

Rural Destination Image and Branding Near the Major Urban Centers in China

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Abstract

Abstract of thesis entitled

Rural Destination Image and Branding Near the Major Urban Centers in China

Submitted by DUAN, Xialei

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Destination image has become a hot topic in tourism research ever since 1970s. It is widely accepted that destination image is an integral and influential part of the traveler's decision process and consequently, influence travel behaviors. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) at all levels have an ultimate goal of building strong and positive images for their destinations. The extent to which image building benefits their targets can be greater if it takes place in the context of branding. However, in the area of rural tourism, little investigation has been undertaken into processes of the branding effort. Rural tourism has gone through two decades of development in China, while the development of rural tourism is quite unbalanced regarding tourist arrivals and economic benefits. Some rural tourism destinations are much more famous than those who own similar resources. One of the major reasons lies in the effectiveness of destination branding. This research attempts to investigate on the essential attributes of rural destination image and construct a destination-branding model specifically for rural tourism in China in the hope to fill the research gap of current studies on destination branding.

There are generally four stages of the research. In stage one, rural destination image attributes are characterized. It is widely accepted that destination image contains both cognitive and affective attributes. But there are few studies on the image factors specifically for rural destinations in China. Stage one aims to fill this research gap by conducting survey to identify Chinese rural destination image attributes, especially in for those located near metropolitan cities. After conducting the survey, Explorative Factor Analysis (EFA) is adopted to generate the main factors of rural destination image. Confirmative Factor Analysis (CFA) is conducted afterwards to confirm whether those variables are loaded on each factor correctly. In stage two,

the relationship between tourist motives and destination image as well as the relationship between tourist behavior and destination image are tested individually. It is important to know how tourist motives affect rural destination image before tourists actually come and what aspects of destination image influence tourists' travel motivation. Canonical Correlation Analysis (CCA) is utilized to test the relationship between tourist motives and destination image while logistic regression is adopted to test the relationship between tourist behavior and destination image. In stage three, the projected image from supply side and perceived image from demand side are evaluated to see whether there is any gap between them. Content analysis is the main method in this stage. On completing the above three stages, a rural destination branding framework is built based on the destination image analysis in stage four.

Four main factors of rural destination image are generated, which are supporting facilities, tourism product, relaxation, and excitement. It was found that there are three major travel motivations for rural tourists, which are relaxation, exploring new things and family togetherness. The destination image is positively related with the travel motivation of having relaxation on the trip, and travel motivation is heavily associated with tourism product. Affective image factors have more powerful influence over tourist behaviors: tourists are more likely to revisit the place when they gain relaxation and excitement during their trip; tourists tend to recommend the place to others when they feel relaxed on the trip. Thus, it is important to understand destination image, especially the affective factors in order to manipulate tourist motivation and behaviors. The evaluation of image congruency in stage three demonstrates that official websites focus more on education. Besides promoting attractions, it provides information on geography background and promotes local culture. Business web content promotes attractions, package tour, and activities which can generate revenue. The perceived image includes more sentiment contents: on-site visitors expressed more negative attitude, but social media comments are relatively positive. Based on the findings from the previous three stages, a three-gap branding framework is constructed.

論文摘要

自 20 世紀 70 年代以來，目的地形像已成為旅遊研究的熱門話題。人們普遍認為目的地形像是旅行者決策過程中不可或缺的壹部分，因此影響旅行者行為。各級目的地營銷部門的最終目標是為目的地建立強大而積極的形象。如果在品牌化的背景下，形象構建有益於其目標的程度可能更大。然而，在鄉村旅遊領域，對品牌化過程的調查很少。鄉村旅遊在中國經歷了二十多年的發展，但鄉村旅遊的發展在旅遊人數和經濟效益方面相當不平衡。壹些鄉村旅遊目的地比那些擁有類似資源的目的地更有名。其中壹個主要原因在於目標品牌的有效性。本研究試圖探討鄉村目的地形象的本質屬性，構建專門針對中國鄉村旅遊的目的地品牌模式，希望填補目前關於目的地品牌研究的研究空白。

本研究大致有四個階段。在第壹階段，鄉村目的地形象屬性被歸納。人們普遍認為，目的地形象包含認知和情感屬性。但很少有關於中國鄉村旅遊目的地形象因素的研究。第壹階段旨在通過調查確定中國鄉村目的地形象的屬性，特別是在大城市的郊區，填補這壹研究空白。進行問卷調查後，采用探索性因子分析（EFA）來生成農村目的地形象的主要因素。之後進行驗證性因子分析（CFA）以確認這些變量是否正確加載到每個因子上。在第二階段分別測試旅遊動機與目的地形象之間的關係以及旅遊者行為與目的地形象之間的關係。重要的是要知道遊客旅遊動機在遊客實際到來之前如何影響鄉村目的地形像以及目的地形象的哪些方面影響遊客的旅行動機。本階段運用典型相關分析（CCA）檢驗旅遊動機與目的地形象之間的關係，采用邏輯回歸分析方法檢驗遊客行為與目的地形象之間的關係。第三階段作者通過內容分析法評估了鄉村旅遊目的地打造的形象是否與遊客感知的形象壹致，以查看它們之間是否存在任何間隙。在完成上述三個階段後，在第四階段作者基於目的地形象分析建立了鄉村旅遊目的地品牌建設框架。

研究結果表明，生成鄉村目的地形象的四個主要因素，即配套設施，旅遊產品，放松和興奮。鄉村旅遊的遊客有三大旅遊動機，壹是獲取放松，二是探索新事物，三是家庭團聚。目的地形象與獲取放松的旅遊動機呈現正相關；旅遊動機與旅遊產品密切相關。情感形象因素對旅遊行為的影響力更強：遊客在旅途中獲得放松和興

奮時更有可能重新訪問該地; 旅遊者往往在旅途中感到放鬆時向其他人推薦這個地方。因此，了解目的地形象，尤其是影響旅遊動機和行為的情感因素是很重要的。第三階段的目的地形象壹致性的評估表明，官方網站更註重教育。除了宣傳景點外，它還提供地理背景信息和促進當地文化。商業網站內容更偏向宣傳景點，自由行以及可以產生直接收入的旅遊產品。感知圖像包含更多情緒內容：現場訪問者表達更多消極態度，但社交媒體評論相對積極。根據前三個階段的發現，作者構建了壹個鄉村旅遊的品牌框架。

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List of Abbreviations

BA	Brand Awareness
BE	Brand Equity
BM	Brand Meaning
CCA	Canonical Correlation Analysis
CFA	Confirmative Factor Analysis
CNTA	China National Tourism Administration
DMO	Destination Marketing Organizations
EFA	Explorative Factor Analysis
GFI	Goodness-of-fit
GREV	Green Rural Experience Village
IPA	Importance-Performance Analysis
MDS	Multi-Dimensional Scale
MOHURD	Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development
NC	Natural and Cultural resource
OI	Overall image
OU DG	Donglian design company (東聯設計集團)
OWC	Old West Country organization
PA	Pleasant Atmosphere
PB	Presented Brand
ReBAM	Recreational belt around metropolis
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
RTTV	Rural Traditional Theme Village
SPBM	Strategic Place Branding Model
SS	Social Setting and environment
SWOT	Strength Weakness Opportunity Threat Analysis
TDI	Tourism Destination Image
UGC	User Generated Contents

WUBA

Wuba information website (五八同城)

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

“For many, rural areas are seen as an idyll, the antithesis of the ills of urban life. The countryside is a place to 'get away from it all' - a weekend retreat, or somewhere where one might aspire to live.”(Rousseau, 1995).

The concept of “rural tourism” started in Europe in the nineteenth century, with the growth of interest in countryside recreation, people visit rural areas “as a reaction to the stress and squalor of the expanding industrial cities” (Lane, 1994). In the 1970s, the western world experienced a great increase in rural tourism activities, and rural restructuring took place along with the development of rural tourism (Daugstad, 2008; Yagüe Perales, 2002). After that, rural tourism is widely considered as an engine of rural development and regeneration (Sharpley & Vass, 2006). As well as in China, rural tourism is also regarded as a tool to boost rural development and revitalization.

Rural tourism has become a popular trend in China since the end of 20th century (Su, 2011; L. Zhou, Chan, & Song, 2017). Chen (1997) pointed out that rural development is the key factor in the success of China’s modernization. China is one of the countries that has sought for rural socio-economic regeneration, sustainable development as well as environmental protection through rural tourism development (Su, 2011). The government has put more effort in rural tourism development ever since the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) established “China Rural Tourism Year” in 1998. Ever since then, the government has carried out a series of policies and regulations to promote rural tourism. In 2005, the government began “Constructing New Socialist Rural Area” (社會主義新農村建設), which aims to turn rural construction into a socialist new countryside with a prosperous economy, complete facilities, a beautiful environment, and a harmonious civilization.

In 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture launched promotion for “the most beautiful countryside” (美麗鄉村建設) in China, which aims to improve living quality in the rural area, bring civilization, democracy to the countryside. “Rural land circulation of managerial authority (農村土地經營權流轉管理辦法) was established in 2005 with a new updated version established in 2014, which states that the farmers can transfer the right of use and

managerial authority to other farmers or organizations. This policy encouraged farmers to hire other parties with professional management and marketing skills to help develop rural tourism on their land. In 2016 and 2017, Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) announced two batches of “Towns with unique characteristics” (特色小鎮) to promote rural tourism development. In 2017, the importance of developing rural tourism development was emphasized in the government official “No. 1 Document (壹號文件)”. A new term called Rural Complex (田園綜合體) appeared in this document. It is stated that “the government supports rural construction with rural cooperatives as the main carrier, allows farmers to participate in and benefit from it fully, and combine rural agriculture with integrated agriculture, creative agriculture, and agricultural experience to form Pastoral Complex.” In 2018, the People’s Daily post an article titled “China's crazy urbanization will be a national disaster,” which shows that the government is alert of the negative impact of urbanization. In this article, the government questioned the GDP-oriented urbanization process and pointed out that the ideal development model should be people-oriented (People's Daily, 2018). Rural tourism is treated as an approach of counter-urbanization. With the policy support from the government, rural tourism developed rapidly in the past 20 years. As a result, the number of rural communities has greatly increased, and different forms of rural tourism appeared (Su, 2011).

The policies mentioned in the previous paragraphs enacted in these years reflect the changes in government planning for rural areas and the changes in rural functions. In the beginning, the government hopes to reduce the gap between urban and rural areas. Later, the government realized the unique characteristics of rural areas and gradually changed to develop tourism by creating unique characteristics of the countryside.

Destination branding is a popular approach to emphasize the unique characteristics of one place (Henderson, 2007; Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2014; Apostolakis, Jaffry, Sizeland, & Cox, 2015). Branding is regarded as a strong tool to build up positive destination image and enhance the competitiveness of the places (Freire, 2005; Anholt, 2007; Miličević, Mihalič, & Sever, 2017). Although rural tourism develops rapidly in China, the development is quite unbalanced. Some rural tourism destinations with similar resources are quite different in terms of popularity and tourism income. One of the major reasons for this phenomenon lies

in the destination branding. However, destination branding is unlike branding products or any services, in which the process involves more comprehensive coordination of space and different stakeholders (Houghton & Stevens, 2011; Pike, 2013; Andersson, 2014). Geography plays an essential role in dealing with space and human relationships (Relph, 2000; Buttimer & Seamon, 2015). Thus, geographers have the advantage to study the place branding due to the knowledge background since destination branding is related to the sense of place (This concept will be elaborated in Chapters 2).

In this research, destination branding is studied within the scope of rural destinations in the suburban areas in China. Since destination image is the most studied aspect of destination branding research (Hosany, Ekinici, & Uysal, 2006; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011; Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015), this research focuses on the rural destination image in order to provide strategies for rural destination branding. Furthermore, this research merely focuses on the destination image and branding of suburban areas in China. For those rural destinations located far away from urban areas are not included in the study scope.

1.2 Research questions

There is abundant research on destination image and branding studies, which are reviewed in detail in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, those research are most commonly conducted in the scale of nations (Vaidyanathan & Aggarwal, 2000; Olins, 2002; Endziņa & Luņeva, 2004; Hall, 2010; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016) or cities (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Houghton & Stevens, 2011; Sevin, 2014; Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). However, not much research has been done on destination image and branding in the context of rural destinations.

For those studies in rural tourism destinations, most of them focus on specific cases instead of from a holistic perspective. It appears that there is a dearth of knowledge on studies of the common rural destination image factors as themes for rural destination branding. With the growth of rural tourism in China, especially those located near the metropolitan cities, the destination marketers need to understand what are the major components of rural destinations in the suburban area? Will destination image affects visitor's travel motivation and behaviors? How can the current models and frameworks of destination branding be modified to fit in the context of rural destinations? This research aims to fill the current research gap.

There are a variety of rural destinations in China, in terms of different landscapes, total area, population, and operational modes (relevant literature review will be done in Chapter 2). The development level of rural tourism business in China is quite unbalanced. One of the most successful rural tourism areas in China is Yangtze River Delta, where a lot of rural tourism destinations are developed around the major cities. The rural destinations are becoming increasingly popular among the urban residents, which are the major target markets for rural destination marketers. The branding strategy varies in terms of different operational modes. Three rural destinations in Yangtze River Delta are selected to study the rural destination images and branding strategies in the sub-urban areas in China.

1.3 Research objectives and hypotheses

With the previously mentioned questions in mind, this research includes three stages which are in accordance with three research objectives:

1. To characterize rural tourism destination image attributes near the major urban centers in China.
2. To investigate the relationship between rural destination image and travel motivation & tourist behavior.
3. To assess the congruency of the projected and perceived image of rural destination.

Although destination image differs from one to another, the first objective aims to explore the common factors of rural tourism destination image near the major urban centers in China. It sets up the foundation of the overall research. It is the first step in the conceptual framework, based on which the other parts of this research are further developed. The second objective tests whether there is any relationship between rural destination image and visitors' travel motivation and tourist behavior. The rural destination image is evaluated based on the common factors identified in the first objective. Finally, the third objective examined the image congruency of projected image from the destination management and marketers side with the perceived image from the visitors' side. In this stage, three research hypotheses are established in the following.

Hypothesis one (H1): In tourism supply side, there is a gap between the projected image from the DMO and the projected image from the tourism entrepreneurs.

Hypothesis two (H2): In tourism demand side, there is a gap between the perceived image from the on-site visitors and the perceived image from the user generated contents (UGC).

