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Song, Hanqun, Sparks, Beverley and Wang, Ying

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Dr Hanqun Song

Lecturer,

The Business School,

University of Huddersfield,

Queensgate, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire,

HD1 3DH, United Kingdom

Email: h.song@hud.ac.uk

Professor Beverley A Sparks

Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management,

Griffith Business School,

Griffith University, Australia

Dr Ying Wang

Senior Lecturer,

Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management,

Griffith Business School,

Griffith University, Australia

Corresponding author: Hanqun Song

Exploring disagreement prevention and resolution in travel decision-making of young Chinese travellers

Abstract

The young Chinese travel market is becoming increasingly significant in domestic and international tourism. However, there is limited research on the market. This study examines the decision-making processes of young Chinese travellers, with a particular interest in disagreement prevention and resolution. On the basis of interviews with 25 young Chinese travellers, this study found that while a small number of travellers did not perceive any disagreement, or did not voice their disagreement, the majority of interviewees described the decision-making process as being characterised by periods of disagreement. It was found that Chinese cultural values including 'forbearance' and 'authority' influence travellers' disagreement prevention. It was discovered that travellers used five types of strategies for disagreement resolution, including: compromise, problem solving, delay, forcing, and accommodation. These strategies were primarily influenced by two Chinese cultural values: 'reciprocity' and 'conformity'.

Keywords: Disagreement Prevention, Disagreement Resolution, Travel Decision-Making, Young Chinese Traveller, Chinese Cultural Values

Introduction

Since travellers commonly travel with other individuals, such as family members, friends, relatives, classmates, and co-workers, it is conjectured that many travel decisions are not made solely by one individual but jointly by multiple decision makers (Marcevova, Coles, & Shaw, 2010). When multiple people with diverse knowledge, characteristics, attitudes, motives and values are involved in the decision-making process, different opinions and disagreement may arise (Parks & Kerr, 1999). Failure to reach agreement is costly to all group members; therefore, an effective process of disagreement resolution to reach a required level of consensus is vital (Hirokawa, 1982). Yet, there has been very little research in the tourism field to understand how travellers solve disagreement in order to reach a consensus in travel-related, group decision-making (Marcevova et al., 2010). Among these limited studies, the process of solving disagreements in travel decision-making has mainly been focused on Western cultural contexts and very few in other cultural contexts, such as China. Therefore, further research is needed to explore whether tourists in Western and Eastern countries perform differently in the process of solving disagreements.

China's tourism industry has grown exponentially, and over the past three decades travel has become a common leisure activity for Chinese people. An important segment of the Chinese travel market is the young travel market that comprises of approximately 389 million adults aged between 18—35 years, accounting for 29.2 per cent of the Chinese population in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2010). Most of the young Chinese population are the first singletons born under China's *One Child Policy* (Huang & Cai, 2011). Being the only child in the family, they often receive undivided love and attention of both parents and grandparents. Living in a wealthy and peaceful society, these young adults have varied characteristics compared to other generations in China. For instance, this generation is known for being more individualistic than previous generations (Huang & Cai, 2011). It is not clear whether this generation still holds Chinese

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cultural values strongly, but evidence shows that travellers' cultural values influence their travel decision-making and behaviours (Summers & McColl-Kennedy, 1998). Therefore, research effort is needed to gain a better understanding of this group of travellers and their related characteristics and behaviours.

Given the lack of research on group travel decision-making and the potential of the young Chinese travel market, this study examines the disagreement resolution process among young Chinese travellers' in group travel decision-making. Specifically, this study aims to examine whether young Chinese travellers have experienced any disagreement or conflict during group travel decision-making. It will examine how they address these disagreements or conflicts in order to reach an agreement, as well as the cultural values, which underpin disagreement resolution strategies adopted by these young travellers.

Literature review

Travel decision making

In the travel decision-making process, destination selection is one of the most vital stages. Because of that, theories about the destination selection have been well developed. One of the popular theories is the choice set theory, which was first proposed by Crompton (1977), and further developed by Um and Crompton (1990). They proposed a framework with three stages for tourist destination selection: 1) awareness set; 2) evolution of an evoked set, and 3) destination selection. These three stages are influenced by external inputs (e.g., stimuli display) and internal inputs (e.g., socio-psychological set). Decrop and Snelders (2004) argued that destination selection might not be a clear three-stage process, but an on-going process, which involves a lot of adaptability and

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opportunism. As such, the decision making process (e.g., destination selection) is unlikely to be a one directional linear progression towards the final destination choice.

Researchers also believed that the travel decision-making sequence involves five main steps: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, choice/purchase, and post-purchase evaluation (Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 1998; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). In addition, travel decision-making involves multiple stages, including pre-travel, during-travel, and post-travel (Woodside & King, 2001). Travel decision-making is not limited to one single decision of choosing a destination, but a multi-faceted decision, consisting of choosing a destination, as well as tourism products and services (e.g., attractions, accommodations, and activities) (Dellaert, Ettema, & Lindh, 1998). Therefore, travellers may follow the travel decision-making sequence for every sub-decision at multiple stages, which makes travel decision-making more complicated than selecting a destination. Group travel further complicates the decision making process as members of a group may have different opinions and thoughts. Disagreements may arise when multiple decision makers are involved in the process.

