researching these sites is that it gives me a clear idea of how tourist agencies embed information about taking photos, "checking it off your bucket list", visiting internet-famous attractions, etc. in their ads to attract tourists and promise them with successful social-media presentations. All of these five websites are available in both Chinese and English, and I chose to examine the Chinese version to ensure the accuracy of the information conveyed.

Because of my positionalities both as a solo traveler and fluent English speaker, fitting into smaller groups within the package tour was not difficult. Although all tour packages claim to be 'all-inclusive', there are still many circumstances that require the use of English. In these moments,

I would become the translator for many of the group members helping them order food, purchasing souvenirs, or connecting to hotel Wi-Fi. During the three package tours, I have interacted and talked with more than 100 tourists and seven tour guides. Among those people, I had developed deeper and closer relationships with about 20 tourists, which meant we shared conversation topics beyond the package tour that include each other's lives and education, personal interests, ideas about love and marriage, and even the customs and superstitions of our hometown culture. During the tour, I have also helped many tourists take, edit, and select photos for their social media posts. Sometimes, I helped them translate the names of places from English to Chinese or assisted them polish their photo annotations. On one occasion, a middle-aged couple I traveled with and interviewed insisted on taking me out to dinner on the last night of the Florida tour. The wife told me that she and her husband had come to Chicago to help with their grandchildren, and I was the person that they have had the longest Chinese conversation with in the past two years. Reflexively, the friendships formed in the field helped me obtain data and schedule interviews more easily. As a result of the intimate friendship, I was also able to gain a deeper understanding of my interview participants' tourism experiences. However, those rather strong relationships have also affected my perspective as an outsider and observer. There were times when I could not get my field notes written down in time because I was too busy helping others. In addition to that, I sometimes took some information for granted without asking further during formal interviews because I assumed that I have already known it based on the daily conversational exchanges with particular interview participants.

An inductive approach was taken for data analysis (see Glaser and Strauss 1967). In particular, grounded theory was used to analyze the three sets of qualitative data. According to Charmaz (2004), researchers need to actively participate in the coding process, while the active

participant of coding should be conducted sequentially with the preliminary data analysis for the purpose of informing future data collection. For this present study, ethnographic data I collected was analyzed immediately after each tour for the purpose of illuminating the next round of data collection. I also wrote theoretical notes in order to creatively analyze the data and link the emerging categories to the existing literature. After that, I integrated the theoretical notes into analytical memos that help further develop the study. As informed by grounded theory, my data analysis process continued during and after the data collection. All of the interviews and website content were documented in simplified Chinese, while my field notes contain a mixture of English and Chinese. Meaning-loss was inevitable, but I mitigated against this to preserve the meanings contained in its original language by providing necessary context and annotation.

Table 2: Tourists' Demographic Information

Tour Route	Pseudonym	Gender	Age
Florida Tour (5 interviews with 7 interviewees in total)	Sun	Male	25
	Zhao	Female	26
	Zhang Female 40 Wang Male 45 (Interviewed together)		
	Chun Female 50s Li Male 50s (Interviewed together)		
	Zhu	Male	79

Table 2 (Continued)

Las Vegas – Yellowstone Tour (11 interviewees in total)	Ling	Female	19
	Zhong	Female	19
	Che	Male	20
	Ming	Female	20
	Zha	Female	25
	Jiang	Male	42
	Lai	Female	50
	Rong	Male	55
	Lou	Female	56
	Ding	Male	60
	Zang	Female	62
NYC – Niagara Falls Tour (5 interviewees in total)	*Chang*	Male	24
	Wan	Female	27
	Fan	*Female*	28
	Chan	*Female*	30
	Zhan	*Female*	30

PACKAGE TOUR EXPERIENCES AS STRATEGIC SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENTATIONS

The collective efforts that were put into the construction of a successful social media self-presentation for Chinese tourists started when they were selecting the tour package, and it continues until after they return to their country of origin. Different parties, including the travel agencies, the tour guide, package tourists themselves, and their virtual audiences back home, contribute differently during the process of constructing and maintaining memorable social media presentations. Chinese international tourists' package tour experiences investigated for this study, although happening in person, were organized around presenting the most instagrammable moments online. Additionally, the collective construction and ensuring of tourists' virtual images on SNS has also led to a change toward what they gaze upon during the tour.

In my analysis, I look into the various strategies used by different parties in promoting, creating, and maintaining glamorous social media presentations during the package tour. I start with looking at how Chinese tourists select their tour packages, and the way different tourist agencies frame their tour packages online to further meet tourists' need to visit social media-worthy attractions. Following that, I discuss the strategies Chinese package holiday tourists use to first take and then post photos so that they can create a self-image online based on the interview and observation data.

Selecting Tour Packages: The Promise of Social Media-Worthy Experiences

According to the China Tourism Academy's annual report in 2019, over 65% of the Chinese outbound tourists plan their trips online. The result is reflected in my interview data as well: except for three elderly tourists whose package tours were booked by their daughter or son, the rest of the interview participants mentioned choosing their current tour package through online channels

including the travel agencies' website, or the itinerary posted on the travel agents' WeChat (a popular Chinese messaging and social media app) page.

Many tourists' needs for a fast-paced, list-checking travel experience to all these social media-worthy spots are reflected in the promotional advertisements published on travel agencies' websites. On their websites, different travel companies advertise their package tours by sharing how many photo-worthy sightseeing spots they can provide and list all the popular attractions for people to "take a once-in-a-life-time photo". The following are some examples of promotional material I found on travel agencies' websites that emphasize the abundant photo-taking opportunities that allow tourists to check these famous spots quickly off their lists [emphasis added]:

> The Lincoln Memorial, the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, the White House, and the Rockefeller Tower are all jewels in the crown of your trip. *Finally, don't forget to come to Times Square and take a beautiful photo to frame your wonderful trip to the American East.*

> The colored cave has long been a purified place for the Navajo Indians to sit and meditate, believing that it was a place where they could hear the voice of God. *Then head to Horseshoe Bay* (hot tip: the tour takes about 40 minutes), one of National Geographic's ten best places to photograph in the United States!*

> Depart in the morning for the world-famous Hollywood Walk of Fame, with an optional visit to the Dolby Theatre, where the Oscars are held (at your own expense). *Then head to the Internet-famous street for a group photo with the famous Instagram art wall.* The next stop is Beverly Center, where the MODS-Museum of Dream Space (at your own expense) has become a new spot in L.A. for you to *quickly check it off the list.*

> The tallest landmark in Los Angeles, take a panoramic view of Los Angeles from OUE SKYSPACE (at your own expense), experience the transparent glass slide, and *take a group photo with the Internet-famous angel wing mural.*

These above examples all demonstrate the importance of taking photos and visiting Internet-famous attractions for Chinese package holiday tourists. In order to make their tour options look more appealing, some agencies emphasize that tourists can take National Geographic-

level photos, while others promise that tourists will be able to have their pictures taken like models on Instagram. Before joining the tour, travel companies have already started to create the impression that the tour will be full of instagrammable attractions that are perfect for tourists to simply check it off their lists quickly. According to the travel agencies' ads, the capabilities to produce as many nice photos as possible are promoted as one of the most essential criteria for Chinese package holiday tourists during their trip to the U.S. This emphasis and promise of different attractions' photogeneity can further reflect tourists' self-gazing during their journey: you will look good and your photos are promised to be popular if shot in front of those spots. This fast-paced, photo-centered travel experience was promised by a tour guide at the beginning of my tour as well. The following field notes were documented at the beginning of my West-Coast tour:

> Today was the first day of this tour. We were picked up from different airports and bus stations in the late afternoon, but there is still one attraction, the West Grand Canyon, planned for today. When we were on the bus to the destination, the tour guide jokingly warned us that "this will be a fast-paced, exhausting travel experience." He told us that the normal meet-up time in the morning will be around 6 o'clock, and usually, we will be returning to the hotel after 9 pm. Then he said, "although the food will suck, and you will be exhausted every day, everything will be worth it once you post your photos to show your friends how beautiful those places are."

When being asked about why they chose this tour over others in my interview, many mentioned that they want to be able to visit as many attractions as possible for the lowest price. One tourist Zhang, coming from the southern part of China, noted that the only criterion she had for selecting package tours was to see if they have enough popular attractions for her to check off the list:

> I don't speak English myself, so I do not expect to learn much about the in-depth cultural and historical stories. I'm not that interested in information like that. All I want to do is to check those popular attractions off my list, have at least ten minutes to take some photos, and that's all I ask for a package tour experience.

For Zhang, the in-depth understanding of the culture and history of the travel destination is unimportant. What is more crucial, by contrast, is to visit as many famous spots as possible. It does not matter if she was only there for a few minutes, as long as she can take some photos to prove to others that "I have been there", then everything is worth it. Another tourist, Li, who traveled with his wife and daughter to the U.S. for the first time, shared a similar view regarding how he chose the tour:

> Li: For us first-timers, all I'm asking for is to be able to visit as many attractions as possible. So, when I selected my tour package, I counted how many places each tour is going to include and chose the most economical one.
> Interviewer: What does economic mean? Do you mean that the more attractions a tour include, the more economical the tour is?
> Li: Of course! If I have seven days to take a tour, and one package includes ten attractions, and another one has 30. Is there any reason for me to choose the former?

For Li, the most important factor for him to choose this particular tour package over others is whether it was worth the money. With no or minimal interest in delving into the local culture, photos seemed to be a valid proof of their trip.

As demonstrated in the above examples, the social media-worthy travel experience was promised by the travel agencies before the tour took place. When advertising for their tour packages online, almost all agencies have highlighted the famous attractions that tourists will be visiting. Thus, they imply that tourists will not be missing out on any hot attraction to 'check-in' and 'punch cards.' On the tourists' side, selecting the most intense, fast-paced, and fully packed tour also serves as a form of guarantee for their successful photoshoots and social media presentations in the future.

Taking Photos During the Tour: Best Strategies and Techniques

After selecting the most social media-friendly tour package, Chinese tourists observed and interviewed in this research use various strategies during the tour to produce the most satisfying

photos to post. In this section of the paper, I present data that demonstrates the different techniques and strategies identified by Chinese tourists I interacted with to produce the best pictures within their capabilities. After applying these techniques, they can further create the most presentable social media moments instantly. By analyzing the data, the following strategies are usually incorporated in order to create the perfect photo: first and foremost, getting the right shot; secondly, framing and composing the pictures tactically; then, posing strategically; and last, editing and retouching those photos.

Getting the shot

The first step to taking a great travel photo that will look perfect on social media is to get the shot. It was only after the shot was successfully captured that tourists can then consider the posting and beautifying of their photos. Before the official tour began, the mission of taking photos was stressed multiple times by the tour guide to prepare us during the trip. At the beginning of each package tour, different tour guides would emphasize a similar issue: we would not be doing an in-depth tour, and in most of the cases, there would only be time to take some photos. This documented field notes also demonstrated the importance for Chinese tourists to have their pictures taken:

> Today was what the tour guide referred to as a "lazy day", but all of us in my group still met up at the lobby at 7 in the morning. The tour guide mentioned that we had less driving to do for today, but we are still checking out at least five attractions. When we arrived at the first destination, which was Bryce Canyon National Park, the tour guide told us that we only had twenty minutes to take some pictures and to use the restroom. "There's no time for you to go for a hike. If you want to hike, come next time by yourself. We Chinese are different from Americans. You can see American families living near the canyon for half a month for their vacation. They go for a hike in the morning and return around 3 or 4 in the afternoon every single day. But that's not us. Our schedule is much more packed and intense. As a tour group, we only have time to take some photos of this rare landform, and that's it."

In the view of this tour guide, the passion for taking photos seems to be a special attribute that distinguishes Chinese tourists from others. He even elevated it to a form of 'Chinese tourist-identity' – as a Chinese tourist, we are different from those Westerners who want to spend time hiking. We are smarter and far more efficient. Compared to getting the shot, the hike and long hours spent in Bryce Canyon are unimportant.