Hypothesis three (H3): there is a gap between the projected image from the tourism supply side and the perceived image from the tourism demand side.

These hypotheses are tested by both quantitative and quantitative approaches (details are discussed in Chapter 3). After verifying the above hypotheses, rural destination branding strategy framework is established accordingly.

1.4 Research significance

One problem exist in the current rural tourism development is the lack of uniqueness, which leads to the phenomenon of “all the villages look the same (千村壹面)” (Zhou et al., 2013; Deng, Huang, Rozelle, Zhang & Li, 2015). To solve this problem, destination branding plays an important role in communicating a destination’s unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors (Henderson, 2007; Campelo et al., 2013; Apostolakis et al., 2015). By differencing a destination from the competitors, many destinations highlight the rurality. Rurality is not a new concept, however, most of the current studies on rurality are conducted in the western context. Rurality is a different concept in China. Rural tourism development mode should be different from the western countries. It is crucial to develop the unique rural destination branding approach in China.

Previous scholars have pointed out that destination image plays an important role in marketing and directly influences tourist decision-making process, valued attributes, purchase process as well as tourist satisfaction (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Gallarza et al., 2002b; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Nigel Morgan et al., 2007). It is crucial to discover how the destination image is formed since it is a combination of what is projected by the destination and what is perceived by the tourist (Royo-Vela, 2009). This bi-directional process is important in both ways in building a successful brand. It is important for tourists because “they would choose a destination brand only when they can trust it” and it is also important for destinations since “a trusted brand brings about tourist loyalty”(Hsu & Cai, 2009). Thus, destination branding is deemed to be of great importance.

Furthermore, as indicated in this chapter, most of the current destination branding studies are in the scale of a country or a region or a city. Much fewer studies were conducted at a much smaller scale, which is rural destinations in the sub-urban areas. Thus, it is important and necessary to fill this research gap in the hope to benefit rural tourism development in China.

1.5 Organization of the thesis

This thesis aims to propose branding strategies which are specifically applied to rural destinations through the study of rural destination images. There are in total eight chapters in this thesis. Chapter one introduces the background of current rural tourism development in China and highlights the importance of destination branding in enhancing the unique characteristics of rural tourism destinations. This chapter identifies the research gaps and sets up the research objectives and hypotheses. Research significance is also emphasized from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

Chapter two reviews the previous literatures of destination image and branding studies as well as rural tourism studies. Relevant key concepts, including cognitive image, affective image, projected image, perceived image, brand awareness, brand trust, brand loyalty, etc. are elaborated in this Chapter. Current destination branding models are classified and utilized as the theory base for rural destination branding. The conceptual framework is established in Chapter three as the first part. It helps to clarify the research stages and response to each research objective accordingly. The second part of Chapter three discusses the site selection and the methodologies are elaborated including the sampling method, data collection process, research methods, research procedure, design of questionnaire and interviews. The research methods are elaborated with details regarding to each research stage. Chapter four introduces the background of the three study sites. This chapter also compares the three sites in terms of five aspects, which are history of tourism development, tourism products, promotion, brand value and future plan.

Chapter five to seven are the results chapters. The order of the result chapters follows the stages in the conceptual framework. Chapter five starts with reliability test of the overall questionnaire data, followed by the descriptive analysis of the respondents' demographic characteristics and visitation information. Then, the current brand performance of the three study sites are compared. In order to find out the reason for the different brand performances,

the latent variables of rural destination image factors are generated. Chapter six utilized the rural destination image factors generated in Chapter five for the relationship analysis. First, the major travel motivations for rural tourism participants are identified. Then, CCA is conducted for testing the relationship between destination image and travel motivations. The tourist behaviors in this research only focus on willingness to revisit the place and willingness to recommend this place to others. Since there are only two categories of the tourist intentions, logistic regression is adopted in testing the relationship. Chapter seven examines the congruency between the projected destination image from the supply side and the perceived destination image from the demand side. Three image gaps are hypothesized.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Tourism destination image concept and its formation

"A society is properly established through iconic and semantic creation that permanently reorganizes an upwelling of figures, shapes and images" (Castoriadis 1975).

Image plays an important role in people's everyday life in the society. In previous researches, scholars proposed that human behavior reacts to images rather than objective reality (Boulding, 1956). They pointed out that images affect the decision-making process of the image perceiver. "Image theory" was developed which suggests that people are more likely to make decisions based on the images they have in mind instead of following strict principles (Beach & Mitchell, 1987). This theory highlights the importance of image building.

Images of a destination represent the sum of impression of a certain place, including people and things relating to that space (Govers & Go, 2009). Along with the rapid development of tourism industry, people have an increasing number of choices of travel destinations. Destination image become essential for visitors to make travel decisions since it affects their perception towards one place and facilitates them to approach the destination in a variety of aspects before actually being there (Gallarza et al., 2002b; Gravari-barbas & Graburn, 2012). Destination image influences the pre-visitation choice process (Hsu & Cai, 2009). Thus, destination image is one important asset for different tourism attractions to compete on. Developing a positive destination image could help destinations gain competitive advantages (Gartner, 1989; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b).

The concept of tourism destination image (TDI) has become a widely investigated topic in tourism research ever since Hunt's study on the role of image in tourism development (Hunt, 1975). Lai and Li, (2016) argued that the conceptual vagueness is a major issue for TDI and this vagueness is caused by the uncertain nature of TDI itself (internal vagueness) and the confusion with other mental concepts (external vagueness). In the beginning scholars define TDI as personalized impressions and mental constructs towards a tourism place (Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979). Most of the studies in the

beginning stage emphasized on cognitive aspect and there was no further classification of the “impressions” of a place. Embacher and Buttle (1989) argued that image may comprise both cognitive and affective components afterwards. Later, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) acknowledged that destination image is not only affected by external stimulus but also by internal factors, such as personal factors and emotions.

Nowadays it is widely accepted that destination image is mainly composed of cognitive and affective attributes, which means visitors’ impression of one place contains both “beliefs” and “feelings” : the cognitive components are those beliefs and knowledge on the physical aspects of a destination, while the affective components are the evaluations of the emotional feelings towards the place (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Hosany et al., 2006a; Assaker, 2014).

According to Baloglu and MacCleary (1999), there are mainly two sources in the image forming process, which are stimulus factors and personal factors. Scholars generally agree that stimulus factors include a variety of information sources (Baloglu, 1999; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and “previous experience” (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Litvin & Ng, 2001; Vogt & Andereck, 2003; Hsu, Wolfe, & Kang, 2004). As for personal factors, Baloglu and McCleary categorized them into psychological factors and social factors and stated that those affective evaluations significantly affect the destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a). Beerli and Martín (2004) admit the impact of information sources and personal factors on the formation of destination image and validate the conceptual model by path models. The model is a good summary of destination image concept and formation process since it is a comprehensive interpretation of previous studies. Thus, this study borrows the concepts from this model.

2.2 Tourism destination image types and functional relationships

“Destination image was conceptualized as evolving from an organic image, through an induced image, to a complex image.” (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991)

After knowing the destination image concept and its formation process, further study on the image types and components needs to be reviewed. From the demand side, which

is the tourist, the image of one destination should be called perceived image; while from the supply side, which is destination management authorities or marketers, the image they try to create and show to tourists is called projected image (Britton, 1979; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Ahmed & Krohn, 1992; Andreu, Bigné, & Cooper, 2000).

Perceived image:

Tourists develop organic images of destinations from various non-tourism information sources, such as books, TV, radio programs, family or friends' opinion (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). This image should be a general impression when mentioning one specific destination, even if the person has not been there or not even plan to visit that place.

Induced image is altered based on organic image and emerges when people are interested in visiting one place, thus, looking for more information from more commercial approaches, such as promotions and advertisement by travel agency, tourism websites (Garay Tamajón & Cànoves Valiente, 2017). Echtner and Ritchie (1991) mentioned that although organic image is not easily affected, induced image of one destination could be manipulated by marketers through different promoting approaches.

Crompton and Fakeye (1991) described the formation of perceived image in a model which summarized different image types and components, and its function in forming the image of one place. Organic image exists at the very beginning and with the motivation to travel, people seek for more information and develop the induced image. By evaluating and comparing the images of alternative destinations, people make decisions on where to go. Finally, after visiting one destination, people should form a more complex and comprehensive image. This image generated from their trip will help them to make decisions on travel destination selection in the future. This model interprets the formation of tourists' perceived image on a destination, which serves as theory base for the perceived image study of this research. In this study, perceived image is studied from online social media and on-site visitor's survey to get a comprehensive view of perceived image from visitors.

Projected image

The image projected by the destination management authorities and marketers is an essential part in promoting one destination. Many destinations spend large amounts of expense in developing an appealing image to attract more visitors (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997, 2000; Iwashita, 2003; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014; Permatasari & Murwani, 2017; . Image could be an asset for one destination, thus destinations develop promotional materials to create, reinforce or alter the destination to attract visitors (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Avraham, 2015).

Destination image could be projected in both verbal and visual format. Verbal contents are the text, slogans, lines used in the promotion materials while visual contents are the photos and pictures of one place. Visual aspects usually draw more attention since they are more directly shown to visitors (Smith & MacKay, 2001; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Tasci and Gartner also mentioned that if the destination management authorities set up unrealistic image for one destination, it will finally hurt the image of that place because visitors cannot fulfill their expectation (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Thus, it is of great importance to project the appropriate image to visitors.

Projected image is from the supply side while perceived image is from the demand side. They function together and form the destination image which could affect the tourist behavior. Tasci and Gartner (2007) describe this process as a “dynamic and reciprocal system”. In the system, the authors characterized image formation factors into controllable (supply side), semi-controllable (independent) and uncontrollable (demand side). The controllable and semi-controllable factors are also regarded as image capital. All of those factors have bi-directional impact on destination image in terms of both image types and image components. The destination image also influences on consumer behavior through pre-visit, during visit and post-visit. This model interprets the image formation process and how the image further influence tourist behavior. This model serves as theory basis for the conceptual framework of this research.

2.3 Relationship of destination image and destination branding

“Branding is a tool of creating positive images in consumer mindsets and building consumer preference and loyalty through product differentiation.” (Knox & Bickerton, 2003)

Branding is originally a marketing tool in business management, which involves in creating a unique name/logo and image for a product in the mind of consumers, mainly through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme (Murphy, 1992).

“As a marketing tool, branding is not just a case of placing a symbol or name onto products to identify the manufacturer; a brand is a set of attributes that have a meaning, an image and produce associations with the product when a person is considering that brand of product.” (Pickton & Broderick, 2000, p.242).

A brand is functional and it is supposed to bring benefit to both sellers and buyers. People buy a branded product because it reduces search costs, assures quality and shows status and prestige. The sellers gain more market, customer loyalty, premium pricing from the brand (Berthon, Holbrook, & Hulbert, 2000).

Scholars have agreed that a brand can help to make one product unique and differentiate it from its competitors (Lim & O’Cass, 2001; Davcik & Sharma, 2015; Delgado-Ballester & Fernandez Sabiote, 2015), reduce information searching cost for customers (Neslin et al., 2014) and represent a good taste and high quality from the perception of customers (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006b). Destination branding has been used to provide a platform on which destination image can be evaluated (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Hosany et al., 2006b; Hsu & Cai, 2009). Currently tourism destination branding has become one of the most studied area in tourism research and effective marketing tools for promoting tourist destinations (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007). Effective destination branding becomes crucial in destination competition (Bastiaansen et al., 2018). Similar to the general knowledge of branding, destination branding exert two important functions, which are identification and differentiation (Qu et al., 2011).

Ekinci (2003) argued that a successful destination brand forms in a two-stage process. In the first stage, destination image is formulated based on visitors' evaluation of one place. From organic image to induced image and finally developed into overall destination image. The second stage is destination branding. It starts when the evaluation of destination image includes a strong emotional attachment. An essential component of the branding process is the creation of a positive and appealing destination image (Ekinci, 2003) From the previous studies, it could be found that destination image and branding interacts with each other. The relationship between destination image and destination branding could be summarized as twofold: firstly, destination image provides information for the tourism destination marketers to develop branding strategies. Secondly, destination branding could help establish and enhance a positive destination image. In this way, tourist decision making process will be influenced.

With the concepts in mind, past studies have utilized the relationship between destination image and branding and developed a variety of destination branding frameworks. However, tourism destinations change with time and vary in different places, one model cannot fit in all situations. An overview of the previous destination branding frameworks is conducted as the theory base for the branding framework in this study.

2.4 Overview of destination branding frameworks

Previous studies have established a variety of branding models. However, the approaches, perspectives and methods from the commercial world to the world of place branding is not straight forward (Braun, 2012). Not every branding model is suitable for destination. Kladou et al. (2016) argues that there are generally three perspectives in destination branding, which are the destination-based approach (Hsu & Cai, 2009), mainly focusing on the attracting visitors and cultivate loyal customers, which are repeat visitors; the stakeholder-based approach (García, Gómez & Molina, 2012), examining the relationships between different stakeholders related to the destination in order to enhance place's reputation; and the identity-based approach (Cai, 2002; M. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), focusing on elements which compose the destination identity and how different elements affect place brands (Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou, & Salonika, 2017).

2.4.1 Destination-based approach

Hsu and Cai (2009) attempt to conceptualize a model of destination branding which integrates such key sequential concepts as brand knowledge, brand trust, and brand loyalty (Figure 2.1). Brand awareness is “reflected by consumers’ ability to identify the brand under different conditions (Keller, 2003).” It refers to the first things come to mind when mentioning a specific destination. The brand knowledge affect brand trust through brand awareness and destination image. According to Hsu and Cai (2009), brand trust is defined as “a tourist’s willingness to rely on his or her perceived ability of the destination brand to deliver its promises and meet or exceed the tourist’s expectations built upon his or her knowledge of the brand” (p.15). Tourists tend to choose their travel destinations based on their brand trust towards a place and they use their knowledge of the place to examine if this brand can meet with their needs (Chen & Phou, 2013). The last step of this model is brand loyalty, which contributes to tourists’ repeat visits to one destination and recommendations to others.