Even though disagreement commonly appears in the travel decision-making process, only a small number of studies (e.g., Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Kozak, 2010) have examined how travellers solve disagreements and ultimately arrive at the final decision. Basically, conflict means disagreement, explicit or implicit, between different parties on the rationale or outcome of a decision (Nelson, 1988). Kirchler (1995) identified three types of conflicts (disagreements) in the consumer decision-making process: *value, probability,* and *distribution* conflicts. Specifically, *value conflicts* arise when the group members have fundamental different goals resulting from different personality traits, product involvement, values, definitions and motives. *Probability conflicts* mean that members share the same motives and involvement in the decision domain but have different assessments about the attributes and alternatives involved in the choice. Such conflicts centre on

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assessments about the actual facts and options involved in a solution due to different source of information or use the same source in different ways. *Distribution conflicts* are connected with the equity theory and arise when group members perceived unequally distribution of costs and benefits across the members. Decrop, Pecheux, and Bauvin (2004) applied these three conflicts in the travel decision-making context. Basically, the conflict can be successful solved (Decrop, 2005).

People implement different strategies to resolve disagreement and reach consensus. Kirchler (1995) identified several tactics to address conflicts: *persuasion tactics, bargaining tactics, objective, reasoned argumentation,* and *conflict avoiding tactics*. Kirchler (1993) also found that the tactics selected depended primarily on the quality of the relationship, the conflict type, and the power discrepancy between different people. Previous tourism studies focus primarily on couples' decision making and stated that couples tend to implement strategies, such as compromise and reward, to mutually benefit both parties in the process of resolving disagreement. For example, Kozak (2010) listed the strategies adopted by husband and wife, when facing disagreement while on vacation and deciding to eat out. These strategies are: *persuasion, bargaining, compromise, coercion, intimidation, sacrifice, giving priority to the other, recommendation by sellers, recommendation by friends/relatives,* and *influence of children*. Among these strategies, *compromise* is most commonly used, showing that couples tend to make decisions through mutual concession. Also focusing on couples' vacation decision-making, Bokek-Cohen (2011) identified three types of strategies: *reward, coercive,* and *emotional*; with *reward* being the most applied strategy. Bronner and de Hoog (2008) identified several strategies for dealing with disagreements; including *exchange, the golden mean, persuasion, emotion, internal expert role, external expert, white lies, authoritarian,* and *throwing a dice*. A form of compromise, the golden mean strategy, is found to be the most frequently used strategy for both males and females in the family decision-making process (Bronner & de Hoog, 2008). Other studies (Jang, Lee, Lee, & Hong, 2007; Kang & Hsu, 2005) found that discussion

between family members is the most common approach to solve interpersonal conflict in order to reach agreement.

Although family and non-family groups' decision-making processes are different (Decrop, 2005), Marcevova et al. (2010) examined non-family groups, and found that *compromise* is still the most commonly employed conflict resolution strategy. Decrop (2005) also examined both family and non-family groups, and found that the conflicts can be resolved through strategies such as: *consensus (altruism), negotiation (give and take), dictatorship (one member imposes his/her ideas on the other members),* or *delegation (letting another person decide for oneself).*

Several research gaps emerged from a review of the current tourism literature. First, the current literature on disagreement solution has been mainly in the Western context (e.g., Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Kozak, 2010). No study has been found in the Eastern context, such as China, despite the Asian tourism market, especially China, has been developed quickly, and disagreement resolution has become very common in the travel decision-making process in Asia. Second, the current literature on disagreement solution has been mainly on the family members (e.g., Bokek-Cohen, 2011; Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Kozak, 2010). Only a few studies (e.g., Decrop, 2005; Decrop et al., 2004; Marcevova et al., 2010) have examined the friendship groups. Further research still needs to be conducted to have an in-depth understanding of the friendship group's disagreement resolution. Third, there is limited understanding of the factors underlying the adoption of various disagreement resolution strategies. Even though Marcevova et al. (2010) found that some travellers did not perceive disagreement in the group travel decision-making process, until now, no studies have explained explain this phenomenon. It is also not clear whether travellers take any strategies to prevent disagreements from occurring.

Chinese cultural values in decision-making

Cultural values influence travellers' behaviour, such as travel decision-making (Correia, Kozak, & Ferradeira, 2011; Summers & McColl-Kennedy, 1998). For example, Summers and McColl-Kennedy (1998) compared Malaysian-Chinese with Americans, and found that cultural values (e.g., Chinese vs. American) do influence the decision outcomes. Correia et al. (2011) also found that national culture influences directly the pattern of vacation decisions in various ways, such as decision making criteria.

People from different cultural backgrounds utilise different communication style in the decision-making process. People in individualised societies, such as United States, have a tendency to persuade counterparts to accept their viewpoints by directly expressing their opinions (Chen & Starosta, 1997). However, people in highly collectivist societies, such as China, tend to value group decisions, order, and security (Chen & Chung, 1994), so they have a tendency to give priority to the goals of the group and try to emphasize their connectedness with the group (Kacen & Lee, 2002; Triandis, 1995). Due to that reason, people in collectivist societies tend to be more silent and use ambiguous language in interactions, and avoid saying 'no' directly to others in order to foster or maintain a harmonious atmosphere (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Hofstede (2004) described Chinese culture as highly collectivistic, which is identified with the Confucian doctrines that emphasize ties of kinship and close personal relations, as opposed to the individualistic culture of Westerners.

