

CHARACTERISTICS OF HONEYMOON TOURISM: CHINESE TOURIST APPROACH

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The aim of this paper is to study a specific type of alternative tourism: honeymoon tourism. Honeymooners contribute significantly to the tourism economy because they spent more than other holidaymakers (Winchester, Winchester & Alvey, 2011). Surprisingly, however, academic research about honeymoon tourism is scarce at the international level and non-existent at the national level. Of the small number of studies conducted, it has been argued that honeymoon tourism has become too important to ignore (Kim & Agrusa, 2005). In fact, authorities and tourism companies in different areas of Spain are increasingly valuing it. This indicates that this valuable segment of the market should be further explored.

The current study attempts to examine the honeymoon tourism features of Chinese tourists. The number of Chinese tourists has increased significantly during the last decade and this trend looks set to continue, making this population an important tourism market. Recently, different studies about China's outbound tourism in Spain and Europe have been published (Andreu, Claver & Quer, 2013; Andreu, Claver & Quer, 2014; Lojo, 2016; Lojo & Cànoves, 2015). Nevertheless, none of them has treated the Chinese honeymoon tourism.

China has become the world's largest outbound tourism market (OMT, 2016) and tourism has traditionally been considered the economic motor of Spain. However, Spain does not appear in the list of the top 20 international destinations of Chinese tourism in 2015 (CNTAIC, 2016). Nowadays, Spain continues to seek cooperation with China to attract Chinese tourists (Ministerio de Energía, Turismo y Agenda Digital, 2010; González, 2015; Minmin, 2015). In according to that, honeymoon tourism can be a good cooperation project taking into account that the honeymoon is a boom among the Chinese tourists (Lojo & Cànoves, 2015; Vizcaíno, 2016; Li, 2016). Therefore it is important to understand the thinking and behaviour of Chinese tourists in the honeymoon trip.

In the interest of contributing theoretically to tourism research, the general objective of this article is the following: to develop a theoretical study relative to the Chinese honeymoon tourism to improve companies' or cities' competitiveness, taking advantage of this emerging sector.

More specifically, this proposal has three principal objectives. Firstly, we seek to define the characteristics of honeymoon tourism in a framework of alternative tourism. Secondly, we attempt to identify the main attributes of the destination in general, and the honeymoon destination specifically. Thirdly, we look to analyse the characteristics of international and European Chinese tourist.

The methodology adopted to carry out the research is focus on a bibliographic review in two steps. First, we search through national and international literature about alternative tourism. In this step, we are paying particular attention to honeymoon tourism and destination choice.

Despite the fact that tourism scientific research is consolidated at national and international level (Albacete & Fuentes, 2010), there is a lack in the literature of particular kinds of alternative tourism, specifically in honeymoon tourism. Therefore, we need to develop a second step. This stage will gather the information of statistical data (INE & Quandl), newspaper articles, web resources and studies or reports of the Chinese tourist market.

The literature review will present an overview of alternative tourism research, destination choice and Chinese tourists on the international market.

Firstly, the alternative tourism is used in research to understand new forms of tourism that have emerged as business opportunities to satisfy new preferences of tourists (McDonald & Murphy, 2008). Thus, tourism current trends justify a newly emerging form of 'alternative tourism' with a specific focus on short duration travels.

Likewise, 'alternative tourism' has emerged in various guises in different parts of the world. In some cases, projects fostering new forms of tourism have been promoted; for example, travel agencies have consistently developed attractive overseas packages for honeymooners.

The idea of 'alternative tourism' popular among critics of conventional tourism is itself submitted to a critical examination. Two principal conceptions of 'alternative tourism' are distinguished: as a reaction to mass consumerism (counter-cultural 'alternative tourism') and as a reaction to the exploitation of the Third World (concerned 'alternative tourism'). 'Alternative tourism' seeks to reverse the trend towards impersonal mass tourism, and to establish personal relations between (paying) guests and local hosts. 'Alternative tourism' in any form, cannot resolve the problems engendered by conventional mass tourism a more realistic strategy is to concentrate directly on the reform of the latter (Cohen, 1987:13).

The honeymoon is widely known as a special holiday undertaken by couples to celebrate their marriage, usually following a wedding ceremony (Lee et al., 2010). Many honeymooners see it as an unforgettable once-in-a-lifetime experience; thus, newlyweds on their honeymoon represent a vital part of the tourism industry. Likewise, honeymoon tourism can be generally referred to international trips that are taken by newlyweds to celebrate their wedding. Therefore, honeymoon tourism is a specialized alternative tourism (Winchester, Winchester, & Alvey, 2011).