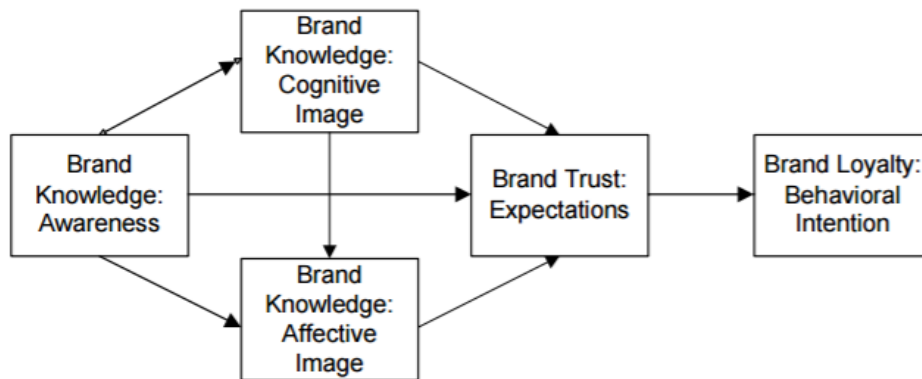


Figure 2. 1 Conceptual Model of Destination Branding

The Berry’s service-branding model (Berry, 2000) was applied in destination branding (García et al., 2012). The model (Figure 2.2) is composed of six main components, which are presented brand (PB), external brand communications, customer experience with company, brand awareness (BA), brand meaning (BM) and brand equity (BE). This model demonstrates that a company’s brand is affected mainly by two stakeholders: the enterprise and the customer. PB refers to the brand message a company is currently promoting (Berry 2000). The message delivered to the customers will affect brand awareness, which is the ability to recognize and recall a brand (Aaker, 1997; Berry,

2000; Berry & Seltman, 2007). By raising brand awareness, the company gains value by its brand name, which leads to increased brand equity. From the perspective of customers, BM refers to the first impression comes to mind when mentioning one brand. The experience with one company will affect customer impression towards this company brand. BM leads to direct impact to brand equity. Apart from customers' actual experience with the company, there are external brand communications between the two main stakeholders. There are a variety of media initiating this type of communication, such as word of mouth and social media.

Currently, the role of social media is becoming increasingly important in destination branding (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Kolb, 2017). Scholars have argued that social media plays an important role in both travelers' decision making and tourism management (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Noone, McGuire, & Rohlf, 2011). Therefore, in this study, external brand communication is evaluated by not only on-site visitor survey but also by social media comments.

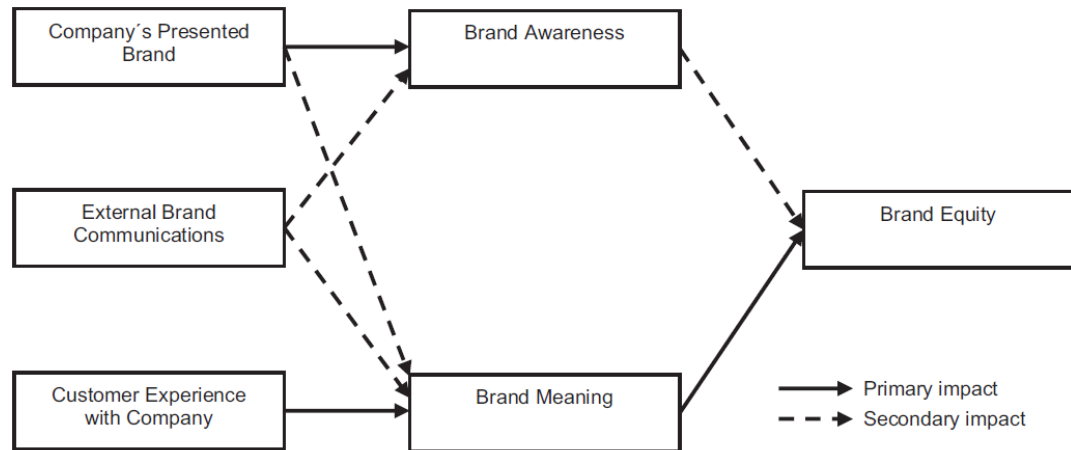


Figure 2. 2 Service-branding model

The two destination models share a lot of similar concepts and are clear in explaining the impact of brand elements. But both of them fail in considering the impacts of relevant stakeholders in destination branding process. Thus, stakeholder-based approach branding models are also reviewed.

2.4.2 Stakeholder-based approach

García et al. (2012) modified berry’s customer-based model (Berry, 2000) and took destination related stakeholders into consideration (Figure 2.3). They constructed this four-main-construct pyramid: PB, BA, BM, and BE, selected from Berry (2000). They also consider that destination image and destination brand are firmly linked together. Therefore, they proposed the conceptual model, containing both destination image and brand. In destination image, there are mainly four factors which constitute the overall image (OI). The four factors are natural and cultural resource (NC); pleasant atmosphere (PA) and social setting environment (SS). Visitors, entrepreneurs and local people are the three types of stakeholders involved in this process. The authors argue that both destination image and destination brand should be in congruence among the three parties.

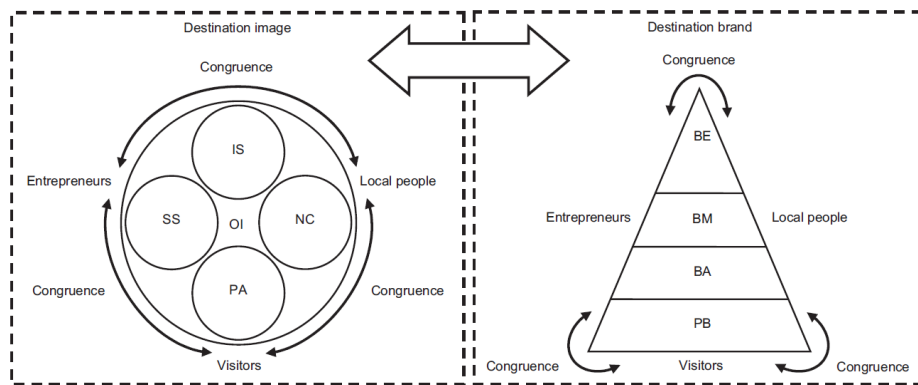


Figure 2. 3 Conceptual model of relationship between destination image and destination brand

The model is in line with Webster’s argument (Webster, 2000), in which the author points out that brands are not only related with the final customer but also with the rest of the stakeholders involved in the destination network and the congruence among different stakeholders is essential to achieve successful branding. This type of destination branding approach is regarded as stakeholders-based BE instead of customer-based BE (García, Gómez & Molina, 2012). Jones (2005) suggests BE comes from and is co-created by multiple stakeholders. It was argued that the stakeholders of one destination have different levels of importance in terms of branding. Destination marketers should prioritize them

regarding their contribution to brand value (Jones, 2005). van Gelder (2008) further pointed out that it is a difficult task to coordinate the relationship among different stakeholders. It is hard to get them work as a group. Thus, in this research, different stakeholders are considered in the branding process as well.

2.4.3 Identity-based approach

Gran (2010) proposed that a brand consists of image and identity. By adding these two components together, we can gain real added value, which is leveraging the brand equity (Table 2.1).

Table 2. 1 Composition of a brand

A brand consists of		
Image	+	Identity
Picture, surface	+	Essence, depth
Focus on the customer	+	Focus on value
Seductive	+	Believable
Visual (picture/image)	+	Invisible, but noticeable
Theatrical (staged/created)	+	Non-theatrical (is)
	=	
Real added value		

Cai (2002) argues that image formation and image building is not equal to branding. Brand identity needs to be established in order to “advance destination image studies to the level of branding” (Cai, 2002, p.722).

This understanding incorporates definitions from the general branding literature (e.g., Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1998; Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002) and emphasizes the role of brand identity. Although the destination image is one important part of brand, it does not cover the whole. The other important part is brand identity. Effective destination branding should incorporate the two parts.

Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013) echoed with Gran’s findings by pointing out that destination branding as a recursive process of optimizing a consistent brand identity and

position the destination through positive image building. In this model, it also allows locals to “express cultural features that for them already form part of the place identity” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p.79). Figure 2.4 demonstrates the process that the place branding shadows the place identity. The process involves four actions, which are expressing, mirroring, reflecting and impressing.

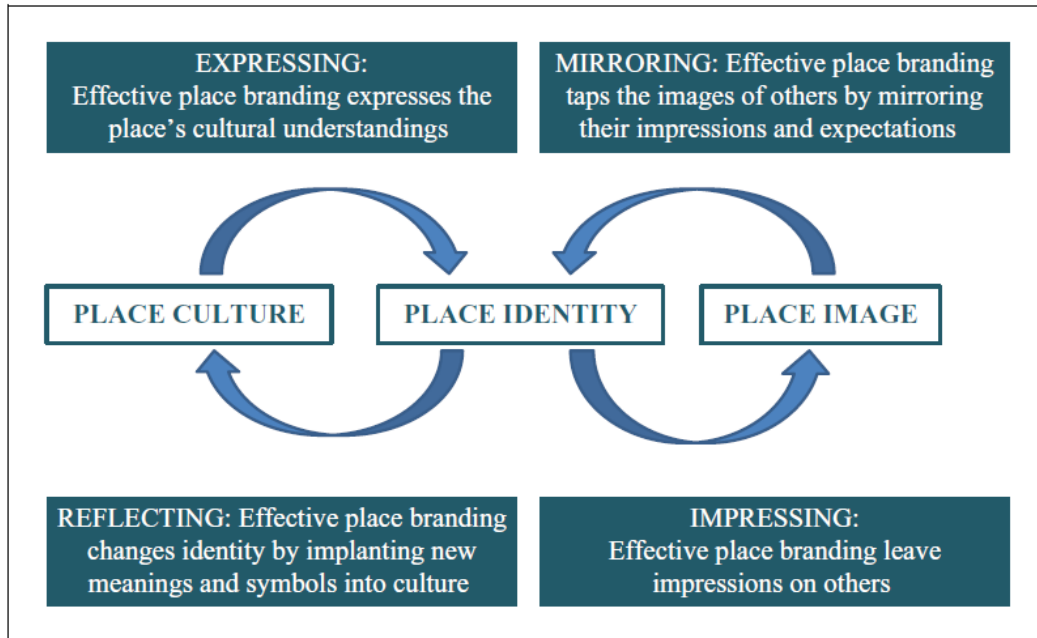


Figure 2. 4 How place branding shadows the identity process

With the above three types of destination branding models in mind, a new destination branding framework specially for rural destination in the suburban areas in China is developed. The aim of the branding framework is to take consideration of attracting visitors while balancing the stakeholders and enhance the place identity.

2.5 Overview of destination image and branding methodologies

In a recent review of destination branding framework and components, the authors have generated a list of past studies in chronological order as shown in Table 2.2 (Adeyinka-Ojo, Khoo-Lattimore, & Nair, 2014). This review list is adopted and used to explore what type of methods these past studies have utilized.

Table 2. 2 Destination Branding Framework/Model and Components Considered by Past Studies

Authors (Years)	Framework (Model)	Components Covered (Past Studies)
Porter (1990)	Diamond model	Destination competitive advantage
Aaker (1991)	Equity framework	Brand equity
Ghemawat (2001)	CAGE model	Destination image
Cai (2002)	Destination branding	Brand identity and brand image
Laws, Scott, & Parfitt (2002)	Destination branding	Market audit, tract and review
Kaplanidou & Vogt (2006)	Destination branding	Brand identity, image, brand, culture, brand soul, personality
Ritchie & Crouch (2003)	Conceptual model of destination competitiveness and sustainability	Destination competitiveness
Anholt (2004)	Nation Branding Hexagon	People, culture and tourism
Hankinson (2004)	Relational network brand	Stakeholders and components of destination branding
Kavaratzis (2004)	City image communication	Primary, secondary and tertiary communication
Caldwell & Freire (2004)	de Chernatony's 'The Brand Box Model'	Destination image and destination brand identity
Risitano (2006)	Destination branding	Brand identity and brand knowledge

Dinnie (2009)	7As Destination branding model	Extension of No. 5 (laws, 2002) including attitude and adoption
Gaggiotti, Low Kim Cheng, & Yunak (2008)	City brand model	Infrastructure and superstructure
Hsu & Cai (2009)	The conceptual model of branding	Brand trust, brand destination loyalty, destination brand experience and intention to revisit
Giannopoulos, Piha, & Avlonitis (2011)	Destination brand model	Management and destination brand maintenance
Qu, Kim, & Im (2011)	A model of destination branding	Brand associations behavioral intention and destination image
Hanna & Rowley (2011)	Strategic Place Branding Model (SPBM)	Stakeholder, infrastructure and relationship
Wang & Pizam (2011)	A framework of place branding	Destination management and marketing; destination brand; destination brand equity

Based on the list, these studies were classified into three main approaches, which are qualitative methods, quantitative methods and mixed methods. In qualitative methods, the most commonly used techniques include on-site observation, interview, focus group, content analysis, SWOT analysis, etc. As for quantitative methods, the most frequently used statistic techniques are descriptive analysis, factor analysis/principle component analysis, etc. Qualitative approach is more popular than quantitative approach in the reviewed studies. Even fewer studies have adopted mixed approach.

Moreover, research gaps are identified. Most of the image and branding studies are in the scale of countries and cities, while few research was conducted in the context of rural areas. Furthermore, previous studies were mainly focused on one specific destination, instead of from a holistic point of view. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gaps.

2.6 Destination branding in the context of rural area

Destination branding is not a new concept. However, there is relatively few research of destination branding in rural area (Cai, 2002; Blain et al., 2005; Hall, 2010; Pike, 2013; Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2014) . However, rural tourism has a particularly weak image. Currently rural areas are involved in the process of globalization and rural economies are experiencing a transformation. The traditional livelihood is being transformed from agriculture to a new economy based on the commercialization of rural space (Woods, 2007). Woods (2007) points out that rural areas are modernizing their economies by focusing on “exchange value” instead of “use value”. It is fundamental to utilize marketing techniques to avoid homogenization of rural spaces. Vik and Villa (2010) believe that rural communities could turn depression into optimism by effective image construction. Therefore, they support the “image-based rural development”. It was also suggested that the rural image should be flexible, and the marketer should take consideration of image impact carefully since image could alter reality.