There is extensive research into Chinese cultural values in literature, which shows that one of the cardinal values of Chinese culture is 'harmony'. This emphasizes a harmonious society and the appropriate arrangement of interpersonal relationships (Chen, 2000; Chen & Starosta, 1997; Hwang, 1987). When harmonious relations are more important than the quality of task performance, group members are likely to suppress conflict and dismiss information (Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams, &

Neale, 1996). In addition, friends had less argumentativeness and aggressiveness in the decision-making process than non-friends, and conflict is likely to be suppressed if group cohesiveness is deemed a priority (Leung, Koch, & Lu, 2002). The values of group orientation and conflict avoidance from Confucian doctrines influence Chinese people to adopt a reserved and implicit communication style so as not to express different opinions and real feelings to others in the group communication process (Fang & Faure, 2011). Specifically, the conflict-free interpersonal relationship valued by Chinese requires individuals to control their emotions and avoid aggressive behaviours (Chen & Chung, 1994), or suffer short-term loss in order to achieve long-term benefits (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Kwek & Lee, 2010). The conflict-free relationship can be explained by the concept of 'forbearance', which is a profound cultural foundation in China. In its broadest sense, 'forbearance' means to control and to suppress one's emotion, desire, and psychological impulse in favour of maintaining a harmonious relationship (Hwang, 1997; Lockett, 1988). Over time, individuals continue to subordinate themselves to the group to sustain a social order (Lockett, 1988).

In addition, Chinese people place a heavy weight on particularistic relationships, which are regulated by a set of specific communication rules and patterns that give individuals a direction of interaction in order to avoid an embarrassing encounters or serious conflict (Chen & Chung, 1994). These communication rules include: to whom to speak, how and when to speak in the process of interaction (Chen & Chung, 1994). Particularistic relationships can be used to avoid conflicts because they are potentially powerful in persuasion, influence and control (Chang & Holt, 1991). The Chinese hierarchical structure of particularistic relationships can be reflected through positions of authority, such as the superior, the father, the husband, and the older brother (Chen, 2000). Directly expressing 'refusal' to obey one's authority is considered to signify an uncooperative attitude, which is detrimental to the harmonious relationship in the Chinese hierarchical network (Pye, 1982).

Chen, Ryan, and Chen (1999) indicated that inter-relation is not only a tool used to avoid conflicts, but also as a social resource such as resolving conflicts among people. Chen et al. (1999) suggested that six determinants might affect conflict management: face, inter-relation, seniority, power, credibility, and severity of the conflict. By comparing Americans and Chinese, Chen et al. (1999) found that Chinese scored significantly higher than Americans on face and seniority, while Americans scored significantly higher than Chinese on severity of conflict. The achievement of harmony among Chinese also demands mutual dependency and responsibility in fulfilling each party's needs in social interaction (Chen & Chung, 1994). Based on Confucian teachings, *reciprocity* requires people to show mutual responsibility in social interactions (Chen & Chung, 1994). It is more than just a materialistic exchange of mutual benefit in the Chinese society. 'Reciprocity' focuses on the long-term benefits to everyone in the group. Compared with Westerners, Chinese people adopt more compromising approaches to deal with group decision-making issues (Chuah, Hoffmann, & Larner, 2014; Hofstede, 2004; Lin & Miller, 2002). Shenkar and Ronen (1987) indicated that Chinese negotiators are likely to make concessions at the end of a negotiation so that they can keep the harmonious relationship and reach a mutually satisfactory outcome. It is an attempt to work with the opponent in an effort to find an integrative solution that would satisfy both parties (Miller, 1995). In addition, Chinese society has historically focused on *conformity* in governing all interpersonal relations, while de-emphasizing personal goals (Chen & Chung, 1994).

Methodology

Group decision-making is a complex idea and one that has been rarely examined from the perspective of young Chinese travellers. Thus, research to adopt an approach that is capable of gaining insights into and capturing the dynamics of the decision-making process is required. To achieve the research objectives, this study collected data through semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews. This methodology was adopted because of the ability to elicit a great amount of

information about individuals' thoughts, interpretations, and behaviours (Langley, 1999). To qualify for this study, all interviewees had to meet the following three criteria: firstly, they had experienced the group travel decision-making process with their friends; secondly, were part of a group decision-making process made within the previous ten months; and thirdly, the travel purpose was for leisure and the group organised the trip themselves rather than relying on a travel agency. Each criterion enforced the realism of the examination of the group in the travel decision-making process, as young travellers travel often with their friends for leisure purposes, and travellers can remember more details about the group decision-making process within ten months. In accordance with the criteria, a purposive sampling approach was implemented to recruit qualified interviewees (Bernard, 2011). Specifically, the researcher contacted his friends, relatives, and former colleagues in China to identify a pool of potential qualified participants. In addition, qualified participants were asked to invite suitable acquaintances to participate in this study.

Altogether, 25 interviews were conducted in this study. The number of interviewees was determined according to the guidelines of data saturation. Saturation is the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the research topic (Shank, 2006). The interviews were conducted within two phases. The first phase included interviews with 20 travellers and an initial round of data analysis to generate key themes. In the second phase, further interviews with five travellers were conducted, and no more new themes or categories emerged. The number of interviews in this study coincide with the assumption that qualitative researchers in the tourism context normally interview around 28 interviewees (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014).

Table 1 provides a profile of the interviewees that participated in this study. The 25 interviewees consisted of mainly professionals that were aged between 21 to 35 years. Males slightly outnumbered females, with 13 males and 12 females. The interviewees travelled by themselves or with others with varying frequency every year, ranging from one to thirty times per year. Three

interviewees failed to provide an estimate due to uncertainties such as changing available time for travel from year to year.