Specific characteristics of honeymoon travel may account for some of the differences found respect other types of holidays. This study revealed five main characteristics of the honeymoon travel:

- Long duration and plan process. Different from other types of travel, the honeymoon trip is performed in a special destination and with a long duration. Most couples look forward to their honeymoon - five days, a week, maybe more, of unwinding, relaxing and spending quality time together in an exotic spot somewhere around the world. Honeymoons come in all shapes and sizes - a beach vacation, a safari, a ski trip - and are based more on the couple's joint-personality than on tradition (Vodenska, 2013).
- Own period. The time in which couples often perform its honeymoon is different in the different countries. Thus, each country has its own season of honeymoon for its special culture and politics.
- Young target. Second marriages, and those marrying later in life, will generate demand for weddings and honeymoon tourism. The number of remarriages is increasing, and is set to continue. Hence the number of second honeymoons will also increase (Vodenska, 2013).
- Particular needs. Different from other types of tourists, couples in honeymoon trip have particular needs. Fundamentally, couples seek a romantic setting. In addition to romanticism, increasingly more tourists are looking for a unique and singular experience that leaves them with an unforgettable memory. Nowadays, newlyweds prefer the balance between strong emotions and romantic relaxation.
- Shared decision making process. The honeymoon destination selection process involves two people (Winchester, Winchester & Alvey, 2011). When decisions involve two people potential conflict can occur, alternatives acceptable to both would only be considered and if an agreement really could not be reached "the final destination was determined by the situation inhibitors and the magnitude of relative influence that one partner holds over the other" (Jang et al., 2007:1299 in Winchester, Winchester & Alvey, 2011).

Therefore honeymoon tourism is a type of tourism in which newlyweds plan well in advance, decide together a long-distance and long duration trip. Occurs after the wedding to celebrate the marriage and couples spend a romantic and intimate time. During the trip, couples offer a specific demand and a more demanding attitude towards services, accepting a relatively high price.

Secondly, another topic explored is the process of destination choice. After the literature review it is possible to affirm that culture, natural environment and facilities stand out as main attributes of the destination. Given the scarcity of research on honeymoon tourism, this study is a first attempt to generate in-depth understanding of newlyweds tourists' perception and preferences. The perceptions and preferences newlyweds have of their honeymoon differ across countries (Lee, Huang & Chen, 2010).

Understanding the factors influencing tourists' decision on destination choice has received substantial attention from tourism researchers and practitioners interested in

developing effective destination management and marketing strategies. However, there is a lack in the literature in terms of attributes that determine the attractiveness of a honeymoon destination. Some studies point to: safety, excellent quality of accommodation, budget, familiarity, romanticism, climate, comfort, landscape, cultural and historic resources and places for shopping (Kim & Agrusa, 2005; Lee, Huang, & Chen, 2010; Winchester, Winchester & Alvey, 2011).

A recent study analyse objective and subjective factors for Chinese citizens' outbound destination choice (Wei, Meng & Zhang, 2017). The results reveal that the demographic characteristics (age and education) and constraints (vacation time and money/income) significantly influence Chinese citizens' outbound destination choice. Compared with other outbound destinations, Europe/the USA are more attractive to young, better-educated people with higher income and more leisure (vacation) time.

Thirdly, we analyse Chinese tourists in the international market, their profiles, their favourite destinations and how they think and behave in the international travel. China's expansion is expected to remain stable (+6.5% in 2017), supported by the strong policy stance, but the rebalancing of the economy continues to weigh on global trade flows. Higher purchasing power of middle class, increased air connectivity and more affordable travel drove demand from both intraregional and interregional source markets (UNWTO, 2017).

However, Chinese outbound market is very limited for Spanish tourism, just assumes 0.49% of total tourists who arrived to Spain in 2016 according to their residence country (INE, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand Chinese tourists if Spain wants to take advantage of hosting this growing market.

The characteristics of China's consumer class are: sheer size, urbanised nature, connectedness and spending behaviour. With a rising income and propensity to travel to an expanding array of destinations across the globe, young Chinese (and Asian) travellers are slowly setting the pace of global tourism as a whole (UNWTO/GTERC, 2016). They realize long-distance trips, with an average duration of 9 days, organized by travel agencies, with high budget and preference for shopping.

The result of this study revealed that the Chinese tourists have its own peculiarities for honeymoon tourism.