Furthermore, a healthy destination image should always be rooted to sense of place, so that it could bring value to the place’s natural, cultural, social and economic wealth (Campelo et al., 2014b; Gnoth, 2007). There are a plethora of studies on sense of place, which have generally agreed that sense of place refers to an attitude towards a spatial setting (Shamai, 1991; Hay, 1998; Campelo et al., 2013; Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2014a; Chapin & Knapp, 2015; Raymond, Kyttä, & Stedman, 2017). Sense of place is constructed by the engagement of experience and mutual interactions in a destination and emotion attachment to the place. It is not only affected by the physical environment but also social cultural aspects of a destination (Campelo, Aitken & Thyne, 2013). The concept of sense of place plays an essential role in destination branding (Campelo et al., 2014b). It could help enhance the authenticity of destination image and build emotional connection between tourists and the place (Ram, Björk, & Weidenfeld, 2016). In the process of branding rural tourism destinations, most of the rural communities focus on the concept of “rurality” in the process of image building because it is the main thing attracting tourists to visit a rural destination (Zhou, 2014). Rurality is a concept initiated from mental health studies and it generally refers to a condition of place-based homeliness shared by people with common ancestry or heritage and who inhabit

traditional, culturally defined areas or places statutorily recognized to be rural (Chigbu, 2013). Previous literatures have generated three theoretical concepts for rurality, which are in terms of area, social production of existence, and regulation (handbook of rural studies). With the impact of globalization, nowadays rurality is always materialized and presented in a commercial way (Clope, Marsden, & Mooney, 2006). It could be viewed as tourist imaginary on a rural destination which greatly influences tourist motivation and behavior. Therefore, it is important to develop appropriate rural image in order to meet the needs of tourists' seeking for "rurality" and boost rural tourism development.

Cai (2002) argues that individual rural destinations are limited in terms of space, resources and drawing power, thus, it is suggested that rural destinations should practice "cooperative branding", which means "to redefine the size of a destination by bringing together two or more adjoining communities of similar natural and cultural compositions of attractions" (Cai, 2002, p.734). the author has given an example of Old West Country organization as "a four-county effort to capitalize on the many attractions and the common image of Southwestern New Mexico" (Cai, 2002, p.728). It is an umbrella marketing organization and promotes its members under one brand name. This organization successfully market the four rural communities by taking advantage of the similar natural resources as well as the popular cow boy culture in the west. Park (2013) has raised another example of successful cooperative branding in rural area. Rural Traditional Theme Village (RTTV) and Green Rural Experience Village (GREV) are programs aiming to stimulate rural tourism in Korea. These organizations cooperate different rural communities and brand them together. In this way, the drawing power is amplified and each member of the organization could benefit from their shared brand.

2.7 The quest for rural destination branding in China

2.7.1 Operational modes and spatial location of rural tourism in China

Su (2011) classified the operational modes into six types: 1). Household-run small business; 2). Individual farmstead; 3). Farmer family plus farmer family; 4). Corporation plus farmers; 5). Corporation plus community plus farmers; 6). Government plus corporation plus farmers. Each of the type has its unique features but also have common characteristics. This study integrated the six types into three major types of operational

modes of rural tourism in China, which are initiated by local community, invested by companies and supported by government.

The first type is initiated by local community. This type of business is started by elite farmers, most of which are household-run small business. This type of operational mode is mostly known as “Nongjiale (農家樂)”, which literally means “happy farmers”. Nongjiale are run by local farmers, providing food and accommodation in their own house for rural tourists. The first cluster of Nongjiale appeared in Chengdu and soon spread to the whole China. This type of operational mode is very common especially at the beginning stage of rural tourism development (Zhou et al., 2013; Zeng, Ryan, Cui, & Chen, 2014). After a certain period of development, some of them will cooperate with others and form a union (Oriade & Robinson, 2017). The advantage of this mode is that the initial investment is relatively low, and it does not require high level of management skills. Moreover, it is a good conservation of local culture since it helps to protect the authentic local culture without much of interference from urban world (Park, 2014). But it also has disadvantages such as homogenization. Farmers are prone to follow and copy the existing successful models which may lead to the homogenization of tourism product. For instance, those Nongjiale in Chongming island, Shanghai, are initiated by the local farmers, but most of the business are homogeneous. Lack of uniqueness is one major problem in the island. Proper destination branding could help to differentiate those projects.

The second type of rural tourism business is those invested by companies. Comparing with the first type, this mode is more professional in terms of management and marketing skills. Local farmers lease their land to the outside companies and transfer the management authority to the companies. In this way, the companies could provide advanced technology and professional skills in developing rural tourism (Luo, 2006). The companies also provide job opportunities by employing local farmers thus benefit the rural communities. But the limitation is also obvious. This mode of business is profit-oriented, which means making profit has higher priority than protecting the local culture. On one hand, the companies bring advanced technology and professional skills, on the other hand, the outside culture may cause culture intrusion, which may lead to the loss of authentic local culture. For instance, a large cluster of companies invests in the Moganshan town in

Zhejiang, including many foreign companies. They have brought their own culture to the local development. Instead of Nongjiale, they call themselves as “Yangjiale (洋家樂)”, which literally means “Happy foreigners”. From this term, it could be seen that the image of Yangjiale tourism is foreign lifestyle instead of local culture.

The last type of operational mode is those initiated by government. The Chinese government treats rural tourism as an effective tool to boost development in rural area. Thus, they directly invested in many rural villages in developing rural tourism. This operational mode adopts “top-down” approach. It is initiated by policy and the development process is under supervision of the government. Comparing with those initiated by local community and those invested by companies, this type is often larger in scale and more stable in terms of financial support (Ding, 2009). And this type of business also provides job opportunities to the local communities. However, it also has limitations, such as ignoring the market needs and lack of communication with the local community. For instance, Cittaslow is an international organization founded in Italy and inspired by the slow food movement. It was originally “focus urban and regional plans around the primary asset of place-based identity, by choosing to preserve the threads of each urban area’s own unique characteristics” (Radstrom, 2011, p.91). Previously, a number of destinations have assumed the context of Cittaslow in Europe. Following this trend, in China Yaxi town, in Jiangsu became the first Cittaslow member. The tourism planning is done by the government and the project is carried out with the governmental support while the local residents do not know much about the Cittaslow organization. Thus, the brand is incongruent between the two stakeholders.

Consequently, the development of rural tourism was quite unbalanced in terms of economic and geographical location. Scholars have categorized three spatial location patterns of rural tourism destinations in China: the first pattern are those located near tourism attractions; the second pattern are those located in the sub-urban areas of metropolis; and the last pattern refer to those located in the poor periphery area (Pan, 1999).

Wu and Cai (2006) have found that 84% of the total rural tourism attractions in China are located within 100 kilometers of the nearby city center. Since urban residents are the

main target market for rural tourism, those rural tourism destinations located in the sub-urban area are the most developed among the three spatial locations. Recreational belt around metropolis (ReBAM) theory was developed by Wu (2001) based on the rural tourism spatial pattern. According to the ReBAM theory, this belt exists in the sub-urban area and the radius of the circle ranges from 15 to 100 kilometers. It mainly provides leisure and recreation activities for the nearby urban residents and tourists from other places. It was further pointed out that the geographical location of the belt is heavily affected by the cost of land development and tourist's travel cost. It seems that the belt is always located in the equilibrium of the two types of cost as indicated in Figure 2.5 (Guo & Wang, 2008). Thus, in this research, cases were selected from this belt, which is within the range of 15-100 kilometers from the city center.

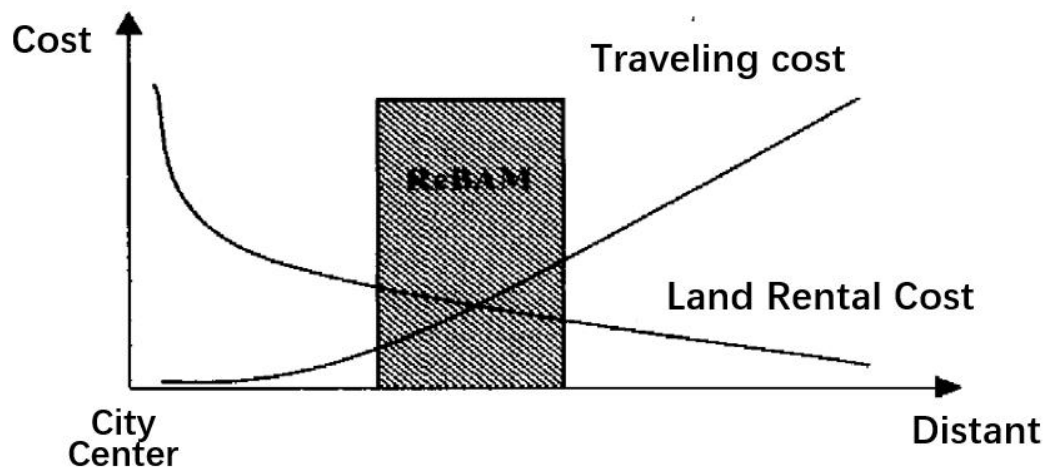


Figure 2. 5 Formation of ReBAM

Previous studies have focused on the formation, impact, stakeholders and space locations of rural tourism. However, few study has been done in rural destination image and branding, especially in the sub-urban areas. This study will focus on rural tourism destination image and branding in sub-urban areas.

2.7.2 Significance of rural tourism branding in China

One problem exist in all of the three types of operational mode is the lack of uniqueness, which leads to the phenomenon of “all the villages look the same”. To solve this problem, destination branding plays an important role in communicating a destination’s unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, rurality is not a new concept, however, most of the current studies on rurality are conducted in the western context. Rurality is different concept in China. Rural tourism development mode should be different from the western countries. It is crucial to develop our own rural destination branding approach in China.

Previous scholars have pointed out that destination image plays an important role in marketing and directly influences tourist decision making process, valued attributes, purchase process as well as tourist satisfaction. (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gallarza et al., 2002b; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). It is crucial to discover how the destination image is formed since it is a combination of what is projected by the destination and what is perceived by the tourist (Royo-Vela, 2009). This bi-directional process is important in both ways in building a successful brand. It is important for tourists because “they would choose a destination brand only when they can trust it” and it is also important for destinations since “a trusted brand brings about tourist loyalty” (Hsu & Cai, 2009). Thus, destination branding is deemed to be of great importance.

2.8 Summary

This chapter provides an overall review from the formation of tourism destination image concepts to the application in rural destination branding. The relationship between destination image and destination branding is explained and branding models are reviewed. The research methods in previous studies are reviewed as well. After reviewing the image and branding theories, the background of rural tourism in China is introduced, along with the quest for rural destination branding. Research gaps are identified as most of the current destination branding studies are in the scale of a country or a region or a city. Much fewer studies were conducted at a much smaller scale, which is rural destinations in the sub-urban areas. Thus, it is important and necessary to fill this research gap in the hope to benefit rural tourism development in China. Based on literature review, the following

chapter will introduce the conceptual framework and discuss the research methods used in the current research.

Chapter 3 Conceptual framework and research methodologies

3.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this research generally contains four stages. In stage one, rural destination image attributes are characterized. It is widely accepted that destination image contains both cognitive and affective attributes. However, few studies were conducted on the image factors specifically for rural destinations in China. Stage one aims to fill this research gap by conducting survey to identify Chinese rural destination image factors, especially in sub-urban area. Destination image factors are selected from previous measurement scales (Russel & Pratt, 1980; Gallarza, Saura, & García, 2002; Hallmann, Zehrer, & Müller, 2015; Mendola & Volo, 2017). A set of 24 factors including 20 cognitive factors and 4 affective factors are finalized and respondents are requested to rate each of the factor on a 7-point Likert scale. After conducting the survey, EFA is adopted to generate the main factors of rural destination image. CFA is conducted afterwards to confirm whether those variables are loaded on each factor correctly.

In stage two, the relationship between tourists' travel motivation and destination image as well as the relationship between tourist behavior and destination image is tested individually. It is important to know how tourist motives affect rural destination image before tourists actually come and what aspects of destination image influence tourists' travel motivation. The study also investigates how destination image affect tourist behavior. CCA is utilized to test the relationship between tourist motives and destination image while logistic regression is adopted to test the relationship between tourist behavior and destination image.

In stage three, the study aims to find out the projected image from supply side and perceived image from demand side and see whether there is any gap between them. Content analysis is the main method in this stage. On completing the above three stages, a rural destination branding framework is developed based on the destination image analysis in stage four.

After reviewing the current branding frameworks (Cai, 2002; Hsu & Cai, 2009; García, Gómez, & Molina, 2012; Kavartzis & Hatch, 2013; Kladou, Kavartzis, Rigopoulou, & Salonika, 2016) for destination in Chapter 2, the two frameworks from Hsu and Cai (2009) will be combined with the service branding model developed by Berry (2000). With the proposed research stages in mind, the framework has been adjusted as shown in Figure 3.1.

In stage one, brand knowledge is composed of three parts, which are cognitive image, affective image and awareness of the destination. Therefore, the factors of image are thus generated.

In stage two, the relationship between brand trust and brand knowledge as well as the relationship between brand knowledge and brand loyalty are tested. It is to investigate whether destination image will affect tourists' travel motivations and behavioral intentions. This investigation is necessary to the whole research since destination branding aims to bring brand trust and loyalty towards one place

In stage three, presented brand by tourism organizers are compared with the brand meaning perceived by tourists. It is important for DMO to ensure the image congruency of one destination.

In the last stage, branding strategies are proposed if there is any gap between presented brand by tourism organizer and brand meaning by tourists.