My groupmates and I also experienced an extremely intense 'heist' when we visited Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago during the Florida package tour. Before we arrived, the tour guide asked the driver to pull the tour bus over at a corner of the road. He told us that there would be absolutely no stopping in front of Mar-a-Lago, and if we stopped, Trump's "strong, black security guards would come up within one minute to evict the vehicle". "So," he said, "we need to be 100% prepared for the photo opportunity: please have your phone and cameras ready now, and when we make a turn at the next corner, I'll ask the driver to slow down as much as possible. We will be able to stay in front of Mar-a-Lago for about thirty seconds, and that's all you have to take photos. Are you guys ready?" In this case, it sounded like he was preparing us for a battle. Everyone on the tour bus was extremely nervous about losing the once-in-a-life-time photo opportunity and not getting the shot of the famous Mar-a-Lago. When it comes to talking about taking pictures, many tour guides tend to use similar combat-related narrative such as "Hurry up! Just take a photo and run back to the bus, we don't have time!" With words like this, tourists feel extremely pressured because of the short time and heavy duty to complete the photo-shooting mission, and they need to do whatever it takes to not miss one single opportunity.

In order to get the most satisfying shot, personal safety can even be put aside. While we were visiting Horseshoe Bay, I experienced first-hand helping a tourist in the same group take pictures at an extremely dangerous location. This middle-aged woman named Lai, who had been

sitting next to me on the tour bus, joined me on this Horseshoe Bay tour. After walking for roughly two miles, we finally reached the attraction spot. She was fascinated by the view and asked me to take a few standing portrait photos of her. After that, she offered to sit on the edge of the cliff and asked me to take her back shot. Despite my multiple safety warnings, she was completely unfazed and walked straight to the edge and sat down. To the astonishment and gasping voices of other tourists around us, I took a few quick shots of her back from different angles and asked her to walk back slowly. When we got back on the tour bus, Lai kept going through the breathtaking travel photos and could not wait to post them on her social media. She showed me her annotations of the photo and it says, "This is a travel photo I bet my life on!"

Overall, from the data I collected from the fieldwork, it seemed that many tourists I interacted with would rather sacrifice their comfort and even personal safety to get the best shot. When I was on the tour bus, I often heard the regretful voice of "how come I didn't capture that view out of the bus window". Tourists would also argue among themselves regarding who can sit in the front row that presumably helps creating the best shot. Until the end, the tour guide required all members to rotate their seats every single day to resolve the issue. Being the first step to create successful social media-presentations, getting the shot was considered as important and absolutely necessary.

Figure 1: Tourists taking photos from the tour bus window.

Framing the shot

Just as important as 'getting the shot' and 'capturing the moment' is the composition and framing of the photo. In order to make their photos look aesthetically pleasing, tourists investigated in this study need to use different techniques and strategies to frame and compose their shots. By doing that, they can ensure that their photos meet the standard for posting on social media. In this section of the paper, I identify the different framing strategies that Chinese package holiday tourists use in the process of creating the most satisfying social media-presentation.

First and foremost, the use of selfie sticks can largely help tourists to get a better frame of their photos, and it was not only for taking selfies, but framing family portraits or group photos. The use of selfie sticks is definitely not an uncommon thing in a Chinese package tour. Since many people in my tour group traveled as a family, selfie sticks make it easier to take group photos without having to ask others for help. I have even observed a Chinese tourist in my group holding a roughly 4-foot-long selfie stick in Yellowstone in order to take a picture of him and his friend.

My hotel mate Zhao from the West-Coast tour, who traveled in the tour group by herself, was observed continuously using a selfie stick to take photos at various attractions. After noticing that I was also traveling alone, she was surprised that I did not own a selfie stick myself: "how are you able to take photos for yourself if you don't have one of these?" Having the right equipment seems to be the prerequisite for creating satisfying photos.

Figure 2: The use of a selfie stick in Yellowstone National Park.

The important contribution from the tour guide in framing the perfect photo cannot be overlooked. On all three tours I have been on, tour guides have provided both photo services and posing exercises to tourists at landmark sites. Usually, before arriving at a landmark site, the tour guide will emphasize the importance of taking photos to the tourists over and over again on the bus. One time when we arrived at a famous waterfall in Yellowstone, the guide volunteered to take family photos for each person within the group. He stood at a fixed spot, and the tourists in my group, looking like products moving on a factory assembly line, lined up first, walked up to the

guide, handed him the camera, and stood at the designated spot. The guide took pictures, and the tourist took the camera back. Next.

The framing of photos also includes a careful selection of what to include and exclude in their photos. I once had a conversation with a young couple about how to compose and frame good travel photos. The girlfriend, Wang, jokingly said, "Well, I will first exclude photos with other tourists in it." Her boyfriend chimed in and said, "Yes, especially when we visit such a popular attraction like the Antelope Canyon. With so many tourists and such a narrow visiting path, a well-framed photo is certainly the one that does not have other tourists in it. You can either pay more attention to the composition of a photo in the moment of the shot or use Photoshop later to get rid of other tourists." For this couple, a social media-worthy photo is first and foremost a clean one, with only the landscape or only themselves. In other words, the crowding and chaos of the attraction should not be presented in good photographs or need to be modified using technical means. When I discussed the purpose of taking photos with a middle-aged couple who were traveling with their teenage son, I asked the question of why they took photos on the trip. The husband replied, "Well, it's to document these moments of the trip, of course." But the wife then quickly added, "Not every moment is worth recording though. You don't need to document moments like when you are on the tour bus or eating at a McDonald's." This particular view was echoed during my interview and observation. For many tourists, a well-framed photo will only show the glamorous moments of the trip, not the stressful and chaotic ones. From what I have observed, it was rare for tourists to use their devices and capture moments happening on the tour bus, in the food court, or when we are on our bathroom break. Utilizing Goffman's (1959) idea, a well-framed and social media-worthy photo should contain the presentation of people's charming and presentable frontstage, and not showing the backstage of the trip.
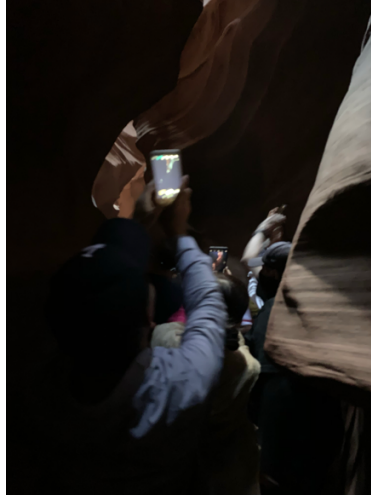
Figure 3: Tourists taking photos inside the Antelope Canyon.

Posing for photos

Since a large portion of travel photos are portrait photos, posing for photos needs to be done exquisitely. After arriving at each of the landmark sites, most Chinese tourists I observed would want to have their portrait pictures taken. The tour guide understands the eagerness of tourists to take photos, so all the explanations of the attraction are done on the tour bus. About fifteen minutes before arriving at the destination, the guide will wake up all the tourists on the bus with a microphone to explain the next sights to be visited, so that all the time after getting off can be spent posing and taking photos. When we visited the Antelope Canyon, our guide warned us that "this will be a once in a lifetime photo opportunity." Since the attraction was very narrow, and each group had a limited time to visit, as tourists, we were only able to walk in line during the tour. While visiting there, a young couple in my group got into a fight over posing for photos. The girlfriend, Ming, wanted to pose longer in the light of the canyon for more artistic shots, but the boyfriend, Che, was worried about blocking the line. They kept arguing with one another until we exited the valley. When the girlfriend grabbed the camera from her boyfriend to check the photos, she commented angrily, "We were both doing this pose of looking up at the sky, but why is this

81

photo of me that you took so ugly?" Since I was assigned to the same small tour group as this couple during the Antelope Valley tour, I witnessed their argument about posing almost the entire time when we visited the narrow valley in a line. Ming regretted several times during their argument that she did not pose for longer at a given spot, "The time they allow for each group was too short. In those very artistic photos online shot in Antelope Valley, the model was posing right where I was standing. Unfortunately, we had too many tourists in line behind us who were also coming to take pictures at that spot." Whether it was the couple's fight or the girlfriend's constant expressions of regret, it was a testament to the importance of posing in the process of producing a good travel photo.

When I asked people about their posing tips in the interview, some were able to articulate specific tips and strategies while others were not. Some of the tourists I talked to can only phrase their posing strategy as being based on a gut feeling, while one interviewee Zhao, who was in her mid-twenties, told me that she wanted all her portrait photos to look like the artwork created by professional photographic studios. To achieve this goal, she offered me several concrete posing tips: "First, you need to wear colorful and flowy dresses because it will make your image pop. Secondly, you cannot always look directly into the camera and smile. Sometimes, in order for the pictures to be more artistic, you need to show your side face and jawline. Last but not least, always remember to move while you pose. It will make the final image look much more natural." According to Zhao, 'posing' is something that needs to be treated with care and deep thoughts. To get a good portrait photo, people need to start by dressing in colorful clothes. In addition to that, it is important to pay extra attention to the details while posing, such as not looking directly into the camera. Although sometimes it was difficult for some interview participants to articulate their specific ideas, I keep noticing the importance of posing during my observations. Travel photos

have gradually changed from simply documenting the external scenery of the destination to capturing oneself and their pose at different attractions.

Figure 4: A boy in my group was observed taking a selfie in front of a hot spring in Yellowstone.

Retouching and beautifying the photo

After getting, framing and posing for the shot, applying filters seem to be another essential strategy in the process of producing the most satisfying travel photos. Applying filters or using a 'beauty camera' (a classical beauty camera app will provide features such as soft focus, portrait modes, and high-quality filters) while shooting portrait photos is remarkably common among those in my group. Typically, the filters tourists tend to apply will make their skin look very pale. Some of the beauty camera apps people use are also able to detect the location of the user's eyes and chin so that the eyes can be automatically enlarged, while the chin can become more pointed. The application of filters during and after taking photos was observed mostly from female tourists of all ages. Lai, a middle-aged woman coming from Guangzhou, asked me to use a beauty camera app while taking her portrait photo at the Grand Canyon. I was also asked to use the beauty camera

when she offered to take a selfie with me to memorize the trip. The pictures taken with the beauty camera app are utterly unrealistic in terms of color, but according to her, "this will make me look healthier and more alive to my friends online!"

During the tour, couples were observed arguing about the use of beautification apps. I once witnessed a young woman complaining about her boyfriend, who forgot to use the beauty camera when taking her portrait photos, "I can't just post my photos right away because of you! I have to do another round of retouching because you forgot to use the beauty camera app." It seems to me that all these uses of filters and beauty camera apps are to cater to a Western standard of beauty: one needs big and double-eyelid eyes, white skin, and a pointed chin. Chinese tourists observed and interviewed in this research are willing to sacrifice the authenticity of their photos to create a portrait with a Western aesthetic.

In many cases, the Chinese tourists I interviewed and observed might spend more time touching up their photos than visiting the attractions. A young female tourist in my group once jokingly said to me, "It took about two minutes sightseeing, but three hours for retouching my photos". During my Florida tour, a 25-year old female tourist name Zhao, has also told me that she would never post a picture without retouching or beautifying it in some ways. She said, "Nowadays, nobody posts their pictures without retouching. It's simply a form of courtesy. Do you think the photos you took directly from your iPhone's selfie camera are presentable?" In addition to that, she added that there was a difference between travel and everyday photos. "When you travel abroad, people have already expected that your travel photos would be above and beyond the standard of daily photos. This means even more retouches." Based on my observations and interviews, for the most part, beauty cameras are utilized while taking portrait pictures and selfies. The reliance on this type of photo-retouching software can also be a reflection of the change in

direction of the traditional outward-looking tourist gaze. While taking photos, tourists would spend more time and energy making their faces look better and more presentable than getting a good representation of the views behind them.

Posting Photos: The Right Time and the Right Audiences

Choosing a tour that is suitable for taking photos and mastering various photo-shooting skills and techniques are all for the ultimate purpose of posting photos on social media. Based on my interactions and conversations, many times, the reason why Chinese tourists take photos is not only to create memories of their trip but also to construct and present their digital self by instantly uploading the photos to different social media platforms. During the process of posting photos, Chinese tourists investigated in this paper also follow a variety of unspoken and implicit rules, including how to post photos, when to post it, and who should be their audience. In this section of the paper, I explore the various strategies and tactics used by Chinese tourists when posting their photos online. This includes the need to post instantly, the accurate measurement of the time period for posting photos because of the time difference between China and the U.S., how they chose the content of their photos, and their considerations regarding choosing the appropriate audience to view their photos.