(Please insert Table 1 here)

Interview Procedure

Pre-testing interviews were conducted with five participants who had group travel decision-making experiences. The pre-testing included questions about previous travel decision-making experience; the agreement and disagreement details; and demographic and travel characterises. The pre-testing suggested including detailed questions about the process of reaching an agreement, as well as some amendments to the wording of the interview questions. Pre-testing improved the possibility of collecting high-quality data through the interview questions (Silverman, 2001).

The official interviews were conducted in five cities in the Yangtze River Delta region in China, including: Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuxi, Taizhou, and Yancheng. The Yangtze River Delta region is one of the most affluent areas in China, where people have great potential to travel. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in places of residence and workplaces of the participants. The language and materials used in the interviews were in Chinese for the convenience of the participants. The formal interview procedure included two steps. Firstly, at the beginning of the interview, the researcher briefly introduced the purpose of the project and invited interviewees to read the information sheet and then sign a consent form to concur with the interview agreement. Secondly, the researcher interviewed participants under a list of semi-structured questions, which were developed from the literature review and the researchers' understanding of the topic.

The interview consisted of three sections: the first section included questions about the interviewees' decision-making experience of their most recent group leisure trip, such as the process of selecting destinations, activities, and travel dates. Section two focused on whether interviewees experienced any disagreements in the decision-making process and how they negotiated with others to resolve these disagreements. This section included questions such as 'Please think about your last travel experience. Did you have any disagreements about suggestions during the decision-making process?', 'In what situation, did you have the disagreement? What were the reasons for the disagreement?', 'If there was no disagreement, what were the reasons?', 'When you had a disagreement, how did you solve any differences? Can you tell me the details?' Questions in the third section collected information on the demographics and trip characteristics of the interviewees. In addition, during the interviews, follow-up questions based on interviewees' answers were asked to gain an in-depth understanding of their decision-making process.

The interviews ranged from approximately 20—40 minutes in duration. This duration of interviews has been accepted by previous studies (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997; Sparks, Bradley, Jennings, & Johnston, 2014). All interviews were audio recorded. Before analysing data, audio materials were carefully transcribed by a native Chinese speaker, and then transcripts were imported into qualitative data analysis software: NVivo 10. Using an inductive approach, coding was conducted following a three step procedure to generate themes including: first-order concepts; second-order themes; and aggregate dimensions (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Krippendorff, 2004). In the first step, concrete surface texts were open-coded, generating 'concepts'. In the second step, the 'concepts' were grouped into meaningful higher-level structural categories which were regarded as the 'abstraction' of the data (Rowlands, 2005; Spiggle, 1994). In the third step, the 'abstractions' were synthesized into the higher level 'themes'. It should be noted that concepts, abstractions, and themes can be refined many times in the process of developing theories (Bernard & Ryan, 2009). Table 2 shows examples of the coding process in this study.

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Findings and discussion

The majority of interviewees travelled to nearby destinations in the Yangtze River Delta region, such as Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui. Only two interviewees went overseas: one travelled to Hong Kong and the other to the Philippines. In terms of travel timing, the majority of interviewees travelled on weekends and public holidays, such as the Qing Ming Festival (April 2 – 4 in 2012), Labour Day (April 29 – May 3 in 2012) and National Day Week (September 30 – October 7 in 2012). The companions that travelled with the participants consisted of friends, classmates, colleagues, and housemates. The following section reports the results from three perspectives including: disagreement issues; disagreement prevention; and disagreement resolution. The results suggest that Chinese cultural values strongly influenced interviewees' perceptions of the group decision-making process and the strategies they adopted in the process.

Disagreement Issues

The majority of interviewees described the decision-making process as being characterised by periods of disagreement. Interviewees mentioned that they had different opinions and argued with others about eight issues including: destination selection, tourism activity, meal option, travel cost, travel timing, accommodation, transportation, and safety. The most common sources of disagreement were tourism activity and meal options.

As most decisions were made in two stages of the trip, pre-vacation and during-vacation, this study examined disagreements in both stages to provide comprehensive insights. In the pre-vacation stage,

it was found that group members mainly had disagreements about: destination selection, tourism activity, accommodation, transportation, travel cost, and travel timing. In this stage, group members were more likely to voice their disagreement. Strong disagreements and irreconcilable differences often resulted in the cancellation of the group trip. In contrast, during the vacation, interviewees perceived the level of disagreement to be lower than that in the pre-vacation stage and observed that group members became more tolerant to disagreements once the journey started. In this stage, travellers' disagreements were mainly about: tourism activity, travel cost, meal option, and safety.

Previous studies (e.g., Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Decrop, 2005; Marcevova et al., 2010) only revealed that disagreement appears in the travel decision-making process; however, what types of disagreement issues have not examined. The current study identified a list of disagreement issues (i.e., sub-decisions) appearing at multiple stages (e.g., pre-vacation and during-vacation stages). Specifically, the level of disagreement in the during-vacation stage is lower than that in the pre-vacation stage. Linking the disagreement issues with three types of conflicts: *value, probability,* and *distribution* in the literature (Decrop et al., 2004; Kirchler, 1995), this study found that the majority of conflicts were *value* conflicts, which is different from the study by Decrop (2005) stating that the *probability* conflict was the major conflict. Possible reasons could be the different research contexts. The current study interviewed Chinese travellers' previous group decision-making experience, but Decrop (2005) interviewed Belgium travellers several times to examine their pre-trip decision-making process. It should be noted that pre-trip planning and post-trip evaluation are different due to memory fades with the passage of time. In addition, Chinese travellers and Western travellers might focus on different perspectives of the decision-making process.