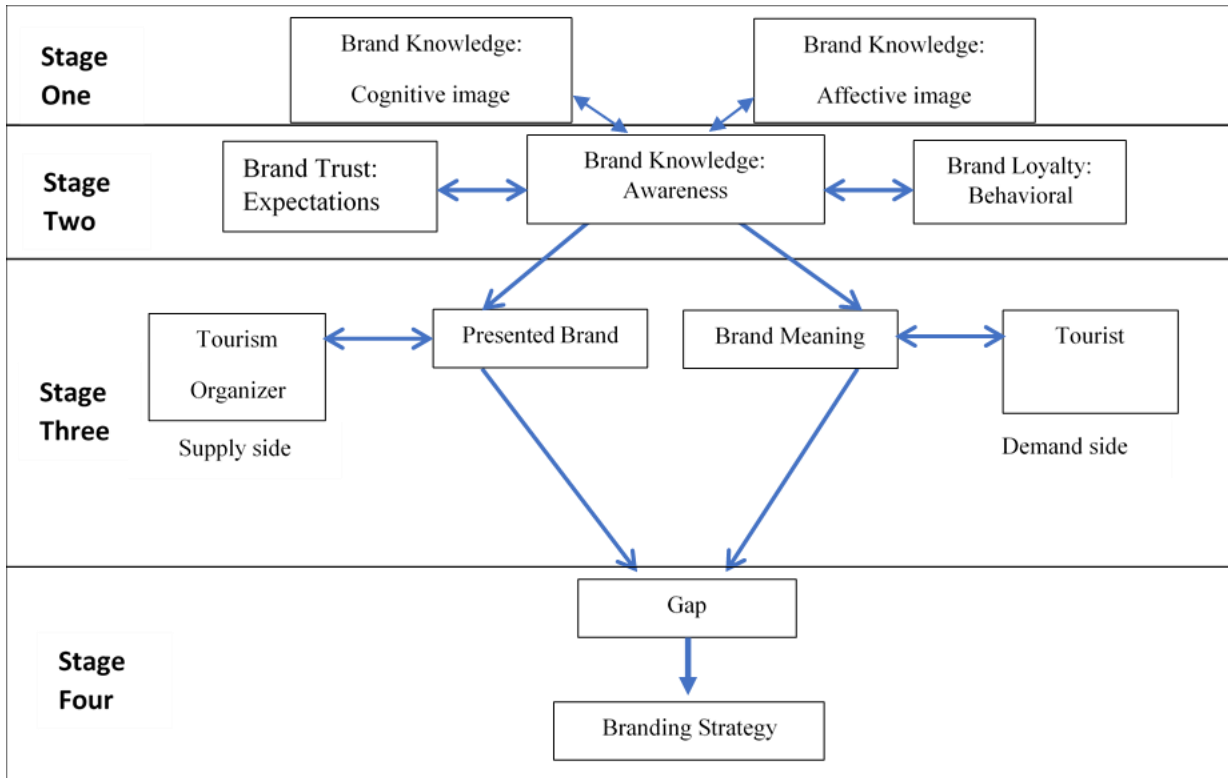


Figure 3. 1 Conceptual framework

3.2 Study area

With the fast development of rural tourism in China, different types of rural tourism appear in different areas. To study the destination image and branding of rural tourism in sub-urban areas in China, three study sites are selected based on the model of operation. To make the sites comparable, all of the three sites are located in Yangtze River Delta, where the geographical, economical, and social-cultural background is similar. The selected three sites are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3. 1 Operational modes of three study sites

Categories	Characteristics	Case studies
Initiated by local community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initiated by some elite farmers 2. Formation of cooperation union 3. Good conservation of local culture 	<p>“happy farmers” 農家樂</p> <p>e.g. Chongming island in Shanghai</p>
Invested by companies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Profit oriented 2. Professional management & marketing skills 3. Culture intrusion 	<p>Resort hotel/holiday villages</p> <p>e.g. Moganshan homestay (莫幹山民宿帶)</p>
Supported by government	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initiated by policy 2. Supervised by government 3. From organizer to supporter and coordinator 	<p>Cittaslow members</p> <p>eg. Gaochun District/Yaxi town in Gaochun district, Nanjing (桤溪國際慢城)</p>

The three sites share some common characteristics. First, all of them are located near metropolis; second, they share similar geographical locations (Yangtze River Delta),

economic development levels, area and population; they are also on the list of “unique towns” in China and all of them have established their own brand (Table 3.2).

Table 3. 2 Background information of study sites

Town	Area (square kilometers)	Population	GDP per capita 2016 (administrative division average) RMB	Destination brand
Yaxi	115	50,000	95,259	Cittaslow 國際慢城
Moganshan	186	31,000	83,538	Moganshan Homestay 莫幹山民宿
Dongping	120	25,000	113,511	Eco-island 崇明生態島

Source: data obtained from National Bureau of Statistics

3.3 Sampling and data collection

Booth (1991) argued that for visitor questionnaire survey, researchers cannot select sample from a list of survey population since “no such lists exist for on-site visitor surveys”. It was further suggested that on-site visitor surveys should be conducted based on survey days and locations (Booth, 1991).

In this research, 30 survey days are divided evenly in the 3 study sites, which means 10 days for each site. The 10 survey days should cover both peak season and low season in a year. Finally, we choose 3 days in July (summer holiday) and 3 days in early October

(National Day) as peak season, and 4 days in September as low season. convenient sampling is adopted afterwards in this research.

Mundfrom, Shaw, & Ke (2005) suggest that the suitable sample size for conducting factor analysis should be from 3 to 20 times the number of variables. In this research, the longest scale contains 24 variables, thus, the suitable sample size should be between 72 to 480. In tourism and leisure study, “the actual sample size requirement largely depends on the effectiveness of sampling error reduction instead of an unnecessary precision (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011)”. To reduce error, the target sample size of this research is set to be 500. Table 3.3 shows the breakdown of questionnaire surveys in the three sites.

Table 3. 3 Breakdown of questionnaire surveys on the three study sites

Survey site	Phase 1 (July 2015)	Phase 2 (October 2016)	Phase 3 (September 2017)	Sub-total
Yaxi	51	51	50	152
Moganshan	53	55	51	159
Dongping	68	60	64	192
Total	172	166	165	503

3.4 Questionnaire design

As mentioned in Chapter One, there are three research objectives in total. The onsite questionnaire survey aims to fulfil the first two research objectives, which are 1) to characterize rural tourism destination image attributes of sub-urban areas in China; 2) to investigate on the relationship between rural destination image and travel motivation & tourist behavior.

There are mainly three parts of the questionnaire: part A destination image; part B visitation information; part C personal information (Table 3.4).

Table 3. 4 Questionnaire contents

Part	Contents
A. Destination image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A1. Twenty-four seven-point Likert scale statements on importance and performance ● A2 Two open end questions which allows visitors to describe the destination image in story format (i) the onsite experience; (ii) the destination image before and after visit
B. Visitation information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● B1. General information on visitor's transportation mode, source of information, and visit times ● B2. Seventeen seven-point Likert statements on travel motivation ● B3 Familiarity and favorability on the existing destination brand ● B4 Tourist behavior on revisit and recommendation to others
C. Tourist Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multiple choice questions on visitor's demographic characteristics: (i) Gender (ii) Age (iii) Education (iv) Working status (v) Monthly income (vi) Place of origin

In part A, the research objective is to characterize rural tourism destination image attributes of sub-urban areas in China. In order to investigate on the rural destination image, variables are developed for both cognitive image and affective image based on previous literature reviews in Chapter Two and research method in Chapter Three (Halfacree, 2006) pointed out that usually there are three components in a rural space, which are rural locality, rural representations, and the livelihood of the rural residents. The rural locality refers to overall natural environment. And rural representations include the social-economic, political and cultural elements of the rural society. The last component refers to the lifestyle of the local population. To get a whole picture of the rural image, questions regarding the three components are asked. Finally, a set of 24 variables (Appendix I) are developed for measuring rural destination image. Onsite tourists were

required to rate the importance of destination image attributes as well as the performance of destination image on the selected 24 variables. Open-end questions were followed to explore visitor's onsite experience and track the destination image.

Part B aims to investigate on the relationship between rural destination image and travel motivation & tourist behavior. Based on the findings from Part A, the relationship will be tested with the visitation information. There are four sections in part B. First part includes general information on "how do the visitors get to the place", "where do they hear about the destination" and "how many times have they visited the destination". Second, travel motivations are explored by asking the visitors to rate on 20 motivation variables in a 7-point Likert scale. Third, the visitors were asked whether they are familiar with the destination brand and whether they like it. The fourth part focus on the tourists' behavioral intentions, which includes willingness of visitors to revisit the destination and recommend to others.

Part C is the last part of the questionnaire, where demographic information of visitors, including gender, education, working status, monthly income is collected.

To check whether the questionnaire of this research is comprehensive, the items in the questionnaire is compared to Morrison's. Morrison (2013) has developed a set of items that should be included in a visitor profile analysis. Table 3.5 includes the items proposed by Morrison with comparison of items included in our research. By comparing with the list proposed by Morrison, it could be proved that the designed questionnaire is suitable for visitor profile analysis.

Table 3. 5 Comparison of questionnaire items with Morrison (2013)

Questionnaire items of Morrison (2013)	Questionnaire items of this research
• Demographic and socio-economic characteristics	✓ Demographic information of gender, age, education, working status, monthly income and place of origin
• Travel trip characteristics	✓ Visitation information of transportation mode, travel motivation, etc.
• Previous visit patterns (number and timing of previous trips)	✓ Visit times
• Revisit intentions (probability of a return visit)	✓ Willingness of revisit
• Attraction usage and awareness	✓ Familiarity to the destination brand
• Activity participation in destination	✓ On-site experience
• Travel information sources used for trip to destination	✓ Visitor's source of information
• Media usage	✓ Visitor's source of information
• Trip satisfaction levels	✓ Destination performance based on twenty-four seven-point Likert statements
• Likes and dislikes	✓ Favorability to the destination brand
• Suggested improvements to the destination	✓ N/A

After designing the questionnaire, pilot studies were conducted on the selected three study sites. I made some justifications based on on-site observation and the result of pilot study. Table 3.6 shows the changes in the questionnaire after the pilot studies.

Table 3. 6 Adjustment after pilot study

Before pilot study	After pilot study	Justification
20 motivation variables	Reduced to 17 motivation variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The variable of “Share a familiar place with others” and “Go to places where friends haven’t been” are combined as one variable “Travel with friends” ✓ Removal of “Inspire community consciousness” and “Visit places family came from” because of large amount of missing data on these questions
Visitors are asked to describe the images and thoughts come to mind BEFORE and AFTER their visit in this destination	This question is removed	✓ Most of the visitors leave this question as blank
The income range is started from 3000 RMB	The income range is started from 4000RMB	✓ Adjust according to the income level of the visitors

3.5 Interview design

Qualitative approach is an important part of the research methodology through all the research stages. Interviews refer to discussions, usually take the form of one-on-one between an interviewer and an individual. The purpose of interviews is to collect information on a specific set of topics. There are different approaches of interviews, it can be conducted in person or over the phone (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

At stage one and two, interviews are conducted with tourists. Respondents provide information on attributes of rural destination, tourist motivation as well as their activities in the destination. At stage three, for the projected image, in-depth interviews are conducted with DMOs and business-oriented organizations. It aims to investigate what type of image the destination projects to the public. As for perceived image, the impression on the destination is collected through the interview of the on-site visitors. By conducting interviews, more comprehensive information is generated.

For interviews in the three study sites, I have developed a same set of interview questions in order to better compare the three places.

Through the interview, the purpose is to investigate on how tourism business in these towns are initiated and developed; what types of tourism products do they provide in each town; how do they do promotion and branding for their town; what impact does the brand bring to the town; and what are their tourism development plan for the future. Semi-structured interview approach is most suitable for this research. Semi-structured interviews are designed in response to a pre-determined set of topics. Open-end questions are most frequently used technique for semi-structured interviews (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). Interview questions were asked around the five topics, which are “history of tourism development”, “tourism product”, “promotion”, “brand value” and “future plan”.

3.6 Research Methodologies and data analysis

After designation of research framework and design of questionnaire and interviews, research methodologies are explained in detail regarding the proposed research stages.

In the first stage, factor analysis is the main research method. EFA is most commonly used in reducing the dimensionality of original set of data into new dimensions which

could be generated from the old ones (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012). CFA is usually applied after EFA to confirm whether the identified factors can represent the variables correctly (Harrington, 2009).

In the second stage, CCA and logistic analysis is adopted. CCA is useful in testing the relationship between two sets of variables (Thompson, 2005) while logistic analysis is usually applied when the dependent variable is binary data, which means the variable only includes two categories of responses (Harrell, 2015).

Content analysis is the main research method at stage three. It quantifies qualitative data by coding text into different categories and conduct statistical analysis (Neuendorf, 2016; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). Morgan referred it as “quantitative analysis of qualitative data” (Morgan, 1993).

Content analysis becomes famous in tourism studies in recent decades (Malloy & Fennell, 1998; Fennell, 2001; Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, & Morrison, 2009; Hang & Penny, 2011). And it is widely applied in tourism destination image studies (Govers & Go, 2005; Douglas & Mills, 2006; Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Brejla & Gilbert, 2014; Camprubi & Coromina, 2016; Hao, Wu, Morrison, & Wang, 2016).

 *Stage 1: Investigate attributes affecting rural destination image in China*

Method: EFA & CFA

In this research, it is assumed that rural destination image is influenced by cognitive and affective evaluations. This research aims to find different attributes which influence cognitive evaluation and affective evaluation in rural destinations in China.

As for the cognitive evaluations, researchers usually assess the measurement scale by asking the respondents for an evaluation of the existing attributes. Royo-Vela, (2009) summarized that ordinal and interval scales are the most commonly used measurement scales, which include multidimensional scale (MDS) (Gartner 1989; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000), nominal scales for correspondence analysis (Calantone, Di Benedetto, Hakam, & Bojanic, 1989), Likert scales (Crompton &

Ankomah, 1993; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001; Beerli & Martín, 2004). The measurement attributes from previous literatures are reviewed and a “master list” is generated (Qu, 2011). Then explorative factor analysis is adopted to find what are the latent factors of rural destination image. After explorative factor analysis, a set of underlying dimensions of cognitive image are generated.

As for affective evaluations, emotions and affections are formed on the basis of cognitions in a hierarchic process (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a). Previously, Russell, Ward and Pratt (1981) had developed affective image scales which are used in this study. Russel further argues that every place is related to some certain type of mood. People in specific environment should have reacted in an emotional way. It was developed from 21 clusters of affective descriptions of environments (Figure 3.2). The scale interprets that peoples’ feeling towards one specific place is generally along four dimensions, which are Arousing-Sleepy, Pleasant-Unpleasant, Exciting-Gloomy, and Relaxing-Distressing. In this research, this theory is adopted that rural destination visitors have feelings along these four bi-polar dimensions.