The first noticeable trend from my observation of different package tours is the use of smartphones when taking photos not solely for aesthetic purposes, but for instant posting. With few exceptions, most of the tourists that I have observed took their travel photos with their phones. One tourist, Chang, who traveled with his sister in the tour group, always used his smartphone to take photos even though he had a Leica camera hanging around his neck all the time. When I asked him why he did not use his camera, he said that he would not be able to post those photos on social media immediately. Chang and I visited Niagara Falls together, and during the visit, I used my

cellphone to take some photos of him and his sister standing in the water curtain underneath the waterfall. When we stepped out of the waterfall and were just taking off the raincoats, he asked me to send him the pictures I just took. After mentioning that the cell phone reception was not good here, he insisted that I use the iPhone's Airdrop feature, which enables iPhone users to transfer data without using cellular data, to send him those photos so that he can "immediately post those photos while adding the live location right here at the Niagara Falls." For Chang, posting photos after visiting an attraction was not good enough. Being emerged within the culture of instantaneity, he not only wanted to share his photos instantly, but also the live location where those photos were taken so that his friends on WeChat could follow his live updates of the tour.

For some Chinese tourists I talked to, the photos themselves are not as important as the instant posting of these just-taken photos. Lai, a fifty-year-old female tourist, constantly had to delete photos from her smartphone to allow more storage for future photos. She once told me, "my strategy is to take as many pictures as possible when I get off the tour bus, select and delete later when I return. Plus, I will have to post these selected photos right away. As soon as they are posted, these pictures can be deleted as well." According to her, once a photo is successfully posted, it becomes worthless and can be deleted immediately. In other words, what is valuable is not the photo itself, but rather the result that the photo is posted.

Most U.S. visitors in this study do not have cellular data on their cell phones because of the high price, so they rely heavily on different wireless networks to post their photos. During the course of my research, I noticed that most of the sixty-seat tour buses offer Wi-Fi service on board. Despite the unstable connection, many tourists were observed to connect to the tour-bus Wi-Fi immediately when they returned for the purpose of posting photos. Many times, when I got back on the tour bus from visiting an attraction, I would find that everyone was on their phones posting

photos they just took. During that time, the tour bus would become extremely quiet, and no one was talking. In addition to Wi-Fi on the tour bus, each time when we check-in at a hotel, the tour guide would take out an A4 printout with detailed instructions for connecting to the hotel's wireless network.

Due to the 12-hour-or-more time difference between China and the U.S., the timing of when to post those photos requires careful consideration as well. A middle-aged man I interviewed, Ding, once told me about how he carefully calculated the posting time so that he can receive comments for his photos right away:

> If it is a photo taken during a morning tour, I will post it on my WeChat right away so that my Chinese friends will see it before they go to bed. But if I take some photos in the afternoon, I will choose to wait and post it after 9 p.m. In that case, my friends back home can wake up seeing my photos right away.

Ding believes that most of his WeChat friends will check social media when they wake up in the morning, thus, to receive the most views, likes, and comments, he had to strategically calculate the time difference between the two countries before posting his photos online. During the trip, the tour guides often bring up similar issues. At the end of each day, tour guides often have to remind everyone to rest early and never stay up late just to post photos. On one occasion, after arriving at the hotel, the tour guide warned us about this in particular. The following is what I wrote down in my field notes:

> When we arrived at the hotel, it was already about 9 p.m., and the next day's meet-up time was 6:30 in the morning. Before getting off the bus, the tour guide specifically reminded everyone not to stay up late to post and share photos. He said, "I know that your friends back at home just woke up, and you cannot wait to share your journey with them, but don't stay up late. Otherwise, you won't be able to wake up on time the next morning. If you end up missing the meet-up time, you will need to pay for your own cab to get to the next location. I'm not going to make sixty people wait for you."

This tour guide must have said this because he has had previous experiences of tourists missing the bus due to staying up late to post photos. This also sideways proves the importance of choosing the right posting time. Many Chinese package tourists observed in this study chose to post their afternoon photos late at night so that it can generate a higher click-volume and more comments when people check their social media after waking up in the morning. This quest for more comments and likes can also be seen as the construction of their 'looking-glass self' (Cooley 1972) in the social media era: people's thoughts and imaginations of how they appear in other people's eyes are reflected upon the amount of comments and likes they receive. The more feedback and reaction they get, the more successful their self-presentations are.

In the process of posting photos online, it is also important to filter and select the content based on different groups of audiences. In my interviews, Wang, Fan, and Zhang, three young tourists in their 20s and early 30s who traveled together, all mentioned the careful selection they went through when they post pictures on WeChat:

Interviewer: Before posting your photos, what else do you consider?
Zhang: Well, that should be the selection of audiences from your friend list on WeChat. For example, since my WeChat contains my friends, co-workers, bosses, and clients, my entertainment-related photos were normally only visible to certain groups of people.
Interviewer: Can you specify that?
Zhang: Well, when I'm traveling or having fun, I usually will exclude my boss from viewing those photos because it's likely that this will jeopardize my "outstanding staff" image. The same goes for my clients. I also exclude them from my fun posts because I want to appear professional.
Wang: Same here. I work at a university, so many of my colleagues are pretty old-fashioned. I usually exclude them from seeing my pictures related to travel, going to concerts, or drinking at a bar. I still want them to like me as a sweet and innocent girl, you know. (laughter)
Interviewer: So, you just use the "group" feature on WeChat?
Fan: Yes, do you not use that? It's really handy. When you post your photos, you simply choose your audiences from the pre-created group lists. For my WeChat page, I have four group categories that include close friends, family members, co-workers, and clients.

As demonstrated above, for some tourists, the audience for their photo posts needs to be carefully screened. A successful social media presentation also means to present the most suitable and expected self-image during international travel. At the same time, by utilizing different features embedded in social media apps, some of the less-pleasing identities can be edited out deliberately for certain groups of audience as they wish.

A tourist once told me that she has come to the U.S. for over a month now, joined three package tours in total, and was physically exhausted every day from the daily visit and commute. With so many attractions to 'check off the list' every day, she cannot even remember where she was three days ago. "However," she said, "as long as I shared photos with my friends and family in our chat groups and let them know that I had been to so many places, then it's worth it." Being the final step of creating a full social-media presentation during the face-to-face package tour, the act of posting photos needs to be done strategically. Based on my observation and interview with Chinese package holiday tourists, not only do they need to carefully calculate the time difference between China and the United States to choose the right time to post photos, they also need to filter their audiences to present the most likeable self-image. Meanwhile, as mentioned in the previous section, the hardship and awkwardness of traveling with a package tour group cannot be shown in the final photo. Based on the conversations I had with my tour mates, no one would send out photos of the tour bus ride with the other fifty tourists, or post about eating fast food at a gas station food court. To conclude, posting photos online requires some specific strategies and techniques. Only by following certain rules can their tourism experiences be turned into successful social media presentations.

THE SHIFTED TOURIST GAZE IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In the previous section of the paper, I show how Chinese package tourists' traveling experiences in the U.S. have been extensively centered around presenting the most ideal self on social media. Chinese package tourists explored in this paper used various strategies to make sure that the images portraying their 'traveling selves' are presentable and curated online. In the past, when people mainly used digital cameras to take pictures, we could say that if the Kodak moment was not captured and framed, then it did not happen; while now, it has become "if it is not posted, then the experiences do not exist." All these mentioned strategies and calculations have pointed toward the same phenomenon: Content posted on various SNS sites eventually became the embodiment of their travel experiences, and the tourist gaze in the age of social media has shifted from looking outward to a continuous self-gazing and self-examination. Furthermore, tourists' enthusiasm for editing and posting their travel portrait photos instantly on SNS has further externalized the traditional tourist gaze: in many cases, the content they post is neither about the view they see nor pictures of themselves, but the links between them. It is about what someone else sees that highlights the combination of both people and the view. Even though they have only spent ten minutes visiting an attraction, posting photos of themselves standing in front of different landscapes is proof that they have been there. To some extent, taking and posting self-highlighting travel photos externalizes the tourist gaze and objectifies the viewer as part of the landscape. It documents the viewing and gazing, not simply the view and gaze.

The discussion of the shifted tourist gaze should also be situated within the culture of instantaneity and the presentation of self in virtual settings. Cooley's notion of the "looking-glass self" (1972) is further extended in the social media landscape: Previously, we construct and shape our identity and self through the imagination of how others see us, whereas in the social media era,

this form of imagination is confirmed and materialized by the number of likes and comments we receive. As a result, our corporal experiences and gazes are deeply influenced and shaped by the interaction and connection that exist in the virtual world. Simultaneously, the culture of instantaneity has taught us to both conduct self-presentation and expect feedback immediately. Valuing the precious and even privileged traveling experiences, tourists' global self constructed and sustained during the tour need to be presented and validated instantly. All these mentioned factors point towards a new kind of the touristic performativity: Chinese international tourists explored in this paper are not only aware of the presence of the cell phone or camera while taking photos, but also expect to receive feedback instantly from their virtual audience on whether their self-presentation was successful or not, thus, further adjust their next performance.

All of these factors mentioned above have reshaped the "tourist gaze" during their journey. Previously, tourists gazed at the different cultural affairs and natural landscapes at their travel destinations, while nowadays, when their entire tourism experiences were immersed in SNS, such tourist gaze shifted direction and became an observation pointed to themselves. In the process of posing, retouching pictures, using selfie sticks, and carefully selecting who gets to see those photos at what time, the tour itself is somehow dispensable. It is much more important to present the tour successfully on social media instead of experiencing the journey itself. As mentioned by one tour guide, "the trip will be exhausting, and the food will suck, but as long as you have good photos to post, it's all worth it."

CONCLUSION

Being one of the most central concepts within tourism research, the idea of the 'tourist gaze' has been explored from different angles (see McGregor 2000, Hospers 2011, Bai 2007, Prins and Webster 2010, Chhabbra 2010, Turner, Turner and Carroll 2005, Zhang and Hitchcock 2017,

McLean and Cooke 2003, Gillespie 2006, Canziani and Francioni 2013, Janes 2008). When tourists travel to a destination that they are unfamiliar with, out of interest and curiosity, they gaze at the local natural and cultural landscape while comparing these observations with their own life experiences. At the same time, improvements in the medium used by tourists on their journeys have further transformed and extended the tourist gaze: from the Kodak moment tourists tried to capture after the invention of film cameras, to shifting their gazes to a small screen after the popularization of digital cameras, until now, as a result of the widespread availability of smartphones and SNS, the object of the tourist gaze has again shifted from the people and nature of the destination back to themselves. In the age of social media, people's excessive gaze toward themselves is reflected in the package-tour experiences explored in this study.

The 'tourist gaze' is neither organic nor a naturally occurring phenomenon, but is shaped and constructed by socio-cultural context, technology, and personal experiences. Embedded within the culture of instantaneity that promotes instant sharing and an 'always-on' mode, I have noticed that the shifted tourist gaze was not accomplished by tourists alone: it was with the combined effect of multiple parties, including the travel agencies' promotional ads, the tour guide, the structure of the package tours, the virtual audiences back home, the comments and likes on social media, as well as the use of technologies, that Chinese tourists I interacted with in this study have turned their outward gazes into an inward self-gazing during their corporal tours. It is because of those mentioned factors that their touristic performativity in the social media era not only encompasses the performances in front of the camera, but also their responses and reactions of their virtual audiences' interactive feedback.

Like most qualitative studies that do not aim to generalize their findings, one limitation of my study is that it only focuses on the travel experiences of Chinese package holiday tourists in

the United States. Observing touristic behavior in isolation from the rest of the tourists' lives back in China may also restrict my understanding of why they chose to post photos and present themselves in certain ways. These forms of all-inclusive tour packages may somewhat limit the direction and content of the tourist gaze, as a result, allow tourists with less agency. While expecting similar trends, the findings might not be able to generalize to groups such as backpackers or solo travelers, nor are they able to be applied to other forms of package tourism. Another limitation regarding method is that I did not analyze tourists' posts on WeChat and other social media platforms. Related data was collected from observation and interviews, but not directly from their online posts because I was not anticipating the trend of photo-posting during the ethnographic field work. However, the examination of tourists' online posts would be a great source of data for my future work learning about tourists' performance of self and display of their conspicuous leisure.

One contribution of this present research is an attempt to explore how the classic concept of the 'tourist gaze' can be further updated and extended in the age of social media through the analysis of the much-lacking ethnographic data. Additionally, it contributes to tourism studies globally because the speedy development of social media platforms and people's growing desire for instantaneity are global trends, thus, the shifted tourist gaze is likely to take place to travelers from other countries. Last but not least, the shifted tourist gaze not only affects tourists themselves, but the entire tourism industry. As a result of this form of self-gazing, many travel agencies and websites have changed their promotional strategies and tour packages to meet the needs of tourists' social media presentations. As a researcher, it is important to recognize that much of people's behavior and thoughts are changing dramatically due to the advent of social networking. At the same time, sociological concepts and theories used to explain human behaviors need to be

constantly updated. It calls for future scholars to further claim the soil of social media sites as research data to explore how previous theories and concepts are transformed by the use of different mediums.