Disagreement Prevention

Around one-third of interviewees did not perceive any disagreement, or did not voice their disagreement in the travel decision-making process. This study also found four reasons to explain why Chinese travellers prevent external disagreement, namely, maintaining close relationships; achieving an enjoyable travel experience; obeying the role of leader; and obeying the male authority, as detailed in Table 3. It is evident that Chinese cultural values, such as forbearance and authority, influenced the way in which interviewees perceived disagreement (see Table 3). 'Forbearance' refers to giving up one's personal goal for a prior consideration of maintaining a harmonious relationship (Hwang, 1997). 'Authority' emphasises the role of power in the Chinese hierarchical structure of particularistic relationships (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Chen, 2000). In this study, 'Forbearance' and 'Authority' refer to the intention to prevent external disagreement in social groups. It should be noted that internal disagreement may still exist.

(Please insert Table 3 here)

Forbearance

Forbearance was a dominant influence on participants' prevention of disagreement. With forbearance in mind, interviewees believed that voicing the disagreement may ruin the close relationship with other group members or destroy the enjoyable travel experience; therefore, they controlled their real feelings and did not express their concerns with others during the decision-making process. As exemplified in Table 3, several interviewees considered the relationship with others the priority and tended to concede to accommodate others. Sometimes even to the extent of sacrificing their own interests and needs in order to meet the needs or expectations of travel companions. Within Chinese culture, establishing a harmonious relationship is the end of human communication in which conflict is treated as a detractor from harmony rather than only a problem

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of communication (Chen & Starosta, 1997). This study found that harmony is the outcome of forbearance. It is interesting that Western travellers also consider group orientation and conflict avoidance when they make travel decisions with their family members or friends (e.g., Decrop, 2005; Decrop et al., 2004). Even though the current study believed that group orientation is similar with harmony, the cultural value of forbearance is stronger in the Chinese context than in the Western context. In addition, the relationship with the group members (e.g., friendship group) also plays an important role in the disagreement prevention situation. The study by Gruenfeld et al. (1996) stated that when harmonious relations are more important than the quality of making a decision, members are likely to suppress conflict. For example, people in friendship groups had less argumentativeness and aggressiveness in the decision-making process than in non-friendship groups (Leung et al., 2002).

Many interviewees prioritized a happy and enjoyable travel journey for the group over their own feelings and needs. They believed that different opinions and conflicts could ruin positive mood of the travel journey. In considering this, interviewees were tolerant of minor disagreements that occurred when making travel plans. This attitude was extremely common during the vacation. Even if interviewees were not happy with other people, they still wanted to continue their journey, so decided to not express disagreement. As some interviewees wanted to continue the trip, they tended to maintain a temporary or superficial harmonious relationship within the group (Hoare, Butcher, & O'Brien, 2011). Therefore, these Chinese interviewees just kept the disagreement in their minds, and tolerant the unhappiness of the trip. These feelings can be synthesised as *forbearance*. In addition, Confucian doctrines influence Chinese people to adopt a reserved and implicit communication style so as not to express different opinions and real feelings to others in the group communication process (Fang & Faure, 2011). It seems that interviewees tended to achieve an enjoyable travel experience; however, this so-called positive experience was temporary and not real, so some interviewees mentioned that they would choose not to travel with the same group of companions again. This study found that this reason is quite obvious in the Chinese traveller context.

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Authority also influenced several interviewees' perceptions of and behaviour during group decision-making. Many participants considered it appropriate to follow the leaders' suggestions regardless of personal opinions and interests. When there was a strong leader in the group, often a member familiar with the destination, the leader chose the destination and planned the whole trip for the group. Other members were usually agreeable and less involved in the decision-making process in order to avoid conflict. In addition, the results suggest an evident male authority with several interviewees, including both males and females, claiming that females followed whatever decisions male members made. As such, these interviewees did not perceive any disagreement among members in the decision-making process.

Previous studies in the Western context noted that leaders normally actively participate in decision-making as they are knowledgeable or expertized (e.g., Leal, Hor-Meyll, & de Paula Pessôa, 2014; Stasser, Stewart, & Wittenbaum, 1995). In the tourism context, one of the popular disagreement resolution approaches is delegation to the most knowledge person (Kang & Hsu, 2004). This study also found that young Chinese travellers' respect the traditional hierarchical structure of particularistic relationship in the Chinese society. As demonstrated by the interviewees in this study and in line with the findings of the studies (e.g., Bond & Hwang, 1986; Kwek & Lee, 2010), Chinese people value authority and tend to leave all the decision-making to the leaders. They also tend to conform to the decisions made by the leader. It seems that leaders, either from the Western context or the Eastern context, play an important role in the decision-making process. In some interviewees' eyes, women should respect male authority and play supportive rather than leading roles in family and society, following the Confucian teachings (Ong & du Cros, 2012; Tang & Tang, 2001). As this study suggests, this respect for male authority is still quite salient in the Chinese society.

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To sum up, this study found that a small number of interviewees did not perceive any disagreement, or did not voice their disagreement in the travel decision-making process. This is consistent with a previous study on Western travellers, suggesting that some young travellers perceived no disagreements during the decision-making process (Marcevova et al., 2010). As Marcevova et al. (2010) did not examine why these young travellers perceived no disagreement, and why they prevented external disagreement, the current study provided thorough explanations about the reasons. Four reasons were found, namely, maintaining close relationships; achieving an enjoyable travel experience; obeying the role of leader; and obeying the male authority. Specifically, maintaining close relationships and obeying the role of leader could be applied in both Western and Chinese contexts, whereas achieving an enjoyable travel experience and obeying the male authority are highly influenced by the reserved and implicit communication style and male authority in the Chinese society.