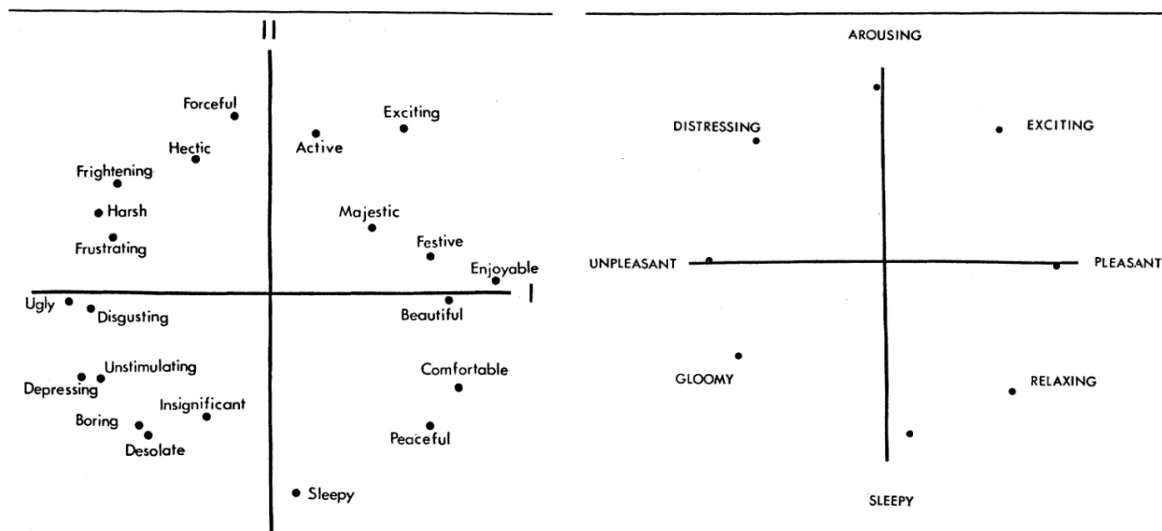


Figure 3. 2 Two-dimensional representations of the affective factors

The overall image of a rural destination is constituted from a group of cognitions (cognitive images) and affections (affective images) (Stern & Krakover, 1993). Royo-

Vela, (2009) argued that the relationship between cognitive, affective and overall image is that the cognitive components have an influence on overall image both directly and indirectly through the affective components. The dimensions of cognitive and affective image of rural destinations in China are combined. CFA is conducted to confirm whether those variables are loaded on each factor correctly. After this process, a set of underlying factors of rural destination image in China are generated and will form the contents of research in the future chapters.

✚ *Stage 2 (part 1): Testing the relationship between tourist motives and rural destination image*

Method: CCA

Upon identifying the essential components of rural destination in China, the research investigates whether there is a relationship between tourist motives and destination image.

A study on travel motivation of rural tourism was conducted by Rural Traditional Theme Village (RTTV) and Green Rural Experience Village (GREV) to promote rural tourism in Korea. Their research resulted in a six-factor solution, which are Relaxation, Socialization, Learning, Family togetherness, Novelty and Excitement (Park & Yoon, 2009).


These factors are adjusted for measuring tourism motivation of rural destinations in China. After the factor analyses of tourism motives and the previous factor analysis of rural destination image, the new factors form two new matrix A (tourism motives: X1, X2... Xn) and B (rural destination image: Y1, Y2... Yn). The relationship between A and B is tested by canonical correlation, which is useful in testing the relationship between two different matrixes. By conducting CCA, the relationship between tourist motives and rural destination images is tested.

✚ *Stage 2 (part 2): Testing the relationship between rural destination image and tourist behavior*

Method: Logistic regression

In this research, only two types of tourists' behavioral intentions are included. One is tourist's willingness to revisit the rural destination and after visiting the place; the other

is tourist's willingness to recommend the place to others. In each behavior intention, there are two categories: "1. Willing to revisit", "0. Not willing to revisit" and "1. Willing to recommend to others", "0. Not willing to recommend to others". Logistic regression model is chosen since it is useful when there are binary dependent variables, that is, where it can take only two values (Hosmer, Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, n.d.). In this case, the dependent variable (Y) is tourist behavior, which contains two values in each behavior. The independent variables (X1, X2...Xn) are those attributes affecting rural destination image in China which are identified in the first stage of the research. Upon determining the attributes, two regression models are built. "Stepwise" method is chosen since there are no sound theoretical reasons for including or excluding the factors mentioned above in the regression model (Raftery, 1995).

 *Stage 3: Assessing the gap between the projected and perceived destination image of rural destination*

Method: Content analysis, cluster analysis

In this stage of research, the study would like to test whether there is any gap between the projected and perceived destination image of rural destination in China. Comparing the differences between projected and perceived image is one approach of evaluating one brand's success since effective destination brand is successful when the projected image of DMO is similar to the perceived image by the visitors (Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015).

Data is selected through an exhaustive search of Chinese website lists under the travel directories of Baidu search engine. The websites are classified into three major categories: one is official tourism websites or government related website; the second is business-oriented websites, such as online travel agents; the last one is user generated contents (UGC) from weblogs. UGC is an internet-based communication phenomenon enabled by Web 2.0, the second generation of web-based services, which allows people to collaborate and share information online.

The contents on official website and business website is compared to see whether the projected image is congruent; Social media contents (UGC) and surveys to on-site visitors are compared to test whether the perceived image is congruent. Finally, the projected image and perceived image are compared to see whether they are congruent (Figure 3.3)

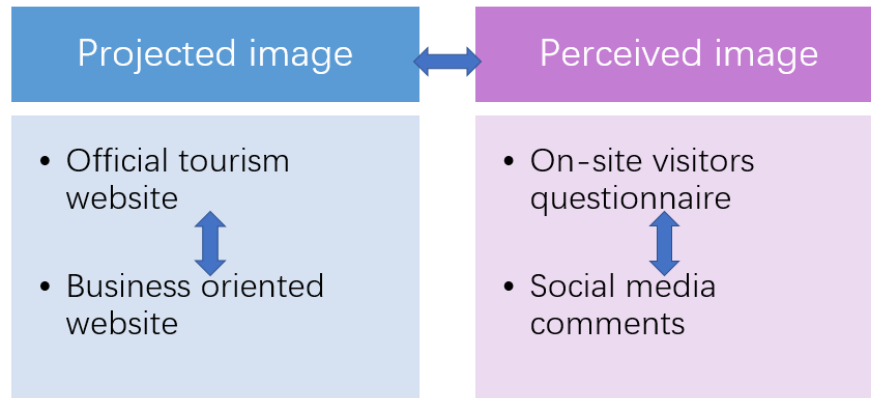


Figure 3. 3 Comparison between projected image and perceived image

According to (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), there are mainly three approaches of content analysis, which are conventional, directed and summative. Each of the approach has its advantages and limitations. The main differences lie in the coding method. They summarized it as shown in Table 3.7.

Table 3. 7 Major coding differences among three approaches to content analysis

Type of content analysis	Study Starts With	Timing of Defining Codes or Keywords	Source of Codes or Keywords
Conventional content analysis	Observation	Codes are defined during data analysis	Codes are derived from data
Directed content analysis	Theory	Codes are defined before and during data analysis	Codes are derived from theory or relevant research findings
Summative content analysis	Keywords	Keywords are identified before and during data analysis	Keywords are derived from interest of researchers or review of literature

In summary, conventional content analysis develops its codes totally based on the text itself, without pre-determined from any other sources. Its main advantage is that it could help generate maximum information from the text. But it fails to develop a theoretical understanding out of the text. Directed content adopts predefined codes from theories or relevant research findings. Its main advantage is that it has theory support, but its limitation is that this theory or research findings may have bias. Summative content analysis use keywords identified from previous literatures and discover the underlying meaning of contents. However, this approach is limited by the credibility of the pre-identified keywords as well as the terms used to replace them (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Comparing the three approaches, directed content analysis is deemed as most suitable for this research among the three approaches. The reasons for choosing this method is listed as follows. First, the website contents include enormous amount of information, it is time consuming to generate codes from the contents. Directed approach could help to comb the structure of information by predefining codes before or during the data analysis. Second, it is important to keep it in consistent with previous stages of research. So, we adopt the destination image measurement scale used in the questionnaire survey as the codes for content analysis.

Text content could be analyzed using Nvivo 11 Pro, a text-mining software program based on artificial neural networks. It is a powerful software for gaining rich insights from qualitative and mixed-methods data. First, projected image is obtained from official tourism website and business-oriented website. Second, on-site visitors' questionnaire and social media comments are achieved to generate perceived image from visitors. Then, the achieved website contents are put into Nvivo. After data cleaning, the text is coded according to the destination image measurement scale used at stage one. Web contents are coded and nodes are generated from different sources of websites. Analysis on the frequency of the nodes, sentiments and clusters of nodes are conducted to compare the projected and perceived image.

3.7 Research procedure

As shown in Figure 3.4, the research starts with questionnaire design. Onsite observation and pilot survey was conducted in Oct. 2015. Adjustment was made according

to the results of pilot survey. Then the finalized questionnaires were distributed at the 3 study sites.

In the second stage, interview questions were developed according to research questions and onsite observations. In-depth interviews with tourism organizers at three sites were followed.

The third stage is to collect online tourism information separately at official websites, business websites and social media websites to see whether there are any gaps between them.

The last stage is to combine all the data collected and conduct data analysis.

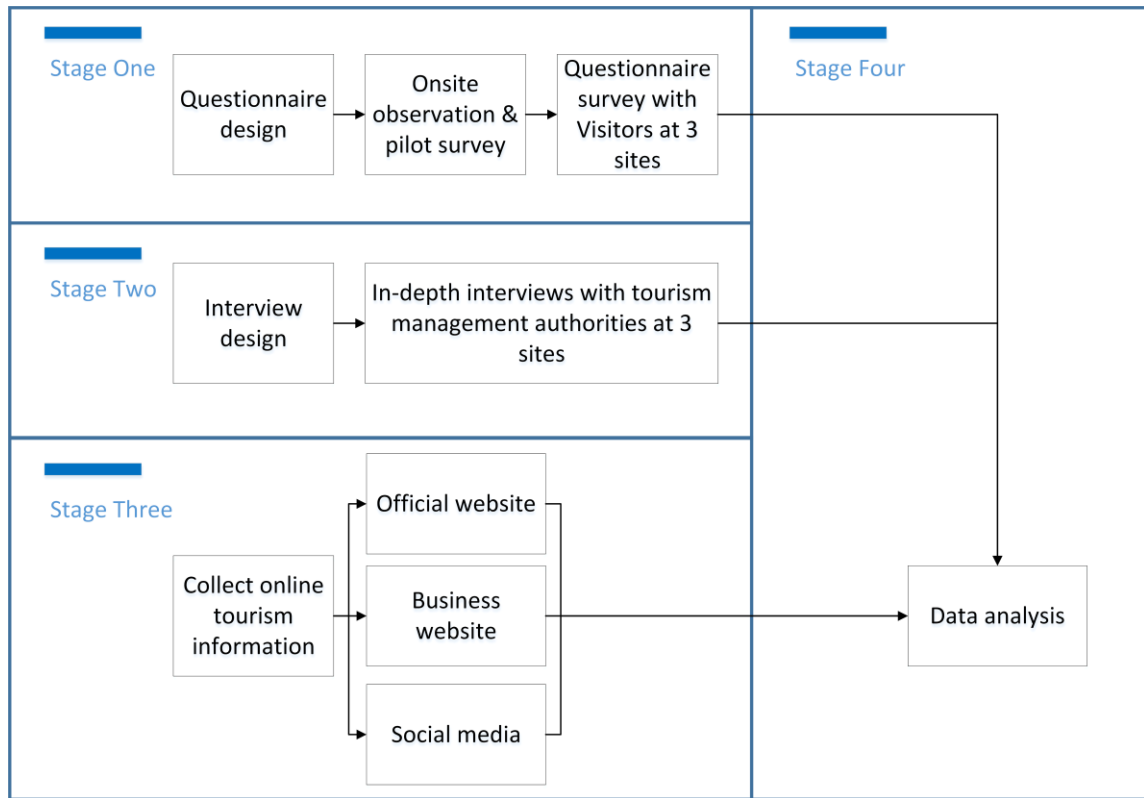


Figure 3. 4 Research procedure

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, research approach and detailed research procedures are discussed. Firstly, conceptual framework is proposed and adjusted according to literature reviews in chapter 2. Four stages of research were designated, and three study sites were selected based on the operational modes. Secondly, with the clarification of framework and study area, research methods were designed in terms of four stages of research, including both quantitative approach and qualitative approach (Table 3.8). Research procedure is discussed and visualized with a research flow chart. Thirdly, questionnaire is developed with clarification of sampling method and data collection approach. Next, interview questions are set up and semi-structure interview approach is adopted. After finalizing the research method in this chapter, the previous three chapters have already raised research questions and objectives, reviewed relevant literatures, and set up detailed research methods. The following step is to introduce the background of study sites and apply the research structure into the destination.

Table 3. 8 Research methods summary

Stage one:	Qualitative	Quantitative
Attributes of rural destination image	Survey with tourists	Factor analysis
Stage two:		Canonical correlation analysis (CCA)
Tourist motivations		
Tourist behaviors		Logistic regression
Stage three:	Qualitative	Quantitative
Projected image	In-depth interview with tourism organizers	Content analysis on official website as well as business website
Perceived image	Survey with tourists	Content analysis on UGC websites and on-site survey

Chapter 4 Background of study sites

As mentioned in Chapter two, there are generally three operational modes of rural tourism in China, which includes those supported by government, invested by companies and initiated by local residents. Three study sites in Yangtze River Delta (Figure 4.1) were chosen in Chapter Three based on the three operational modes. In each study site, in-depth interviews were conducted with the tourism proponents. In this Chapter, background information of the three study sites is introduced along with the interview contents. Yaxi town belongs to government-initiated type; Moganshan town belongs to company-initiated type while Dongping town belongs to the farmer initiated type of rural tourism business.



Figure 4. 1 Map of three study sites

The profiles of interviewees at the three sites are listed in Table 4.1. The interview target is the tourism proponent at each site. In Yaxi town, two staff who worked at Gaochun Tourism Administration as well as Cittaslow management committee were interviewed since they are quite familiar with the rural tourism development at Yaxi town.

In Moganshan, interviews are done with two tourism company managers: the manager of Yuanshe Homestay, which belongs to Xiangban group and the manager of Lingdi culture group. The two companies are neighbors and competitors. In Dongping town, interviews are done individually with an officer at town government and Mr. Li, owner of a Nongjiale business.

Table 4. 1 Profiles of interviewees

Town	Authority	Position
Yaxi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gaochun Tourism Administration ● Cittaslow Management Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cittaslow Management Committee member
Moganshan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Xiangban Group ● Lingdin Culture Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manager of Yuanshe Homestay ● Manager of Lingdi Culture Group
Dongping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dongping town government ● Dongping Town Nongjiale owner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Officer at Dongping town government ● Owner of a Nongjiale

This chapter includes two main parts: first, the background of the three sites is introduced; second, the three sites are identified according to history of the tourism development, tourism products, promotion, brand value and future plan.