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Chapter 3: "You Are First a Chinese Citizen, Then A Consumer": Presenting and Balancing Identities Online as Chinese International Tourists

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the analysis of 261 video and word posts collected from four popular social media sites on which Chinese tourists shared their consumption-related experiences during and after the trip. It investigates Chinese international tourists' diverse presentations of self to a broad audience online through explaining their shopping experiences and product reviews. Tourists are expected to balance multiple identities carefully when they project themselves online as consumers: on the one hand, they present themselves as global consumer and trend setters who are strategic and savvy; while on the other hand, they still need to preserve and even emphasize their national identity as Chinese patriots. Providing the much-lacking qualitative insight, this study enhances our understanding of international tourists and their consumption behavior, the construction and presentation of a digital self, and how globalization operates at the micro level.

INTRODUCTION

With a population of 1.4 billion, China generates the greatest number of international tourists worldwide. According to *The Outbound Chinese Tourism and Consumption Trends: 2017 Survey* jointly issued by Nielsen and Alipay, Chinese tourists traveled overseas on 131 million occasions in 2017, with an increase of 7 percent from the previous year. Among all the destinations visited, nearly three million Chinese tourists visit the U.S. annually, spending over $30 billion per year. While shopping may not be the primary motivation for most travelers, it is a universal tourist activity that often adds to the overall attractiveness of almost every region in the world (Butler 1991; Chen 1997; Jansen-Verbeke 1987; Kincade and Woodard 2001; Law 1993; McIntosh et al.

1995; Page 1992; Prus and Dawson 1991; Reisinger and Turner 2002). Even though China is an active participant in the global marketplace, shopping while traveling abroad is still a prominent trend among Chinese tourists despite most brands examined in this paper being available in China.

In addition to the existing close link between shopping and tourism, the widespread use of social media applications adds another layer for the scholarly exploration of tourism, consumption, and the presentation of self. Currently, tourists not only post their travel experiences on different social media platforms but also share their shopping experiences, recommend what to buy to others, and review the products they purchased during and after their trips. Their roles as tourists and consumers are much expanded when they decide to post their shopping experiences online. With the help of social media, tourists are capable of presenting themselves as cultural intermediaries, trend-setters, and global consumers. Further, shopping is also used to promote their national identity as Chinese patriots and loyal citizens. In the social media age, the timely issue of how people's identities are constructed and shaped by the interactions online is worth exploring.

Nowadays, tourists can construct and present diverse digital selves in virtual settings. In physical spaces, there is a limited audience and time span for every performance; but for interactions online, people's audiences can theoretically keep expanding indefinitely, and the performance never has to end. At the same time, it is worth noting that such tourists' presentations of self are monitored and policed in stricter ways by their much-expanded pool of virtual audiences, compared to traditional face-to-face interactions in physical settings. In other words, successful presentations of self in virtual settings require performers to acquire approvals from a much-expanded group of audiences outside their intimate life circles. Consequently, Chinese international tourists sometimes need to balance multiple different, even competing, identities while doing self-presentations online.

Being a part of a larger study on Chinese international tourists in the U.S., this present paper aims to better understand how Chinese international tourists present themselves in virtual settings through the discussion of their shopping experiences. To answer this research question, data from four social media platforms were examined: travel journals from one open-access travel forum (www.mafengwo.cn), short and long videos about shopping experiences, and product reviews that are posted on social media platforms like Red, Weibo, and Bilibili. This study contributes to the field of tourism studies and the investigation of identity construction in social media age in multiple ways: on the one hand, it provides the much-lacking qualitative insights in the exploration of tourists' consumption behaviors when they travel internationally; while on the other hand, it extends Goffman's theoretical framework by looking at self-presentation and identity construction in virtual settings.

In the following section, a literature review is undertaken to discuss Goffman's theoretical framework of the presentation of self and the connection between consumption, tourism, and identity. Following this, methodology and data collection across different platforms are discussed. In the following section, through describing their consumption practices, sharing what they bought during the trip, and offering product reviews, Chinese tourists present themselves online as 1) good community members; 2) smart and competent global consumers; 3) trend-setters and cultural intermediaries; 4) good Chinese patriots. Simultaneously, many are expected to strategically balance their global and national identities toward their audiences in mainland China so that their followers do not feel offended or betrayed. Finally, I conclude and set out and future avenues of research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Goffman's Theoretical Framework: The Presentation of Self

In his work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) explored the presentation and management of the self during social interactions with considerable insight. Utilizing the metaphor of social life being a "theater" and people being "performers," Goffman described in great detail the back versus front stage operations and the presentation of self in social encounters. According to Goffman, performers achieve their ideal identities in different interactional arenas through performances. At the same time, the competent performances are under social constraints and subject to the disposition of relevant audiences in social interactions (Gecas 1982). This means that they need to deliver different performances when facing different audiences. Thus, based on Goffman's work, identities are constructed both by actors through performances and by others who serve as audiences in different situations.

Goffman claims that in order to understand identity, researchers could look into the intentional and tangible component of self — self-presentations. Through the dramaturgical lens, people are social actors that engage in different presentations of self to manipulate other people's impressions of them during social interactions. In this way, the presentation of self is achieved through the corporeal display in communicating the desired or potential self across different social settings (Belk 1988). However, with the voluntary usage of social media, users' personal imaging can transform into publicly accessible artifacts (Patterson 2018). With the worldwide prevalence of the internet, smartphones, and social media applications, researchers have started to conduct studies exploring people's presentation of self in online and virtual spaces without having to engage in any corporeal interaction (Icetch 2019, Kendall 1998, Gottschalk 2010, Zhao 2005). The idea of self-presentation serves as the theoretical framework for the analysis of Chinese tourists'

presentation of self and balancing of multiple competing identities online through sharing their shopping experiences and product reviews.

Tourism and Consumption

While tourism has existed as a mass phenomenon at least since the late nineteenth century, the expansion of road transport infrastructure and a decrease in the cost of air travel has encouraged the industry's expansion. As a result, the rise of domestic and international tourism has transformed consumption both in form and in content. Warde's (2015) discussed how consumption can help promote social interaction, friendship and kinship, elite formation, the gift economy, collective mobilization, social solidarity, and rebellion (Martens and Casey 2016; Maffesoli 1996; McCracken 1990; Noble 2004; Reimer and Leslie 2004; Thornton 1995). Moreover, scholars have studied international tourists' souvenir and general shopping behaviors, preferences, and expenditures in the age of globalization (Sthapit 2017; Lehto et al. 2004; Jin, Moscardo, and Murphy 2017; Albayrak, Caber, and Comen 2016).

As for the investigation of Chinese tourists' consumption behavior, there is a dominant trend that focuses on tourists' shopping motives (Tsang, Lee and Liu 2014, Chan et al. 2014, Correia, Kozak, and Kim 2018) for both daily necessities and luxury products when they travel internationally. A number of previous studies have also focused on tourist shopping satisfaction at the destination level (Lin and Lin 2006, Liu, Choi, and Lee 2008, Wong and Wan 2013). Apart from that, another line of research has provided the profiling information regarding Chinese international tourists as consumers (Huang and Lu 2017，McKercher et al. 2020) that includes the youthful 'second-wave' (Arlt 2013, Cheng and Foley 2018) as well as the elite middle-age Chinese outbound travelers with ample buying power (Bao, Jin and Weaver 2019, Liu and Li 2020). One clear gap within the existing literature is the lack of qualitative exploration. The

majority of the previous research mentioned in this section used quantitative survey methods and statistical analysis. Therefore, this area of research calls for more qualitative studies that provide thick descriptions and micro-level complex explorations for Chinese tourists' consumption behaviors.

Globalized Consumer Identity as Cultural Intermediaries

Previous studies have discussed the blurred boundaries between mass media and physical consumer products by looking into the phenomenon of consumers becoming cultural intermediaries (Lash and Lury 2007). The concept of a 'cultural intermediary' addresses how individuals who tend to be early adopters of new fashions or lifestyles gradually became professional intermediaries between brands and consumers and have a significant influence on a broad swath of the population (Bourdieu 1984; Featherstone 1991). These individuals adopt the ethics of self-expression through consumption and promote new products and lifestyles in everyday and relatable ways (Sassatelli 2007; Maguire and Matthews 2012). On a similar note, Schor (2004) looked at the phenomena of 'stealth marketing,' discussing how large brands and corporations use various means to smuggle a marketing message so that it is seamless.

Web 2.0 and modern social media applications now provide people with multiple platforms to mediate between manufacturers and consumers. This phenomenon offers a distinct twist on traditional understandings of what consumption looks like. Traditionally, companies that produce products and services directly advertise them for consumers to buy. However, with various social media platforms, users sometimes unwittingly provide free advertising for products and services they like by sharing a review on YouTube or Facebook (Rojek 2011). These new media platforms have a democratizing effect on the production and distribution of media content by undercutting the monopoly previously held by media companies and advertisers (Strangelove 2010). Large

companies have started to encourage consumers to share testimonials regarding the products that speak positively and sincerely about the brand and use these narratives in their own marketing as a source of profit for their brand (Foster 2011). As a result, it requires researchers to study consumption through a different lens and further cultivate social media as a critical source of data.

Consumer Citizenship and the Nation-State

In the age of globalization, many consumers not only see consumption as a means of personal satisfaction but also as a tool of political expression. In many ways, consumers act as citizens through actions in both domestic and international marketplaces. In turn, during certain historical moments such as in the context of a trade war, government officials encourage citizens to consume, exchange, and dispose of specific types of products to help the nation achieve its political and economic goals.

Many previous works across different disciplines have explored the relationship among nationalism, tourism, and consumption behavior (Baillargeon and Gélinas 2011, Pretes 2003). Cohen (2003: 204) made a distinction between citizen-consumers and consumer-consumers and defined the former as "consumers who take on the political responsibility we usually associate with citizens to consider the general good of the nation through their consumption," while consumer-consumer are those who seek primarily to "maximize their economic interests in the marketplace." Overall, consumers who act as citizens began to organize to achieve collective goals through co-operatives and boycotts beginning in the eighteenth century and continue to do so to the present day. This connection between consumer citizenship and nation-state illustrates that in some settings, consumers can express and enact the values and goals of solidarity and social change, construct and present their collective national identities through consumption. Consumer politics has taken many forms, from consumer associations concerned with product quality to campaigns

to 'buycott[1]' large brands in order to pressure companies to change specific policies and improve working conditions and fair trade (Daunton and Hilton 2001; Gabriel and Lang 1995). Other work has also been conducted to understand related concepts such as consumer ethnocentrism (Pecotich and Rosenthal 2001) and animosity (Shimp and Sharma 1987) that aim to understand the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign brands.

In addition to this, many existing literatures have focused on Chinese nationalism and its connection to consumer behaviors. Because of the strong antiforeign feeling together with a victim complex (Wu 2006), many Chinese nationalists tend to frame and rationalize their behavior based on past humiliations (Gao 2012) and collective memories of past national experiences (Carlson 2009). As for the impact of grassroot nationalism in China on foreign brands, Gao (2012) has identified four fronts including the political, cultural, economic, and consumer rights. A few scholars from various disciplines have also looked at Chinese consumers' resistance to foreign brands (Hooper 2000, Li 2008, Lu and Weber 2009, Wang 2006), while some empirical work has examined the influence of nationalism on Chinese tourists regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island Incident between China and Japan since late 2012 (Cheng and Wong 2014, Li 2009).

Historically less powerful groups have used the space of consumer citizenship to claim collective rights and demand equality not only in the economic but also in the political sphere. Nelson's (2000) study of consumer nationalism in South Korea looked at how South Korean activists and government officials discouraged their citizens from consumption in order to promote a distinct road to economic development. In China, while modern consumption developed alongside the rise of the nation-state, government officials, businesspeople, and activists sought to persuade Chinese individuals to only purchase Chinese-made goods to further advance Chinese nationalism (Gerth

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[1] Deliberately purchasing a company's or a country's products in support of their policies, or to counter a boycott.

2008). In contrast to the Western model of mass consumption without the involvement of the nation-state (Ritzer 2003; Smart 2010), these cases demonstrate the vital role of the nation in order to understand specific patterns of consumer citizenship.