Derived from Confucian doctrines, Chinese cultural values influence Chinese people to adopt a reserved and implicit communication style, so as not to express different opinions and real feelings to others in the group communication process (Fang & Faure, 2011). Previous literature (e.g., Chen et al., 1999) has indicated that people from different cultures might share similar values in the conflict management. In the Western context, group cohesiveness and authority are also existed. However, both *forbearance* and *authority* are stronger in the Chinese context than in the Western context. Specifically, group cohesiveness could be an outcome of forbearance, and forbearance is about self-restraint and tolerance. In addition, leadership is partly about authority, which has been examined widely in the Western literature. After identifying the reasons why young Chinese travellers prevent disagreement in the travel decision-making process, the following section describes the ways to revolve disagreement.

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Interviewees described a range of strategies that they used during periods of disagreement, including compromising, problem solving, delaying, forcing, and accommodating. This study identified two Chinese cultural values: 'reciprocity' and 'conformity', which underpin the approaches taken by the interviewees to resolve disagreement within the decision-making process (see Table 4). 'Reciprocity' focuses on mutual dependency and responsibility in fulfilling each party's needs in social interaction (Chen & Starosta, 1997). 'Conformity', on the other hand, emphasises scarifying self in order to benefit the group in the decision-making process (Liu & Chen, 2000).

(Please insert Table 4 here)

Reciprocity

Reciprocity was the dominant cultural value that influenced the way disagreements were addressed, with compromising and problem solving being the most commonly adopted approaches employed to reach a consensus. In this study, the majority of interviewees adopted one or multiple reciprocity approaches (see Table 4). The results show that people considered their relationships with others and focused on mutual dependency on and the mutual benefits to the competing parties in the travel decision-making process. Thus, reciprocity approaches like compromising and problem solving were the most common approaches to solve a problem.

Compromising: More than half of interviewees claimed that they made compromises (e.g., future promises, multiple options, and alternative options) in order to meet the needs and satisfaction of others. Firstly, making future promises was common in the situation of selecting meal options, tourism activities, and alternative destinations. Taking meal options as an example, if travel

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companions had disagreement about two meal options, the group chose one meal one time and had the another meal the next time. Secondly, the strategy of multiple choices was normally used in the contexts of meal choices and tourism activity during the vacation, where the group accepted two or more options at the same time. Thirdly, choosing another alternative option, which was outside the proposed options could solve the disagreement and make everyone satisfied. Similar with previous Western literature (e.g., Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Kozak, 2010; Marcevova et al., 2010) stating that compromising the most popular strategy to address disagreement in travel decision-making by couples, family members, and friends, this study found that young Chinese travellers also utilised compromising to solve disagreement when travelling with a group of friends.

Problem-Solving: Nearly half of the interviewees implemented the problem-solving approach to solve disagreements. Using this strategy, group members rationally evaluated competing options through using decision-making guidelines, searching further information, or voting. This approach often was used for destination selection where group members had to select one option from a list of alternatives. Kang and Hsu (2004) found that information gathering was the most popular conflict resolution mode by travellers when they have time and resources. In this study, destination selection is a major sub-decision in the travel decision-making process, therefore, further information or official voting are appropriate approaches to solve disagreements.

Delaying: Another strategy that was implemented by groups in order to reach a consensus was to postpone or delay decision-making rather than solving the disagreement immediately. With the time goes, some options became unavailable, thereby leaving some disagreements naturally resolved. It seems that delaying is a way that benefits different parties in travel decision-making.

To sum up, this study found that Chinese friendship groups focus on the benefits to the whole group when solving disagreement. In order to meet everyone's needs, Chinese people adopt a neutral

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attitude and moderate thinking to solve problems, with foresight to the long-term benefits (Chuah et al., 2014; Hoare et al., 2011; Jaw, Ling, Wang, & Chang, 2007). The result parallels the existing Western literature that finds that friendship groups are similar to family members, which tend to implement strategies such as compromise and reward to mutually benefit all parties (Bokek-Cohen, 2011; Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Kozak, 2010; Marcevova et al., 2010).

Conformity

Conformity underpinned the behaviour of several interviewees, who either manipulated their power to force others to agree with them (forcing) or voluntarily conceded to others (accommodating) in the decision-making process. A key characteristic of conformity is to sacrifice minority/personal benefits in order to benefit the majority of the group.

Forcing: Several interviewees stated that some travel companions strongly compelled others to agree with them. The majority of the group often implemented the 'forcing' strategy when one member showed disagreement with the majority of people. This approach was used mainly to address disagreement about tourism activity during the journey. Minority members were forced to participate in group activities because there were strong expectations that all members should participate in group outings and tourist activities. Interviewees indicated that the purpose of adopting the forcing strategy is to benefit the majority of group members. The forcing strategy has not been mentioned in travel decision making literature. It is a new strategy identified by this study in the context of Chinese travellers who are more collectivist than their Western counterparts who respect individualism. The forcing strategy is also emphasizing the group priority, while de-emphasizing personal goals (Chen & Chung, 1994).

Accommodating: Several interviewees voluntarily accommodated or conceded with others by sacrificing their own interests in considering the goal of travelling together or for the purpose of not detracting the group from an enjoyable travel experience. These members had a high tolerance for others and voluntarily gave up their original plans to keep the group happy. Accommodating is a cooperative approach to benefit the majority of group members.