4.1 Background of Yaxi Town, Gaochun District, Nanjing

Yaxi Town is located in the northeast of Gaochun District, Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province. It has a population of around 50,000. This town is composed of 6 administrative villages and covers an area of 115 square kilometers with a 48-kilometer-long scenic belt. It is rich in both natural and cultural resources. Natural resources include Youzishan National Park, bamboo forests, maple trees, sunflowers, lavender, pear trees, tea

plantation, etc. For cultural aspect, there are cultural heritages such as the Nancheng city relic, Memorial Hall of Zhang Xun.

This small town was nominated as a Cittaslow member by the chairman of Cittaslow organization in 2010 and became an official member of Cittaslow in Nov. 2010. Cittaslow is an international organization established in Italy in 1999, which aims to promote quality of life in towns by slowing down its overall pace, especially in the use of spaces and the flow of life and traffic through them (Pink, 2008). Cittaslow is a part of the slow movement, which is a popular culture trend started in Italy in 1986.

Yaxi is the first Cittaslow member in China, thus it became the national Cittaslow headquarter. The Chinese government has input great effort in promoting this brand. By now, there are 6 Cittaslow members in China and it becomes a popular trend for rural towns joining the Cittaslow network.

Before Yaxi join the Cittaslow network, it was branded as a rural destination for eco-tourism. However, this brand is not quite successful since many destinations branded themselves as “eco-tourism”. The chairman of Cittaslow organization was invited to visit Yaxi in 2010. He found that the local lifestyle and culture is in line with the standards of Cittaslow, thus, he recommended Yaxi to become a member of this international organization. At that time, few people were familiar with the concept of Cittaslow in China. In the beginning, the local government was concerned that whether this culture would fit in the “fast culture” in China, where people at that time only chase for high GDP growth and fast development. However, the local government considered joining this international organization might bring awareness to Yaxi and they decided to highlight the “slow culture” among the fast development country wide, which became a unique feature at that time.

Yaxi officially joined the Cittaslow network in Nov. 2010 and was reported as the first Cittaslow member in China by the Guangzhou Daily in 2012. Afterwards, many Chinese newspapers forwarded this message, thus, it brought quite a lot of awareness to this small town. With the fast-economic growth in China, people are paying more attention to the quality of life. More people are willing to slow down and enjoy health lifestyle.

With the prevalence of “Slow life” culture in recent years, more tourists prefer to experience the “slow” culture in their trip. The local government of Gaochun District focused on promoting Yaxi town as the first Cittaslow member in China and became the headquarter of Cittaslow national network. The government has made progress in the following aspects:

1) Establishment of Cittaslow Management Committee

The government established the Cittaslow Management Committee as a branch of Gaochun Tourism Administration in March 2012.

2) Policy enactment

The government conducted comprehensive planning and carried out a “Cittaslow Master Plan” to lead the development of Yaxi town, which include series of policies and regulations on tourism project design.

3) Infrastructure and facilities

Multi-layer road system was established, including footpath (7.9km), cycling track (11.4 km), sightseeing vehicle line (17 km). There are currently 300 bikes and 40 electric tour buses in the town. Three tourist reception centers were set up along with three parking lots in the main entrances of the town.

4) Tourism projects

The main tourism project is the construction of “Slow City Center”, which is located in the core area of Yaxi town. This project includes construction of a 600-meter commercial street selling souvenirs, and children’s entertainment area, culture demonstration zone, art studios, hotels and hostels, etc. This project is still in progress and will take around an area of 232mu (around 155 thousand square meters). Plantation of rape flowers, sunflowers, lavenders cover an area of 6200 mu (around 4 square kilometers).

Apart from that, the government also encourages investment of tourism projects by enterprises, such as cultural parks, orientation camps to enrich the tourism activities in the town. Universities are also involved. Nanjing Normal University participated in visual art design of tourism product packages. Southeast University

designed the electronic touch screen to demonstration tourist information at the tourist reception center.

5) Propaganda work



Figure 4. 2 Mascot of Yaxi Cittaslow

Source: http://www.sohu.com/a/131402127_167068

To promote Cittaslow, the government designed a mascot called “Man” (阿曼), which is a cartoon character of a piece of cloud wearing a snail hat (Figure. 4.2). The name means “slowness” in Chinese. The cloud represents clean air in the rural area and the snail hat represents the slow lifestyle. This mascot is not only built in many sculptures in Yaxi, but also appears in major tourism events and popular tourism destinations around Nanjing city.

6) Events

“Golden Flower Festival” is one famous annual event in Yaxi. It begins in March and ends in May. During this event, visitors can appreciate beautiful rape flowers everywhere, while watch performances in town. With the success of this event, the government holds more events such as photograph competition with the theme of Cittaslow, and “Flower Feast” with the theme of slow food, etc.

7) Enhance communication with other Cittaslow members;

Since Yaxi is the headquarter of Cittaslow national network in China. The local government spend much effort in expanding the members in China. Destinations who

intend to join Cittaslow needs to submit application through Yaxi. Yaxi has successfully helped other five destinations joining the network. In the meantime, Yaxi also actively communicates with Cittaslow members in other countries to bring more brand awareness.

4.2 Background of Moganshan Town, Deqing county, Huzhou

Moganshan town locates in the west of Deqing county, Huzhou city, Zhejiang province. The area covers 185.77 square kilometers. It is composed of 18 incorporated villages with a population of around 31 thousand residents. The tourism resource is rich, including both natural environment and cultural attractions. Mogan Mount is one famous mountain and 4A tourism attraction in China. There are large areas of bamboo planted all over the mountain as well as many rare plants, such as Chinese ilex, Ginkgo biloba, Taxus, etc. For cultural aspects, the town preserves quite good culture of Chinese Republic era. There are a bunch of summer houses which were constructed in that period for the previous Chinese leaders and rich people. These villas have been revitalized and transformed into museums.

Because of the rich tourism resources, Moganshan town attracts the investments from many enterprises. “Moganshan Homestay” is a collective name for the homestays in Deqing county of Huzhou, Zhejiang. It mainly covers Moganshan Town and some areas such as Wukang Street, Wuyang Street and Tunxi Street. During the Republic of China, Moganshan recorded the use of residential houses to receive tourists. In the 1920s, it became a summer resort in the Yangtze River Delta. At that time, a group of foreign businessmen built villas here. Moganshan was called Zhejiang’s “Shanghai Beach”, because it attracts lots of high-income residents in Shanghai. Later, the Chinese began to build villas in Moganshan, and many celebrity villas have remained in the mountains. In the 1980s, Moganshan was also a famous summer resort in China, but it changed from a boom to a decline. In 2002, the development of the “Yi Garden (颐园)” in Moganshan was considered the first homestay in the modern sense.

In 2007, Gao Tiancheng from South Africa rented 8 old houses in Sanjiuwu and transformed it into a boutique homestay “Naked Heart Township (裸心乡)”, becoming the first “Yangjiale (洋家乐)”, which literally means happy foreign farmers. This is a foreign style Nongjiale, which is operated by foreigners. It opened the prelude to the rapid development of Moganshan Homestay. Moganshan town is thus honored as the source of Yangjiale. Gao Tiancheng invested another 150 million yuan to establish a “Naked Heart Valley (裸心谷)” for a resort for foreign tourists. Moganshan’s Yangjiale enjoyed a good

reputation. The success of “Naked Heart Township” and “Naked Heart Valley” attracted many foreigners from France, Britain, Belgium, Denmark, South Korea and so on to invest in Yangjiale in Moganshan, and also attracted social capital to invest in Moganshan.

Apart from foreign investment, many Chinese enterprises also come in. These companies would like to create an atmosphere of home for the tourists and they are located in the rural area which provide opportunities for visitors to be close to nature and local communities. Thus, they are all recognized as “Homestay”. “Moganshan Homestay” becomes a famous brand. With naked heart town, French mountain home, hidden. Mogan, Xipo No. 29 and other brands have risen rapidly. Moganshan Homestay, represented by Yangjiale, is well-known at home and abroad. In 2012, Moganshan was selected by the New York Times as “a must-go before the Great Wall.” One of the featured places” and “one of the 45 places worth visiting in the world”.

By 2017, there are around 400 Homestays which are officially registered and operated in Moganshan Town. One of the most famous company is the Xiangban Group lead by Mr. Zhu Shengxuan. Mr. Zhu’s team established an organization called “Homestay Union” (宿盟) in 2015. It is the first platform for companies who operate rural tourism business in China. It relies on social media, such as Wechat public account and travel blogs to promote for the members. Xiangban Group owns several sub-brands of Xiangban Group. The group owns a wide range of business, including assets management, homestay, nature education, social media, architecture design and supporting networks like rural innovation institution. The Xiangban Group currently have seven sub-brands (Figure. 4.3) in total, which are Shanghai Yuan Pu (原圃), Tree Wow (树蛙), Pu Homes(圃舍), Yuan She (原舍), Green Joy (綠樂園), Ruralmate BnB Alliance (鄉關何宿) and OUDG (東聯設計集團). The group also have a lot of chain business in other places in China. They have carried out a series of projects in China, including Moganshan project, Kunshan project, Sujia project, etc. And these projects vary in terms of themes and target markets.



Figure 4. 3 Sub-brands of Xiangban Group

4.3 Background of Dongping Town, Chongming county, Shanghai

Chongming island is known as the “backyard of Shanghai” because of its well reserved nature environment and rich biodiversity. The island owns two 4A-class attractions and four 3A-class attractions. There are mainly three tourism clusters in the island - East Chongming, Central Chongming and West Chongming. East Chongming features Dongtan Wetland Park and agritainment options in Yingdong Village and Nanjiang Village. Central Chongming features Dongping National Forest Park, agritainment options at Qianwei Village, Gaojia Zhuangyuan and Ruihua Orchard, Genbao Football Base, Chongming Xuegong (Chongming Museum), Jinaoshan Park, Shou’an Temple and Sanmin Cultural Village. West Chongming offers Mingzhu Lake Park, Xiling Resort, Xisha Wetland and agritainment at Lugang Village. Early in 2001, the state council positioned Chongming island as an “eco-island” in the development and plan 1999-2020. In 2017, The city’s top planning body and the Chongming government jointly released the plan for the island’s development through 2040 to achieve the aim of becoming a “world class ecological island.”

Dongping town is located in the northern central part of Chongming island. It is composed of four farmlands and located near the Dongping National Forest Park. The total area is 119.7 square kilometers with a population of around 25,000. It is awarded as “unique town” in 2017, and it is by now the only town in Chongming island that has got this award. The town government considers rural tourism to be the polar industry, and focus developing four types of major tourism products: cultural tourism, sport tourism, theme park and Nongjiale.

Dongping town used to be agricultural farms before 2008. Now the farms are transformed into Dongping National Forest Park. Dongping Forest Farm was established in 1959, opened to the public in 1989, and became a nationally-protected area in 1993. It

is Shanghai's largest forest park, with planted green plants covering 3.55 square kilometers (1.37 sq meter). It is one famous landmark of Chongming and is one of the most popular tourist attractions on the island. Local residents started “happy farmers” business around this forest park. The major attractions are rural landscape, flower and fauna, traditional dishes, rural homestays.

From the background of the three study sites, it could be seen that Yaxi town is a pioneer in term of Cittaslow in China, which is a government decision regarding destination branding. Thus, it is selected as a representative of government-initiated rural tourism destination. Moganshan town is famous for company invested homestays, and act as the leader in homestay business in China, this it is regarded as a representative of company-initiated rural tourism destinations. Dongping town locates in Chongming Island, which is known as the back garden of Shanghai. Nongjiale business is popular in Dongping, thus it is selected as a representative of local famer-initiated rural tourism destination. The following section compares the three types of rural tourism business utilizing the three representatives.

4.4 Comparison of three sites

As indicated in Chapter Three, thematic analysis is conducted on the transcript of interviews in the three sites. Five major aspects were compared, which are history of tourism development; tourism products; promotion; brand value and future plan. Five charts are generated based on thematic analysis, in which the yellow dots represent the three towns while the red dots demonstrate the common areas of the topics mentioned during the interviews. The arrows point to the child nodes which belongs to the main topics.

4.4.1 History of tourism development

Figure 4.4 demonstrates the history of tourism development in the three sites, which are Yaxi, Moganshan and Dongping town. Three common features are generated from the interview, which are natural resource, government and local development.

First, it could be seen that the natural resource is the foundation of rural tourism development. All of the three sites are heavily related to natural resources. Ecology is

important for Moganshan and Yaxi town during their development. Moganshan highlights the eco-cottage and Yaxi develops the eco-tour. As for Dongping town, it used to be a forest farm and now is transformed to Dongping national forest. Based on this forest park, local residents gradually begin to develop Nongjiale.

Second, the government plays an essential role in tourism development. However, the role of government is different in the three types of rural tourism business. In Yaxi town, the local government is responsible for infrastructure construction, mainly in transportation. Government projects are conducted in the town. And the government directly invests in the tourism development and participates in the planning process. The government cares about the local livelihood and promotes the slow lifestyle. The successful application of joining Cittaslow organization helped to raise the awareness of Yaxi. Cittaslow as one international brand now becomes an asset. The government participated in the tourism development in Moganshan in a different way. Since the companies initiated the tourism business in Moganshan, the government has been supervising their operation instead of directly investing in the business. The companies rent collective lands from the government and built eco-cottages in the town because of the well-protected ecology. In Dongping town, the role of government in rural tourism business is relatively weak than the other two. Most of the Nongjiale in Dongping are initiated by the local farmers and operated by family members.

Local development issue is mentioned in the history of tourism development in Yaxi and Dongping town. Tourism could help with economic development, increase local GDP. And it also affects the local industrial structure. In Dongping town, agriculture and fishing used to be the major industry, but with the development of “happy farmers”, service industry takes more share in the local industrial structure. However, in Moganshan, local development seems not to be a major concern. The business is initiated by the investment of companies, especially those foreigners who work in Shanghai and hope to spend summer vacation in a natural environment. They rent the land from local farmers and built “eco-cottages”, which are environmental friendly buildings in Moganshan.