In summary, literature on tourism, consumption, and identity construction has focused on how consumption is used in multiple ways to help consumers present themselves and construct different identities towards distinct groups of audiences. In many cases, consumers can even become cultural intermediaries between brands and their potential consumers. Sometimes, consumers can use their consumption power to preserve and emphasize their national identities. However, existing literature overlooked the issue that examines how social media and the act of "posting experiences online" have further shape people's self-presentations. This requires an extension of Goffman's theory to not only look at the presentation of self during corporeal, but also virtual interactions. As a considerable amount of our self-presentation and identity-construction relies on interactions happening in virtual settings nowadays, the role of social media and how it shapes our self-presentation is still not being sufficiently explored. In addition to that, empirical exploration of consumer citizenship mainly focused on how consumers chose to reject foreign brands and purchase products made in their own country. In the case of international tourism, the phenomenon that tourists manage to maintain their national identities while purchasing foreign brand is understudied.

DATA AND METHOD

In this paper, social media is an essential field in understanding how tourists, both as consumers and social media users, talk about their consumption experiences, while at the same time construct their identities in virtual settings. The data sets assembled in this paper were collected from four social media platforms that are the most popular among Chinese tourists: Mafengwo

(www.mafengwo.cn), a Chinese social media site for travelers to share tips, pictures, and travel logs about their worldwide traveling experience; Red, a social media and e-commerce platform that allows users to share product reviews, travel blogs and lifestyle stories via short videos and photos; Weibo, a Chinese microblogging website similar to Twitter that allows word, picture and video-postings; and Bilibili, a popular video-sharing social media platform that many Chinese tourists use to post longer travel video logs or 'vlogs' and 'haul' videos.[2]

Given that all four social media platforms have hundreds of millions of Chinese users worldwide, the focus was narrowed down by limiting the sample to posts from January 1, 2014, to December 31, 2018, made by Chinese tourists who have visited the U.S. In addition to that, the results on all three sites were filtered by popularity in order to capture the most popular posts that reached the greatest number of users. I have also excluded posts that only offered concrete travel tips and did not have individuals' travel and consumption experiences. This research went through an in-depth analysis of 261 posts, which included travel logs, short product-review videos, as well as longer travel vlogs and shopping haul videos. The sampling process was concluded when similar information began to emerge, which indicated that the data had reached a saturation point.

These four social media sites were chosen not only because they are popular among tourists who want to share their experiences, but also because they contain a rather comprehensive format of qualitative data that includes words, pictures, and videos. Therefore, the data incorporates an exploration of the more diverse forms of digital data that are available nowadays.

Mafengwo is a Chinese travel forum founded in 2006. Currently, it has over 300 million users worldwide, and it covers over 95 percent of the popular travel destinations in the world. Tourists can post their travel logs, pictures from their tour, and share travel tips about hotels, flights,

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[2] A video recording, posted to the Internet, in which a person discusses his/her fashion and beauty purchases (Romano 2010).

local culture, along with their recommendations of local restaurants and places to shop. On Mafengwo, many tourists share their shopping-related experiences in various outlets, department stores, and luxury shops. Some share and briefly review the products they bought during the trip to provide insights for future travelers. This research selected 55 posts from Mafengwo, most of which are 1500 to 2000 words long with 10 to 30 pictures each.

Red is a social media site founded in 2013 with a current worldwide user base of over 500 million. The majority of its users are Chinese people around the world. This particular social media application does not have a web version, and all posts are documented through smartphone. On Red, people can either share product reviews, travel experiences, and lifestyle tips via short videos less than 60 seconds, or post pictures or screenshots of various note-taking apps if they wish to share more words. To collect data, I analyzed 156 short videos and photo posts on Red.

The third site chosen for this paper is *Weibo*. Weibo is a Chinese microblogging website, and one of the biggest social media platforms in China. By searching keywords and hashtags such as #USshoppinghaul and #whatIboughtintheUS, I chose to analyze 30 shopping-related videos posted on Weibo between the selected time period. The fourth and final site is *Bilibili*, a Chinese video sharing website equivalent to YouTube. On Bilibili, Chinese tourists can share longer posts about their trip in video format. In total, 20 longer videos were analyzed on Bilibili. The content of video posts both on Weibo and Bilibili include shopping videos that feature the live footage of the tourists visiting different department stores and outlets, as well as videos where tourists shared what they had purchased with their online audiences.

In order to analyze the data, an inductive approach was taken (see Glaser and Strauss 1967). As the study proceeded, relevant categories emerged from the data. In particular, grounded theory was used to analyze the online posts. According to Charmaz (2004), researchers' active

involvement in coding is a crucial part of the grounded theory process, and the data collection and analysis should be conducted sequentially with preliminary data analysis informing future data collection. For the online posts collected for this study, I wrote theoretical notes in order to creatively analyze the data and link the emerging categories to the existing literature. Gradually, I integrated the theoretical notes into analytical memos that help further focus study. The data analysis process continued during and after data collection until I developed guiding theories, a general scheme, and identified an overall pattern and categories for data analysis. All of the collected data was in its original language, including simplified Chinese and Mandarin. As a native Mandarin speaker, I translated the data from Chinese to English for the purposes of this paper. Meaning-loss was inevitable, however I mitigated against this in order to preserve the meanings contained in its original language by providing context and necessary annotation.

In addition to the use of memos, the ongoing process of coding these online posts was central to the data analysis. Accomplishing this goal required reading and rereading the data in order to highlight and label important, descriptive, and informative issues that emerged for later sorting and categorization. I examined the data with an eye to identifying and discovering classes of things, persons, and events as well as the properties that characterized them. The ultimate goal for the grounded theory approach was to develop theories that account for Chinese tourists/consumers' meaning-making processes and their presentation of self when they talk about their shopping experiences. Data collection ceased when no new ideas or concepts emerged, and when no negative cases could be found that disconfirmed or invalidated the proposed framework of analysis for each data set. In the end, a total number of 261 cases from all three data sets were analyzed.

CHINESE INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' DIVERSE PRESENTATIONS OF SELF ON
SOCIAL MEDIA

Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese tourists spend 61 percent of their money on shopping, while U.S. residents, Canadians, Europeans, and Australians spend from 28 to 37 percent of their money on shopping activities (Heung and Qu 1998). Based on the data analyzed, shopping is one of the primary motivations of outbound tourists traveling from China. In the travel logs posted on Mafengwo, Chinese tourists offer various tips about bus schedules to outlet malls, acquiring coupons in stores, and paying attention to different holiday sales in the U.S.; while in both short and long haul videos posted on Red, Weibo and Bilibili, tourists often mentioned how important shopping is to them during their trip. Multiple people talked about purchasing a second or third suitcase to store the products they bought in the U.S., as well as staying in cheap hotels or hostels in order to save money for shopping. Shopping opportunities are everywhere, and as Underhill (1999:31) puts, "you almost have to make an effort to avoid shopping today."

Furthermore, with the prevalence of social media and smartphones, people's presentations of self rely heavily on various digital platforms. Utilizing various forms of posts including videos, pictures, and words, Chinese tourists who travel to the U.S. are able to present themselves to their virtual audiences online. Different features of social media platforms, such as the using of hashtags and labels, greatly expand the pool of audiences their posts can reach, while at the same time, the imagined feedback from the audiences will in turn further shape their self-presentations. In this section of the paper, I explore Chinese tourists' presentations of self virtually by sharing their shopping experiences on three different social media platforms and thus form different digital identities.

Chinese International Tourists as Good Community Members

From approximate calculations based on the prices and discounts mentioned in the videos and travel logs, the Chinese tourists analyzed in this present paper have estimated budgets from $1000 to over $20,000 during an average 15-day trip. Among various products they purchased during the trip, souvenirs and gifts constituted the smallest portion of their travel budgets. The purchase of souvenirs and gifts was perceived as an obligatory aspect of their trips, both for their own personal memories of the trip and the maintenance of healthy relationships with friends, family members, and colleagues. For instance, one person, who purchased a necklace from a local souvenir shop at the Grand Canyon, stated that it was "the only souvenir I bought to remember this trip." Another tourist discussed purchasing a Hollywood keychain in Los Angeles near the Hollywood Walk of Fame. She noted that "one does not have to buy too many souvenirs because they are not practical. Purchasing only one or two things to remember the trip is enough."

Moreover, Chinese international tourists examined in this study purchased gifts for close ones not only from the souvenir shops but also from large supermarkets like Walmart and Trader Joes. One tourist spoke about purchasing large bags of chocolates, Tostitos chips, and nut boxes from Walmart as gifts for friends and colleagues. According to him, these types of products both "represent American culture and are more practical than a fridge magnet or a keychain because you can eat them." By posting online about their experiences selecting souvenirs for various groups of people helps Chinese tourists construct their identity as good friends, colleagues, and thoughtful family members. This particular idea was discussed by one of the tourists in her short video posts:

> When you travel to the U.S., you cannot come back to work empty-handed. Even without bringing it up intentionally, your colleagues always expect you to bring them something from your travel destination. I bought these three large packs of chocolate from Walmart as gifts for people in my office. We can share them together and one pack only costs about five dollars.

As demonstrated by this post, when people travel internationally, an almost unspoken rule is that one cannot return empty-handed. Purchasing souvenirs that friends and family can share helps maintain healthy relationships without having to choose separate gifts for everyone. Another person mentioned purchasing a Harvard sweatshirt and baseball cap for her little brother as an "inspirational gift." According to this tourist, the most appropriate kind of gift for younger family members should be both practical and inspirational. Simultaneously, this helps to maintain healthy relationships with relatives due to the good will this product creates. No matter if it is several packages of chocolates, one box of nuts, a sweatshirt, or a couple of keychains, most people discussed the obligations to buy gifts for people they are close to. Although not costing a large amount of money, gifts are always considered necessary. Discussing their experiences selecting souvenirs aides tourists in presenting themselves as thoughtful and considerate and thus construct healthy relationships with friends, relatives, and colleagues.

Chinese International Tourists as Competent and Smart Global Consumers

In addition to souvenirs and gifts, most of the tourists' posts also mentioned purchasing products such as clothing, sneakers, electronic products, and nutritious supplements from Western brands. Nearly all accounts analyzed discussed purchasing clothing, shoes, and various accessories from large retailers like H&M, Gap, Forever 21, Levi's, American Eagle, etc.as well as sports brands such as Nike, Adidas, Converse, and Under Armor. While most of these Western brands are available in China with a price markup, the inaccessibility of items due to very high cost fuels the idea of tourists as shoppers. For instance, many shared their experiences purchasing different skincare and cosmetics products while traveling to the U.S. One tourist wrote in her travel log about doing "80 percent of the shopping in Sephora[3]" and discussed purchasing numerous products

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[3] A multinational chain of personal care and beauty store.

to "stock up for the entire year because it's so much cheaper here." Besides that, many detailed their experiences purchasing luxury Western brands like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Hermes.

According to Keown (1989), relative prices are one of the most influential factors in generating shopping tourism. Together with the rapid growth in popularity of outlet malls and factory shops, tourists attest to the importance of good value and price. Given the enormous demand for shopping by tourists, many destinations have launched major shopping promotional campaigns and have adopted retail and tourist shopping as official policies in their tourism development efforts, thus further expanding the price advantages (Jansen-Verbeke 1990). Below is an example in which the Chinese tourist shared tips for purchasing luxury products during a trip:

> If you want to buy luxury products in the U.S., Hawaii should be your first choice because their sale tax is only 4%, and it is the lowest in the U.S. I purchased my Hermes handbag in Hawaii without having to first buy other of their products that match the price of the bag because they knew you are tourists, and you are not able to stay there long to accumulate the credits.[4] I only bought a $4,600 bracelet and a $600 pillow, and then the salesperson took me to see their handbag collection in the back. I ended up purchasing this beautiful $8,600 Hermes bag in only one visit. Everyone should try their luck in places like Hawaii and Las Vegas.
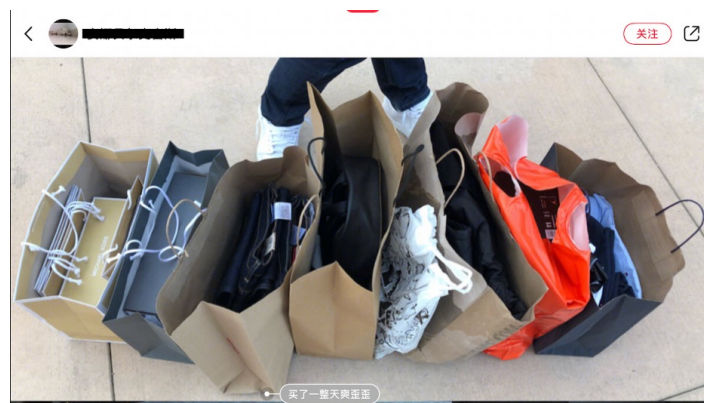

Figure 5: On the platform Red, one Chinese tourist showcases her "haul" after a shopping day at an outlet. At the bottom of the picture, she states, "Shopping for an entire day makes me feel so happy."