In the Chinese society, conformity is a Chinese cultural value that benefits the majority of the group while scarifying personal interests or the interests of the minority. Specifically, Chinese travellers tend to opt to sacrifice their interests or tolerate others in order to avoid conflict (Hoare et al., 2011; Kwek & Lee, 2010). It is interesting that the findings of this study are also consistent with the Western literature (e.g., Decrop, 2005), in which Western friends are quite willing to sacrifice all their wishes to preserve the affective ties between members. It seems that, in the friendship group context, both Westerners and Chinese would sacrifice the interests of the minority in order to benefit the whole or the majority of the group. In this situation, the close relationship between different group members (e.g., couples, relatives, or friends) plays a key role in disagreement resolution of the group travel decision-making process. The reason can be supported by Kirchler (1995) who stated that the way household members deal with decision-related conflicts reflects the nature of their relationship with each other and, conversely, the nature of their relationship determines the way they resolve conflicts.

Theoretical contribution

This study provides an in-depth understanding of disagreement prevention and resolution in travel related decision-making among young Chinese travellers, which generates theoretical contributions to the body of knowledge surrounding the travel decision-making process. Firstly, this study contributes to the travel decision-making literature. The current study supports Decrop and Snelders

(2004), Dellaert et al. (1998), and Woodside and King (2001) in that travel decision-making is an on-going process, and multi-faceted decision in which travellers have disagreement during pre-trip and during-trip period. Secondly, this study was undertaken in response to a significant knowledge gap (i.e., disagreement prevention) identified in the non-tourism and tourism literature. To our knowledge, only one study (Marcevova et al., 2010) briefly mentioned that travellers may not express their disagreements or conflicts in the group decision-making process; however, why these people chose not to express their true feelings was unknown in the literature. This study, for the first time, identified a list of underlying reasons, including maintaining close relationships; achieving an enjoyable travel experience; obeying the role of leader; and obeying the male authority. The current article has addressed the knowledge deficit area, providing a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Thirdly, this study contributes to a better understanding of the role of culture in group decision-making. It seems that national cultures influence travellers' behaviours. The disagreement prevention factors identified could be synthesised into two Chinese cultural values: *forbearance* and *authority*. Even a Western study (Marcevova et al., 2010) has briefly mentioned that travellers may not express their disagreements or conflicts in the group decision-making process, the current study identified the Chinese culture underpinned the disagreement prevention phenomenon. Due to Chinese culture, as collective culture, Chinese travellers adopt a reserved and implicit communication style (e.g., silent and use ambiguous language in interactions), and avoid saying 'no' directly to others. Although the target of this study was young Chinese travellers aged between 21 to 35 years, these youth still adopt traditional Chinese communication style which was influenced by the Chinese cultural values. It seems that even in the 21st century, young Chinese travellers are still influenced by the Chinese cultural values. Therefore, this study contributes to the Chinese cultural studies (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1997; Fang & Faure, 2011).

Previous examinations are largely Western centric focusing on decision makers from North America and European countries. While a range of disagreement resolution strategies have been identified, their adoption in travel related decision making and in an Eastern context remains unclear. The current study is the first study examining disagreement prevention and resolution in the Chinese context. It should be noted that many culture values are present in both the Western and Eastern context, this study found that *forbearance* and *authority* are stronger in the Chinese context and in the Western context. This study found that the disagreement resolution approaches can be synthesised into two Chinese cultural values: *reciprocity* and *conformity*. Some disagreement resolution approaches, such as forcing and accommodating, are quite obvious in the Chinese context.

Practical implication

The findings of this study provided practical implications for tourism management and marketing. First, findings can assist with product design and innovation. For instance, according this study, young Chinese travellers generally consider the whole group the priority and would try to meet the needs of the entire group in the travel decision-making process, even if this means sacrificing their own interests. Tourism operators could design customised group activity packages for young Chinese travellers to enhance the group cohesiveness with other travel companions. In addition, destinations also need to conduct marketing research to better understand young Chinese travellers. A potential project is to examine the motivation of travelling in groups to determine whether they travel for the experience of the journey itself or as a means of spending time together.

Second, tourism practitioners need to understand the Chinese cultural values of young Chinese independent travellers when designing marketing strategies. *Forbearance* and *authority* are important Chinese cultural values influencing people do not perceive any disagreement, and *reciprocity* and *conformity* are two important values influencing the way that people revolve

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disagreement. In the future, tourism organizations should conduct studies to examine the relationship between these Chinese cultural values and sub-decisions (e.g., destination selection, accommodation selection, meal choice, transportation choice, etc.). Based on the results, tourism organizations can have further understanding of these Chinese cultural values in the tourism context.

Thirdly, this study found that group leaders exert a great influence on the group travel decision-making process, such as destination selection. Tourism organizations should identify the group leaders and target these people by providing specific marketing promotion. In doing so, tourism organizations need to survey a large number of travellers, and gain an in-depth view of the group leaders. In the survey, demographic and travel characteristics, travel marketing channels (e.g., TV programs, newspapers, websites, and travel magazines), and the psychological characteristics should be collected. If marketing practitioners could attract group leaders to the destination, then the group leaders might bring a group of people to the same destination.

Limitation and Recommendation

As aforementioned, this study provided important insights into young Chinese travellers' decision-making process. Nevertheless, limitations exist that point in the direction for future research. Firstly, this study used a retrospective design where interviewees shared insightful information about their previous group travel decision-making experiences. Such a design may suffer from recall bias, as interviewee responses depend entirely on memory that may be inaccurate and incomplete, thus unreliable. Future studies could use other qualitative methods, such as observations of group discussions and negotiations, in order to fully capture the dynamics of decision-making process in real time.