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[4] One unspoken rule in many luxury shops is that consumers will first have to buy a certain number of "unpopular" products like shoes, clothing, belts to accumulate their credit and status for the most popular handbags.

As shown in these video posts, "being strategic while shopping" is a theme that frequently emerges when Chinese international tourists discuss their consumption experiences in the U.S. on different social media platforms. Many tourists mentioned that the price for the same product is two to five times higher when purchased in China. Discussing their experiences and strategies for finding different deals both for everyday and luxury products while traveling to the U.S. helped Chinese international tourists present themselves as well-off and smart global consumers. In the videos and travel logs that I analyzed, many cannot hide their excitement talking about the deals they discovered while traveling in the U.S. Most of them are noticeably proud of their ability to locate good deals, as, according to one tourist, "you are saving money while spending money." The following two examples each reveal how Chinese international tourists construct and manage their identities as savvy global consumers:

> In China, one Tommy Hilfiger T-shirt will cost me about $100, and I'm really not willing to spend so much money on a plain logo shirt. When I went to the outlet in the U.S., I was shocked by the low price of this brand --- it's only $20! … I've had my eyes on this pair of Coach sneakers back in China for a long time, and I did not even dare to try it on in the store because I knew I could not afford it. It costs about $500 in China and owning a pair of $500-dollar sneakers is unimaginable for me. When I travel to the U.S., I went to the Coach outlet store and saw the exact same pair for $90! That's why I went for it immediately. I love it so much!

> You can buy Coach, Michael Kors, and Samsonite with your eyes closed! There's no need to compare the prices because it's definitely cheaper here in the U.S. The prices from these brands are almost half compared to the prices in China. If you buy it in outlets, they will have additional discounts.
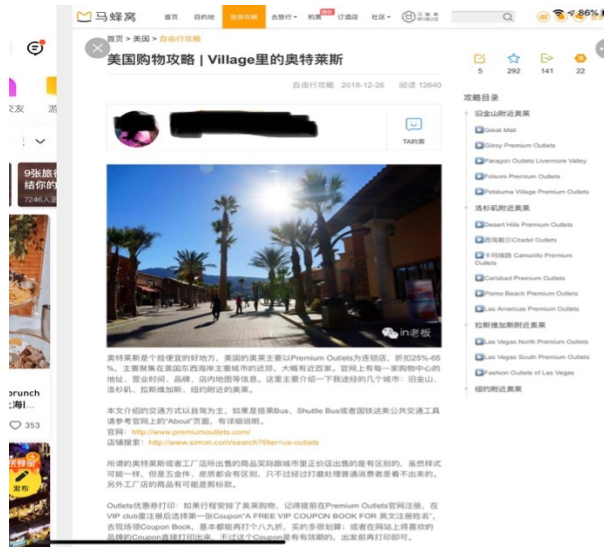
Figure 6: On the platform Mafengwo, one Chinese tourist posted a long article to offer an extensive guide to all the outlets near San Francisco.

In the above examples, Chinese international tourists shared their experiences finding good deals on Western brands when they travel to the U.S. and justified their consumption by reference to the large price differential for certain products between the two countries. There are many more examples from the data analyzed that saw significant price difference as the major shopping motivation while traveling in the U.S. At the same time, discussing shopping strategies helped them confirm their shopping skills publicly. One tourist even went as far as to create a Google Doc to track different deals during her trip. After sharing the document with her viewers on Bilibili, many people complimented her as the most "hardcore deal-catcher" on the internet. Overall, one consistent message that was apparent from these posts was that Chinese tourists are well-off and willing to spend a lot of money when they travel, but they remain savvy and strategic. They will evaluate deals and make shrewd decisions accordingly. Sharing shopping tips and justifying their consumption practices using the price differential helps Chinese tourists present themselves as competent and smart global consumers.

Chinese International Tourists as Trend Setters and Cultural Intermediaries

The prevalent use of social media and smartphones during and after trips adds another layer to the exploration of tourists' roles as consumers. Tourists post about their trips online not only to share their experiences with friends and family but also strangers who are seeking travel tips, things to buy, and general shopping information. Social media platforms enable them to reach a broader audience when sharing their perceptions and experiences. In this way, Chinese international tourists present themselves as trend-setters and cultural intermediaries between China and the U.S.

When searching for questions, labels, and hashtags such as "what to buy in the U.S.," "U.S. shopping haul," "tips on what and where to shop in the U.S." on various platforms, there are tens of thousands of results. By utilizing hashtags or similar features, social media users do not necessarily need to have a large number of followers to achieve a high-click volume for one specific post. Many with fewer than 100 followers can have several posts that reach over ten thousand readers through tracking hashtags. Being considered as experienced consumers who have the right to speak about their shopping experiences and the value of the products they bought in the U.S., some tourists move beyond their traditional roles as consumers in destination countries and become cultural intermediaries who, in many cases, unwittingly provide advertisements for products and services.

Posts from the three chosen social media platforms demonstrate that many Chinese international tourists who have shopped in the U.S. gave future travelers and potential customers advice regarding what brands to buy and not to buy, where to shop, and what the latest products and services to try out while traveling to the U.S. were. A number of people mentioned purchasing newly released cosmetic products that are not yet available in China during their trip to the U.S.:

> If you ever go to Sephora, you should pick up this eyeshadow palette from Urban Decay. This product is from their latest cosmetic line but not yet available in mainland China.

If enough people buy it and post about it, the Chinese supplier will probably consider introducing it to Chinese customers.

In this particular video post, the informant encouraged future Chinese tourists to purchase one specific eyeshadow palette from a brand, in the hope of setting a trend and potentially signaling to Chinese suppliers to bring this product to mainland China. In other words, the influential power of social media is used to promote new products and lifestyles on behalf of large brands. Further, Chinese tourists continuously shared their reviews of various outlets stores, restaurants, coffee shops; their shopping experiences in luxury stores; and their perspectives on customer services. In one post analyzed, one person complained about the barista's attitude in a well-known coffee shop and strongly discouraged future tourists from visiting that specific shop:

> When I stepped into Blue Bottle for a cup of coffee, I had high expectations. However, after I ordered my coffee and waited there for over five minutes, I did not notice anyone making it. I had to remind the barista again of my order. They did not apologize or anything, one guy just proceeded with my order slowly and reluctantly. The customer service was just ridiculous. If you ever travel to New York, do not go to that coffee shop.

By sharing her experience extensively online, this particular tourist became a credible source for future consumers. Therefore, Chinese international tourists who post their own shopping experiences online, either encouraging or discouraging future customers from coming to specific shops in the U.S., indirectly act as middlemen between future customers and brands. As well as taking on the role of internet key opinion leader, many eventually become resellers themselves. On numerous social media platforms, many Chinese international tourists publicly offer to purchase items in the U.S. for interested persons, so they can purchase it for them with a small price markup. By taking advantage of the large price differences mentioned in the shopping motives section, these tourist resellers turn their journey to the U.S. into a win-win situation for their customers in China and for themselves.

Figure 7: On the platform Bilibili, one Chinese tourist holds up a pair of Adidas sneakers to show to her online audiences.

The phenomenon of tourists taking on the role of resellers that connect retailers in the U.S. and customers in China is particularly apparent on the social media platform Red. On Red, there are two resell models: the resellers will ask potential customers to submit their requests, or they will recommend what they think is popular in the U.S. The following are two examples to demonstrate these two models:

> Hi guys, I will be traveling to the U.S. during the summer. If you need anything, please just message me and let me know. If you are not familiar with what you want to buy in the U.S. or U.S. brands, my recommendation is that you can start with athletic products. Products from Nike and Adidas usually have really large price differences and are all worth checking out.

> I want to recommend an indie brand that few people know in China, and it is called Realisation Par. It is an American brand and their dresses accentuate your body curve perfectly. I wore it once when I traveled to Thailand and it was so flattering. I can help to purchase their dresses when I travel to the U.S. I cannot do a large order since I'm not really a professional reseller, just a tourist. I still need suitcase space for myself lol. Just message me and let me know.

As seen in the above examples, people extend their roles from tourists to resellers during or after their trip. This extended role builds a bridge between Chinese customers and U.S. retailers, meanwhile, their tastes and recommendations mediate between the two cultures and set trends. Resellers' posts are pervasive on social media sites throughout the year but tend to peak during summer and around national holidays. Many social media users who are not able to travel to the U.S. also share their experiences finding "customized buyers". One person shared her experiences

finding various Chinese tourists around the Chinese National Day holiday period to purchase her

engagement ring. She said:

> It's easy to find tourists as your buyers around national holidays because there are so many of them! I asked multiple people to find me a Tiffany engagement ring in different regions in the U.S. so that was able to compare the prices. Although you are not able to travel with them, you can find the products you love and have them buy it for you simply by browsing social media apps.

Through maximizing the impact of social media, Chinese international tourists act beyond

their role as tourists, and become culture intermediaries between potential consumers back in

China and businesses in the U.S. Different features embedded in social media platforms allow their

posts to reach a broader audience online, thus further enabling them to present themselves and

construct their identities in unconventional ways.

Chinese International Tourists as Good and Loyal Chinese Patriots

While traveling in a foreign country, tourists' national identity becomes more pronounced

compared to when they are in their country-of-origin. In the case of Chinese tourists in the U.S., it

is likely for them to be recognized collectively as "Chinese". Many feel obligated to not lose face

and to convey a positive national image of Chinese people when they travel abroad. Shopping, as

one of the most important tourist activities, can move beyond a means of personal pleasure and be

used as a way to express political standpoints and construct national identities.

For some people, there is a strong relationship between consuming behaviors and personal

beliefs in politics, morals and justice. After analyzing the social media posts from Chinese tourists,

it was observed that many take the chance of sharing their travel purchases online as an opportunity

to form identities beyond tourists and consumers. By sharing what to buy and what not to buy,

tourists are able to present themselves as good and loyal Chinese patriots. By endorsing certain

brands and condemning others, a message of patriotism and nationalism can be sent.

When Chinese tourists share their product reviews and shopping experiences online, whether or not a certain brand supports Tibetan independence is one of the most frequently asked questions. In Chinese Pinyin,[5] 'Tibet Independence' translates as 'ZangDu', and people who post about this issue online use its abbreviation 'ZD'. People on various social media sites try to identify and share information about U.S. brands that support Tibetan independence based on information such as whether the particular brands' representatives have met with the Dalai Lama or not. By doing so, they intend to persuade their readers and followers to boycott these brands in support of the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese national sovereignty. For example, one person posted a video on Weibo to share what she bought in the U.S., and in the comments section, a viewer pointed out that one brand she purchased from supports ZD and Tibetan independence, and "as a small influencer, you should boycott brands like that." In her defense, she posted and pinned her response to the top of her profile:

> I was in 'buy buy buy' mode everyday and did not notice the large 'bomb' I had stepped on. I just came back home and read your comments; the fact that the brand Anastasia Beverly Hills supports ZD is something that I did not know before now. I will not recommend this brand anymore. There's a lot of substitute products out there so you do not have to purchase eyeshadow palette from this specific brand.

As we can see from this post, it is crucial for any Chinese person who shares their haul video or product review to have a firm stand on issues regarding national sovereignty. For the audience, the national sovereignty of China is non-negotiable and needed to be addressed almost immediately. On Red, they typically use hashtags like #supportsZD and #ZDbrand to warn future customers about specific brands that supports Tibetan independence. By expressing political opinions while sharing what they bought during the trip, they demonstrate that they are not only tourists and consumers, but also Chinese patriots and loyal Chinese citizens. Of the posts analyzed,

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[5] The official romanization system for Standard Chinese in mainland China.

there were no posts publicly supporting Tibetan independence. Such opposing views are either directly censored altogether by the Chinese government or kept private by the individuals themselves.

Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are also frequently mentioned in national sovereignty issues. In 2019, luxury brands such as Versace, Givenchy and Coach mistakenly identified Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan as independent countries on their websites and on items of clothing. This incident caused considerable online backlash and calls to boycott these brands in China. While noting that Chinese people enjoyed purchasing Coach handbags at outlet stores, one particular tourist suggested that "at this special moment, we as Chinese citizens should do our part to protect China's territorial sovereignty and stop purchasing from this brand." As said by one tourist on Red, "you are first a Chinese citizen, then a consumer," hoping to discourage tourists who come to the U.S. from purchasing specific brands perceived as disloyal. Overall, many tourists consider their purchasing power as a form of leverage to force large Western businesses to comply with so-called 'Chinese laws and regulations' unconditionally. China is a key market for luxury brands, thus, many of them quickly express regret and contrition for their mistake after the eruption of a backlash from Chinese social media users.

Other than issues regarding the unification of China, Chinese tourists also frequently post to remind future customers not to purchase from brands that have posted racist content about Chinese or Asians people in general. Many initiate online social movements to urge people to use social media as a tool to express their disappointment publicly on brands' online accounts. In the example below, one Chinese tourist posted about Tarte, a Western cosmetics brand, after it referred pejoratively to Chinese people as "Ching Chong" on their Instagram page. The tourist explained

the racial slur to people who may not be familiar with it and encouraged future tourists to boycott

this brand when traveling to the U.S.:

> This brand posted a meme picture on their Instagram page a couple of months ago, and in the caption section, they used the word "Ching Chong." If you are not familiar with this word, it is a racial slur targeting Asian people. It's similar to the N-word for black people. It's extremely offensive. I know that many of you want to purchase their cosmetic products because they are cheap and in good quality, but I encourage you to reconsider it. If you travel to the U.S., there are so many other options.

Besides this, many videos and posts talked about boycotting U.S. celebrities and their endorsed

products because they had posted racist content on their social media in the past. Multiple people

on Red discussed one U.S. celebrity's video post and notified future tourists not to purchase

products that she endorsed:

> Gigi Hadid posted a video in which she squinted her eyes intentionally to mock Asian people. Let's try not to purchase her products when we travel to the U.S., and maybe get her banned in China forever as well.

> Trust me, you don't really need this pair of jeans she [Gigi Hadid] wears. If you don't respect Chinese people, then you don't take money from us. This [boycotting her brand] is something that all Chinese who are abroad should do together.

The Chinese government has banned almost all forms of social movements and political

protests in mainland China, with the exception of collective actions that propagate nationalism and

patriotism. As can be seen in the examples above, when Chinese tourists share their shopping

experiences on different social media platforms, they are expected to present themselves as good

and loyal Chinese citizens by boycotting certain brands that violate the territorial integrity of China

or demean Chinese people in general. In this sense, Chinese international tourists are not just

tourists, but defenders of Chinese national interests.

ENACTING AND BALANCING COMPETING IDENTITIES ONLINE

As discussed in the previous section, social media platforms and the much-extended groups of

virtual audiences allow Chinese international tourists to present various multi-faceted identities

online. Compared to constructing and presenting themselves solely as tourists, they are capable of becoming cultural intermediaries, global consumers, trendsetters, and Chinese patriots. Although most people analyzed in this study do not embody all of types of identities simultaneously, in many cases, Chinese tourists who talk about their consumption experiences online need to be strategic and exercise caution when presenting competing identities so that the expansive pool of audiences will not feel offended.

Overall, there is a clear tension between presenting the global and the national self when tourists share their consumption experiences online. This phenomenon is particularly real when tourists wish to present global identities as cultural intermediaries, trendsetters, and national identity Chinese patriots simultaneously. For instance, in one post on Red, one tourist who visited the U.S. discussed how young people in China could consider copying American fashion styles. In the comment section, a commenter confronted her and said, "What is the problem with the ways Chinese people dress? American culture should not be prioritized over our own." In this example, presenting a global self as a trendsetter can sometimes conflict with presenting as a loyal Chinese patriot. While introducing Western fashion trends to the local audiences in mainland China, Chinese tourists often face judgment from their fellow countrymen for seemingly prioritizing Western culture over their own. This requires them to carefully balance these competing identities using a variety of tactics.

Among all the tourists examined for this study, the strategic balancing of global and national identities happened more often among people who already had a particularly large fan base. Based on the data analysis, if a Chinese tourist is already an 'internet influencer'[6] who can potentially monetize the content they post, balancing the roles of being a Chinese patriot, a fashion

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[6] "Influencers in social media are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic." (Influencer Marketing Hub)

influencer and a profitable content provider becomes even more crucial. As one subscriber noted under a Chinese blogger's video, "if you are already making money out of your Chinese fans, you had better watch your words and not comment bad things about China." Noticeably, a number of internet influencers who had a fan base between 5,000 to 100,000 sometimes use various forms of disclaimers in their videos or posts in order to balance their multiple roles. For example, at the beginning of a video in which one Chinese tourist/influencer shared her shopping haul in the U.S., she first announced that

> I am not rich at all, and my family is just middle-class. I am not making this video to brag about what I purchased or expressing how good American products are. I understand that many of our local brands in China have already surpassed a lot of foreign brands, both in quality and style.

By having this type of disclaimer either in the beginning of the post or as a later response, many sought to portray to their audiences that purchasing Western brands should not disqualify them from being considered loyal Chinese patriots.

Although not the research subject of this paper, similar criticism can also be found in the comment sections of Chinese bloggers who reside in the U.S. For instance, one Chinese blogger named 'Vicky Soupsss' was forced by their audiences to stop posting for several months because she posted a picture with an American YouTuber named 'Serpent_Za', who once criticized China publicly on his channel. There are also cases where Chinese bloggers were forced to even quit career after collaborating with another person who, according to their fans, supported the independence of Taiwan or the protesters in Hong Kong. Overall, Chinese international tourists, especially those with an established fan base, are expected to strategically balance their global and national identities so that their audiences can be satisfied with their self-presentations, and monetize the content they post online.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As discussed by many previous scholars (Martens and Casey 2016; Maffesoli 1996; McCracken 1990; Noble 2004; Reimer and Leslie 2004; Thornton 1995; Sassatelli 2007; Maguire and Matthews 2012; Cohen 2003), consumption has long moved beyond meeting basic living needs and has become a way for people to construct their identity, discover meanings in their lives, and mark themselves apart from other groups. As a result of globalization, international tourism has become a significant contributor to consumption, and international tourists, as analyzed in this paper, see shopping as one of the primary motivations for traveling. In turn, shopping becomes a way for them to construct their identity beyond simply being a tourist and consumer. Furthermore, with the use of social media during and after their trips, tourists are expected to balance multiple identities carefully when they project themselves online – on the one hand, they present themselves as global consumers who are shrewd and savvy; whilst on the other hand, they still need to preserve and even emphasize their national identity and show how loyal and patriotic they are as Chinese citizens.

In this paper, for the purpose of analyzing Chinese international tourists' presentations of self on different virtual platforms, data was collected from four popular social media sites where tourists share their shopping experiences and tips. Chinese international tourists present themselves first as good community members by discussing how they select different souvenirs and gifts for friends, family, and colleagues, thus maintaining healthy relationships with people around them. Further, they discuss their shopping strategies and share tips about what and where to shop when they travel abroad to the U.S. By doing so, they present themselves as affluent and smart global consumers. Social media platforms and the utilization of hashtags or labels allow them to ascend to trendsetters by informing their Chinese audiences what is popular in the U.S.,

with some tourist resellers serving the role of cultural intermediaries between potential customers back in China and brands in the U.S. Finally, posting about how they use their purchasing power as political leverage enables many Chinese tourists to present themselves as good and loyal Chinese citizens.

This present paper contributes to the study of international tourism, consumption, and the construction of digital self in multiple ways: first of all, this particular study complements Goffman's theoretical framework by extending the field of research into virtual settings and focusing on the combined effect among international travel, consumption, and the use of social media on the construction and presentation of people's digital self. Moreover, this research provides readers with the much-lacking qualitative insights in the exploration of tourists' consumption behavior and its connection to Chinese nationalism in the digital age. As demonstrated by the data, many tourists were forced to make statements regarding the products they had purchased if it was perceived that a brand had disrespected China's sovereignty. Any posts that did not sufficiently promote patriotism or display positive images of China were subjected to severe attack and criticism online. Some tourists and social media users also face the dilemma that requires them to strategically manage the tension between their competing global and national identities. Overall, the paper discussed the complexities and the liberating yet constraining aspects of presenting one's self in virtual settings – people can present themselves in myriad diverse ways online and all the while their presentations are constantly being monitored and policed by more and more audiences outside their immediate life circle. This sometimes requires them to creatively conduct self-presentation so that their competing identities can be strategically balanced.

One limitation of the paper is that the majority of the posts analyzed came from female social media users in their 20s to 40s. Some possible explanations for the unbalanced gender ratio include: first, a primary source of data for this paper, the platform Red, has a predominantly female audience of approximately 88 percent; simultaneously, 83% of their users are millennials born between 1982 and 2000. Secondly, women today still share the responsibilities as purchasers both for themselves and their entire family. Being a strategic and smart consumer is still a common expectation for women in the context of China. Another weakness is that this study only focused on consumption experiences that had been shared online, which represents a rather small portion of global consumption activities. Like most qualitative studies that do not aim to generalize their findings, another limitation of this present paper is that the findings may not be able to generalize to other groups of population such as U.S. international tourists in China, or domestic Chinese tourists.

Given that all posts analyzed were in Simplified Chinese and Mandarin, how people from other parts of the world react to Chinese tourists' presentations of self in various virtual settings was not examined. However, through collecting and analyzing various forms of data from three Chinese social media sites, I hope that this paper has helped, in some small way, to deepen people's impressions of Chinese tourists in the age of globalization. This study has provided some insights into how globalization operates at a micro-level and can serve as a starting point to unpack the various issues and interactions people face in the digital age. The case of China is unique because of the internet surveillance imposed by the government – Chinese people need to be cautious about what they post online, otherwise, they will not only take the risk of having their posts deleted and their accounts canceled, but they may also be subject to legal action for what they say. As a result of living under such censorship for long, many Chinese netizens have also internalized this set of

standards for online speech and use it to examine the speech and posts of others. However, the case of China, on some level, might also shed light on exploring the virtual self-presentation of people in other parts of the world. In the age of social media when performers' presentations of self constantly orient towards a virtual group of audience outside their life circles, they need to manage and balance their identities more creatively compared to traditional face-to-face interactions to seek the audiences' approvals.

Conclusively, future studies on international tourism and consumption should continue to cultivate social media sites as an essential source of data, and further explore the consumption, interaction, and presentations of self that take place in virtual settings. Recently, the tourism industry has been massively affected by the spread of coronavirus. It is also important for future scholars to pay close attention to how COVID-19 and the worldwide pandemic shape tourists' identities and the stigmas Chinese/Asian-looking tourists might face afterwards.

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Conclusion Chapter

My dissertation, *"Presenting Selves and Interpreting Culture: An Ethnography of Chinese International Tourism in the U.S.,"* is a study that explores the connection between global consumption, technological development, and new patterns of international tourism and migration that have emerged. Specifically, I examined the phenomenon of international, cross-border package tours for Chinese tourists in the United States. Using both virtual and face-to-face ethnographic methods, I analyzed Chinese international package tourists' consumption behavior, social media presentations, cultural interpretations, as well as their construction of the collective identity as "good Chinese" overseas. I used Chinese international package tour as a case study to interrogate how globalization and the global economy operate at the micro-level, and how international tourists from "the East" make cultural interpretations of "the West" during their tourism experiences. Simultaneously, I look at how racial and gender biases, as well as other forms of inequalities, are reproduced during the interactive processes. With China and the U.S. continually being compared and contended in the grand political narratives, my goal for this research is to provide a micro-level, in-depth exploration of the transnational and cross-cultural interactions between the two nations.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Based on qualitative data collected both in virtual and face-to-face settings, this dissertation research looked at Chinese international tourists' experiences and identity constructions while traveling in United States. The first chapter of my dissertation tackles how Chinese tourists construct and maintain two types of seemingly contradicting identities: on the one hand, the tour was used for them to boost their identity as global consumers and citizens; while on the other hand,

the tour in the U.S. also led them to feel prouder of being a Chinese, thus, enhancing their national identity. Through the analysis of ethnographic observations and interviews, this paper illustrates that the understanding of Chinese international tourists' multifaceted tourist identities should be situated within broad social and cultural contexts, including the social context of China's economic ascendence and the accompanying national pride, the current tension between two nations, as well as the neoliberal logic that pervades modern society.