Secondly, this study synthesized four Chinese cultural values based on 25 interviews with young Chinese travellers. As this study, for the first time, identified that the Chinese cultural values play a role in the process of disagreement prevention and resolution, there might be some over-generalisation of results. In the future, quantitative research can be conducted to test whether these Chinese cultural values commonly exist in disagreement prevention and resolution.

Thirdly, this study focuses on one segment of the Chinese travel market, young Chinese friendship travellers; therefore, the findings might be subject to the specific group structure or context. Senior generations of Chinese travellers might be highly influenced by Chinese cultural values, thus generate a different outcome. Therefore, further studies of a comparative nature could provide valuable insights to both academia and industry practitioners. Thirdly, this study only focused on disagreement prevention and resolution, which is a small component in the reaching agreement process of travel decision-making. To fully enclose the reaching agreement process, a follow-up study in the future could be conducted to explore extended concepts, such as Mianzi, Renqing, and other dimensions of Chinese Guanxi.

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Table 1: Interviewee Profile

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Occupation	Travel Frequency per Year
1	Male	28	Engineer	1-2
2	Male	27	Engineer	1-2
3	Female	29	Manager	2-3
4	Male	31	Engineer	4-5
5	Female	32	Manager	3-4
6	Female	22	Trade company officer	1-2
7	Female	24	Accountant	20-30
8	Female	25	Receptionist	1-2
9	Female	21	Undergraduate student	20-30
10	Male	27	Administration employee	2-3
11	Female	25	Accountant	3
12	Male	24	IT officer	10-20
13	Male	35	Government officer	2
14	Female	23	Trade company officer	2
15	Male	26	Small business owner	20-30
16	Female	25	Accountant assistant	1
17	Male	21	Undergraduate student	4-5
18	Female	32	Manager	Not Sure
19	Female	22	Undergraduate student	Not Sure
20	Female	24	Human resource officer	10
21	Male	25	Postgraduate student	2-3
22	Male	24	Structural engineer	2
23	Male	23	Real estate agent	5-6
24	Male	25	Postgraduate student	Not Sure
25	Male	33	Salesperson	1-2

Table 2: Coding Process

Text	First Step Coding (Concept)	Second Step Coding (Abstraction)	Third Step Coding (Theme)
Interviewer: You have talked about the destination selection. During the trip, did you have any disagreement? Interviewee 21: <u>No, we didn't have any disagreement, because we are friends.</u> We travelled together, and we did not join a package tour. If we join a package tour, we might have disagreement with other group members. <u>However, we are friends, and we should not argue with friends.</u>	*Friends* *Friends*	*Maintaining a close relationship* *Maintaining a close relationship*	*Forbearance* *Forbearance*

Table 3: Chinese Cultural Values and Disagreement Prevention

Chinese Cultural Value (Theme)	Concept	Example
Forbearance	Maintaining close relationships	We were travelling together in a big friendship group, and we are good friends, we should not argue with each other, and we should be tolerant of others. (No 15, male, 26, a small business owner, Wuxi)
	Achieving an enjoyable travel experience	People want to have a happy journey. During the trip, if somebody has a conflict, others probably feel unhappy… People shouldn't ruin the happy journey, so we won't argue with others. (No 21, male, 25, a postgraduate student, Shanghai)
Authority	Obeying the role of leader	If we travel within a group of three to four people, normally, one person is responsible for everything, such as finding a destination, and planning the trip. Once the travel plan is finished, he/she sends the travel plan to other group members… as we exactly follow the person and the travel itinerary, we don't have any conflicts. (No 20, female, 24, a human resource officer, Shanghai)
	Obeying the male authority	We didn't have any conflict. These two female classmates followed us, they just did what we asked them to do… females couldn't make decisions. (No 17, male, 21, a undergraduate student, Nanjing) We had nine people from three families travelling together...my husband and other two male adults discussed the travel plan and made the decisions...females and kids were just following their decisions. (No 5, female, 32, a manager, Wuxi)

Table 4: Chinese Cultural Values and Disagreement Resolution

Chinese Cultural Value (Theme)	Abstraction	Example Quote
Reciprocity	Compromising	If you like this restaurant and he likes that one, it's very easy: we go to this restaurant for lunch, and go to that one for dinner. (No 20, female, 24, a human resource officer, Shanghai)
	Problem solving	Every one speaks their own opinions and we put all opinions together and we are trying to maximize different people's needs, and that's the best choice…(No 9, female, 21, an undergraduate, Nanjing)
	Delaying	Some people wanted to stay in budget hotels and some preferred standard hotels … we didn't choose an accommodation until we arrived at the destination… and we found that all budget hotels were fully booked, so we decided to stay in a standard hotel (No 23, male, 23, a real estate agent, Taizhou)
Conformity	Forcing	We went to the Ocean Park in Shanghai… but one guy didn't like to go. Because he was alone, we forced him to go with us… you know, otherwise he would be bored at the hotel… We had the same problem at the China Dinosaur Park in Changzhou, Jiangsu Province… since he was already at the travel destination, then he should visit some places with us. (No 15, male, 26, a small business owner, Wuxi)
	Accommodating	We had different opinions in Chengdu. I recommended visiting Mount Qingcheng in the spare time; however, several people felt exhausted after four days travel, and did not want to go… finally I decided to give up my suggestion because other people couldn't stand to travel. (No 13, male, 35, a governmental officer, Wuxi)