The second chapter of the dissertation focused on one particular tourist activity: taking photos. For this chapter, I concluded that many Chinese tourists' package tour experiences in the United States are, to a large extent, social media-focused and centered on interacting with friends and family back home. Through the analysis of ethnographic observations, interviews, and documents, this chapter illustrates that Chinese package tourists, aided by tour organizers and guides, direct their gaze inward instead of outward during their corporal tours in the United States. Their travel activities do not aim at seeing tourist attractions but rather are orchestrated to constantly check how they look in pictures and whether their self-presentations are successful in the eyes of people back home. Equipped with modern technology, tourists studied in this paper have successfully shifted their gaze away from looking outward to a backward self-examination. Participating in the scholarly debate of the 'tourist gaze', I argue that the gaze is neither organic nor a naturally occurring phenomenon, but is shaped and constructed by socio-cultural context, technology, and personal experiences. Embedded within the culture of instantaneity that promotes instant sharing and an 'always-on' mode, I have noticed that the shifted tourist gaze was not accomplished by tourists alone: it was with the combined effect of multiple parties, including the travel agencies' promotional ads, the tour guide, the structure of the package tours, the virtual audiences back home, the comments and likes on social media, as well as the use of technologies,

that Chinese tourists I interacted with in this study have turned their outward gazes into an inward self-gazing during their corporal tours. It is because of those mentioned factors that their touristic performativity in the social media era not only encompasses the performances in front of the camera, but also their responses and reactions of their virtual audiences' interactive feedback.

The third chapter of the dissertation looked at Chinese tourists' consumption experiences as they shared tips and experiences online, and more specifically, it looked at the role social media plays for tourists' identity presentations. Social media platforms and the much-extended groups of virtual audiences allow Chinese international tourists to present various multi-faceted identities online. Compared to constructing and presenting themselves solely as tourists, they are capable of becoming cultural intermediaries, global consumers, trendsetters, and Chinese patriots. Although most people analyzed in this study do not embody all of types of identities simultaneously, in many cases, Chinese tourists who talk about their consumption experiences online need to be strategic and exercise caution when presenting competing identities so that the expansive pool of audiences will not feel offended. In some cases, tourists need to strategically balance and negotiate their conflicting identities in virtual settings. This phenomenon is particularly real when tourists wish to present global identities as cultural intermediaries, trendsetters, and national identity Chinese patriots simultaneously.

IMPLICATIONS

Chinese tourists' presentation of self and construction of multifaceted identities should be situated and understood within broader social contexts of both China and the United States. This multifaceted tourist self is, at first, situated within a broader social context that highlights China's economic ascendance. As a direct result of China's economic growth, the purchasing power of its citizens has greatly increased, and as mentioned above, China is not only the largest

tourist-generating country in the world, but Chinese tourists also bring big revenues to the destination countries. The economic development at the national level and "the power of purchasing power" at the individual level during international tours together feed the national pride of Chinese tourists.

The globalized yet patriotic tourist self constructed during the tour should also be situated within the tensions between U.S. and China, especially during the Trump administration. The global political and economic order created after World War II was greatly challenged by Donald Trump. As the two largest economies in the world, the relationship between China and the United States has gradually turned from interdependence to hostility, and the tension keeps exacerbating until today (Boylan, McBeath, and Wang 2021). Due to this tension and the accompanying negative coverage of the U.S. in Chinese news, Chinese tourists tend to enter the U.S. with preexisting biases and stereotypes. On top of that, the tour guides also deliberately cater to these biases to keep the tourists happy and reduce potential conflicts of opinions, thus collectively enhancing their national pride during the trip. On the other hand, the eagerness to construct a "globalized self" can be seen as a consequence of a neoliberal logic that pervades modern society (Lemert and Elliott 2006). In other words, neoliberalism encourages individuals to apply a market logic to their own lives and see themselves as calculated consumers.

Additionally, this dissertation research also indicated how classic sociological concepts and theories can be shaped by modern technologies, such as social media and smartphones. Nowadays, tourists can construct and present diverse digital selves in virtual settings. In physical spaces, there is a limited audience and time span for every performance; but for interactions online, people's audiences can theoretically keep expanding indefinitely, and the performance never has to end. At the same time, it is worth noting that such tourists' presentations of self are

monitored and policed in stricter ways by their much-expanded pool of virtual audiences, compared to traditional face-to-face interactions in physical settings. In other words, successful presentations of self in virtual settings require performers to acquire approvals from a much-expanded group of audiences outside their intimate life circles. Consequently, Chinese international tourists sometimes need to balance multiple different, even competing, identities while doing self-presentations online.

Besides that, I show how Chinese package tourists' traveling experiences in the U.S. have been extensively centered around presenting the most ideal self on social media, and this has further impacted the classic sociological concept of the tourist gaze. Chinese package tourists explored in this dissertation used various strategies to make sure that the images portraying their 'traveling selves' are presentable and curated online. In the past, when people mainly used digital cameras to take pictures, we could say that if the Kodak moment was not captured and framed, then it did not happen; while now, it has become "if it is not posted, then the experiences do not exist." All these mentioned strategies and calculations have pointed toward the same phenomenon: Content posted on various SNS sites eventually became the embodiment of their travel experiences, and the tourist gaze in the age of social media has shifted from looking outward to a continuous self-gazing and self-examination. Furthermore, tourists' enthusiasm for editing and posting their travel portrait photos instantly on SNS has further externalized the traditional tourist gaze: in many cases, the content they post is neither about the view they see nor pictures of themselves, but the links between them. It is about what someone else sees that highlights the combination of both people and the view. Even though they have only spent ten minutes visiting an attraction, posting photos of themselves standing in front of different landscapes is proof that they have been there. To some extent, taking and posting self-

highlighting travel photos externalizes the tourist gaze and objectifies the viewer as part of the landscape. It documents the viewing and gazing, not simply the view and gaze.

Overall, my work situates the case of Chinese international tourism within the context of a changing global economic order. In light of China's economic ascendance, more people are willing to spend their money traveling abroad in efforts to see Western cultures with their own eyes. Their corporeal travel experiences were also accompanied by the speedy development of social media, thus causing them to gaze back at themselves and their social media-presentations instead of those cultural encounters. On top of that, China's cyber-surveillance requires tourists to pay extra attention while presenting themselves online: In many cases, tourists need to prioritize and emphasize their identity as Chinese patriots before introducing Western culture to people back home. Lastly, the tour guide, serving the role of 'cultural intermediary' between the East and the West, often unwittingly reproduces cultural understandings containing racial and gender biases. In summary, my dissertation project critically examines how forces of global capitalism, technological development, and China's socio-economic transition are reshaping international tourism, cross-cultural interactions, and identity constructions across geographic borders.

LIMITATIONS

Like most qualitative studies that do not aim to generalize their findings, one limitation of my dissertation is that it only focuses on the travel experiences of Chinese package holiday tourists in the United States. Similar findings may not be extended to other tourist groups such as solo travelers or backpackers. However, the paradox I have uncovered in this study can not only provide insight on Chinese tourists but can also be seen as a snapshot of how globalization and China-U.S. relations operate at the micro-level. Despite the grand narrative and tensions

portrayed in the news, the actual interactions contain more nuances and subtleties. As suggested in the theoretical framework, individuals' identities need to be interpreted within social and cultural contexts, and this study provides the much-lacking thick descriptions in the field of international tourism and identity construction.

In addition, observing touristic behavior in isolation from the rest of the tourists' lives back in China may also restrict my understanding of why they chose to post photos and present themselves in certain ways. These forms of all-inclusive tour packages may somewhat limit the direction and content of the tourist gaze, as a result, allow tourists with less agency. While expecting similar trends, the findings might not be able to generalize to groups such as backpackers or solo travelers, nor are they able to be applied to other forms of package tourism. Another limitation regarding method is that I did not analyze tourists' actual posts on WeChat and other social media platforms. Related data was collected from observation and interviews, but not directly from their online posts because I was not anticipating the trend of photo-posting during the ethnographic field work. However, the examination of tourists' online posts would be a great source of data for my future work learning about tourists' performance of self and display of their conspicuous leisure. Given that all posts analyzed were in Simplified Chinese and Mandarin, how people from other parts of the world react to Chinese tourists' presentations of self in various virtual settings was not examined.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While my dissertation examined Chinese package tourism in the U.S., I plan to conduct a follow-up project that explores violence and racism against Chinese and Asian-looking tourists and tour guides after COVID-19. Following the same theme, some of my future projects will involve the exploration of other forms of tourism, including birth tourism (the practice of traveling to

another country to give birth and obtain citizenship), dark/grief tourism (tourism involving travel to places historically associated with death or tragedy), sustainable tourism (tourism that takes full account of its social, economic, and environmental impacts), and international tourism from Western countries to mainland China. In addition to that, I plan to write a separate paper focusing on the role of the tour guide throughout entire tour. In my observation, I found out that tour guides are not only cultural intermediaries and information hubs for most of the package tourists, but at the same time, they conduct an enormous amount of identity work and emotional labor. The job tour guides do in the United States can also reflect, to some extent, how the labor market operates in the context of globalization.

As a researcher, it is important to recognize that much of people's behavior and thoughts are changing dramatically due to the advent of social networking. At the same time, sociological concepts and theories used to explain human behaviors need to be constantly updated. It calls for future scholars to further claim the soil of social media sites as research data to explore how previous theories and concepts are transformed by the use of different mediums. Conclusively, future studies on international tourism and consumption should continue to cultivate social media sites as an essential source of data, and further explore the consumption, interaction, and presentations of self that take place in virtual settings.

My hope is that this initial exploration can encourage future researchers to delve more deeply into the empirical practices of package tourism, and to shed more light on how individuals' practices are shaped by the broad dynamics of neoliberal globalization. Meanwhile, the near-destructive impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry cannot be overlooked. 2019 saw approximately three million Chinese tourists to the United States, while in 2020, the number has decreased to 370,000 (Statista 2020). Coinciding with the global pandemic are discrimination and

violence against Asians. In this context, future research should further explore the current state of tourism under the impact of the global pandemic, as well as the discrimination that Asian-looking tourists and tour guides may face in the near future.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

- *Background information*

1. Is this your first time visiting the U.S.?

2. What are your impressions about the U.S. before the visit? Where/how do you usually get information about the U.S. in China?

3. Please tell me more about this trip: How did you decide to travel to the U.S.? Why did you choose this package tour, or package tour in general? What do you expect to learn and see in this trip?

4. During the trip, have you encountered situations that are different from how things operate in China? Can you give me some specific examples?

5. How did you deal with situations? Can you give me some examples?

6. Do you think it's important for tourists to respect and follow the cultural and social norms in the places they visit? Why or why not?

7. Have you encountered any situation in which people express emotions differently than in China? Can you give me some examples?

8. What's your own emotional experiences before, during, and after the trip?

9. Do you think Chinese tourists need to "fit in" emotionally in different places in the U.S.?

10. How do you interpret your own role as Chinese tourists in the U.S.? Do you feel obligated to represent your entire country as cultural ambassadors, or just yourself? Do you feel obligated to "not lose face" for your country?

11. How do you feel about Americans and American society in general?

12. How do you feel about your own travel experiences?

13. Which experiences and places did you most enjoy (including landmarks, landscapes, foods)? Which objects and symbols of American culture do they value? Can you give me some examples?

14. What do you not like in this trip?

15. Is there anything else you think would be important for me to know? About being a tourist in the U.S., or going on this trip/tour?

16. Do you have any question for me?

- *Demographic information*

17. Place of residence.

18. Year of birth.

19. Who are you traveling with?

20. What's your job back home?

21. Educational background.

22. Number of times you have visited the U.S.? Total length of your previous trips? Locations you visited?

Appendix B: IRB Approval

USF UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

January 14, 2019

Fangheyue Ma
Sociology
Tampa, FL 33613

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#: Pro00038380
Title: Presenting Selves and Interpreting Culture: An Ethnography of Chinese International Tourism in the United States.

Study Approval Period: 1/12/2019 to 1/12/2020

Dear Ms. Ma:

On 1/12/2019, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Protocol, Version #1, 11.26.18

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Adult Consent Version #1 Jan 4th 2019 (1).docx.pdf
Chinese Adult Consent Version #1 Jan. 4th 2019.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research

proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) business days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Melissa Sloan, PhD, Vice Chairperson

USF Institutional Review Board