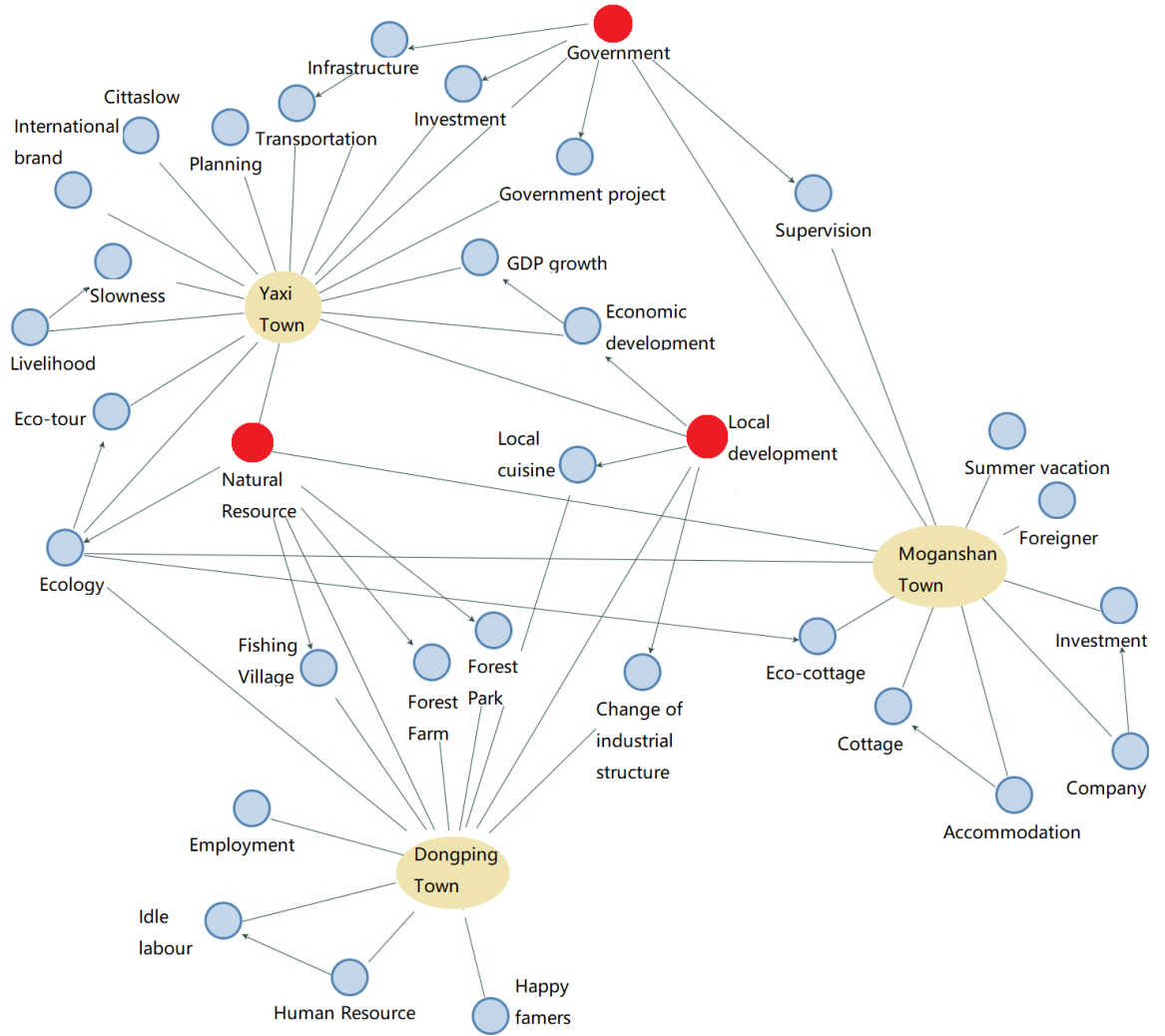


Figure 4. 4 History of tourism development in the three sites

4.4.2 Tourism products

Tourism products are one of the key elements which attract tourists by fulfilling their needs to particular destinations (Benur & Bramwell, 2015). For rural tourism, the product characteristics are demonstrated in Figure 4.5. It shows the current tourism products at the three sites. It could be seen that the products are heavily related to each other. They share common features of natural resource, festival and activity.

The rich natural resource is the most common character among the three sites, which is an advantage of rural tourism. Urban residents are mostly attracted by the natural resources in the rural environment. For example, Dongping town develops eco-tours since they branded Chongming island as an “eco-island”.

Different activities are developed based on the natural resources in each site. For example, in Dongping town, they provide fishing activities because the fishing industry is quite developed in Chongming island. Farm work is a common activity in Dongping and Moganshan since there are large areas of farmlands in the towns.

Festival is a common product in Yaxi and Dongping town. They organize different festivals according to local culture and resource. For instance, the crab festival is very popular in Yaxi since the crab is one famous local dish. Apart from the common products, there is one unique character in tourism product structure in Moganshan. There is a variety of business involved, such as homestay, design, education, social media operation, cultural park, etc. It is determined by the nature of the company since the companies usually have more connections with different industries.

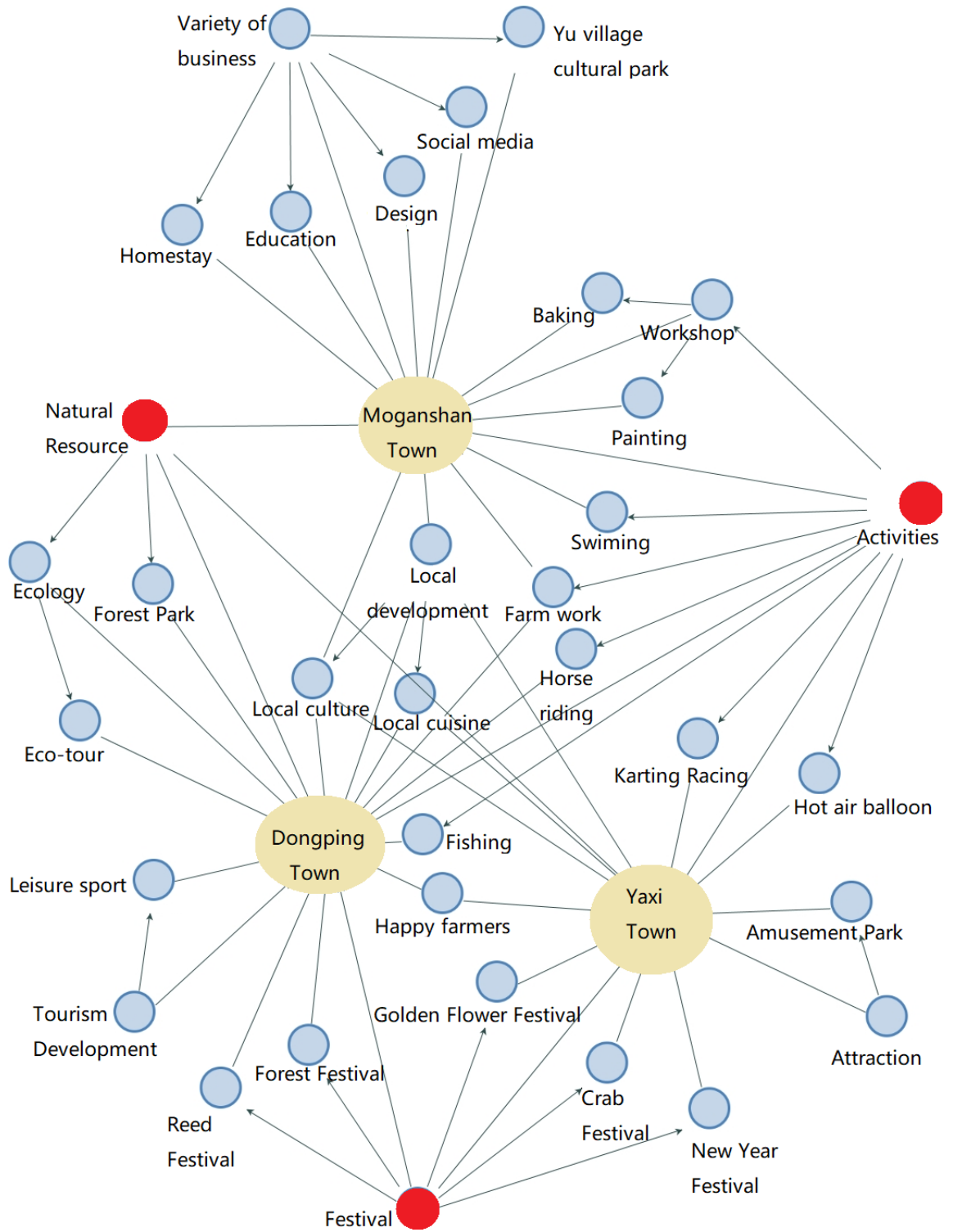


Figure 4. 5 Tourism products in the three sites

4.4.3 Promotion

The three destinations have paid many efforts on promotion work (Figure. 4.6). Each site has its unique approach while they share common characters. All of the three sites use website platform for marketing. Website like WUBA info (58 同城), Public comment (大众点评), Ctrip (携程), Qunar (去哪儿) are focused on the direct sales of food and accommodation. While social media, such as wechat public account is focused on advertising for the activities and events happened in the destinations.

Apart from website platform, Yaxi town relies more on traditional marketing approaches, such as newspaper, CCTV documentary on TV. The government plays an important role in promotion. Tourism administration would like to differentiate Yaxi from other rural tourism destinations, so they joined the Cittaslow organization to obtain an international brand. The Cittaslow management committee is in charge of the promotion job. As the headquarter of Cittaslow in China, the committee deals with applications of joining this organization in China, through which more people get to know the brand.

For Dongping and Moganshan, they depend more on word-of-mouth. For Dongping town, they highlight the natural resource because they brand the island as “Eco-island”. For Moganshan, they cooperate with each other and have created an online platform for homestay business called Rural B&B Alliance.

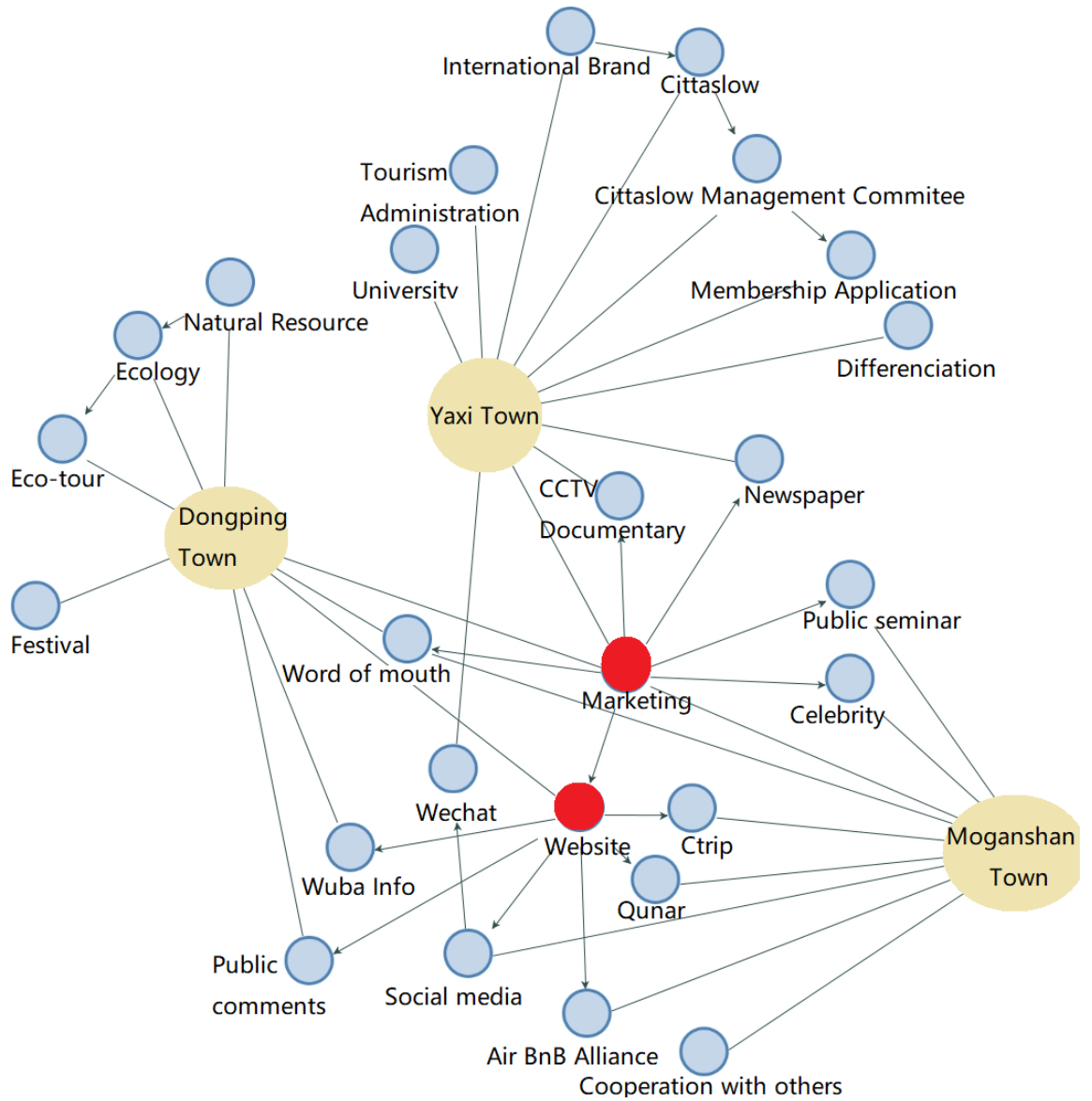


Figure 4. 6 Promotion of destinations in the three sites

4.4.4 Brand value

When talking about “what could the brand bring to the destination”, the three sites all mentioned about bring awareness and boost local development (Figure. 4.7). Yaxi and Dongping town seem to have more common field. They both value the international brand they have obtained (Cittaslow member) or trying to pursue (International eco-island). They consider the brand could boost local development in terms of economic, local product development, change of industrial structure and influence power in the country and worldwide.

Each site has its own concerns. For Yaxi town, the government cares more about the local livelihood and tries to improve the life quality. Green development, Children’s education and tourism development are supposed to be important as well. For Dongping town, the local famers hope the brand could improve its destination competitiveness, service quality, and management. For Moganshan town, the company cares less about local development and more about profit. They hope to expand the market, gain privilege pricing, and open chain stores. They also hope to connect with other industries to expand their business. For example, Xianbang Group owns variety of business apart from accommodation, such as design and consultant. The Moganshan homestay brand not only benefit their accommodation business, it could help bring awareness to their other business as well.

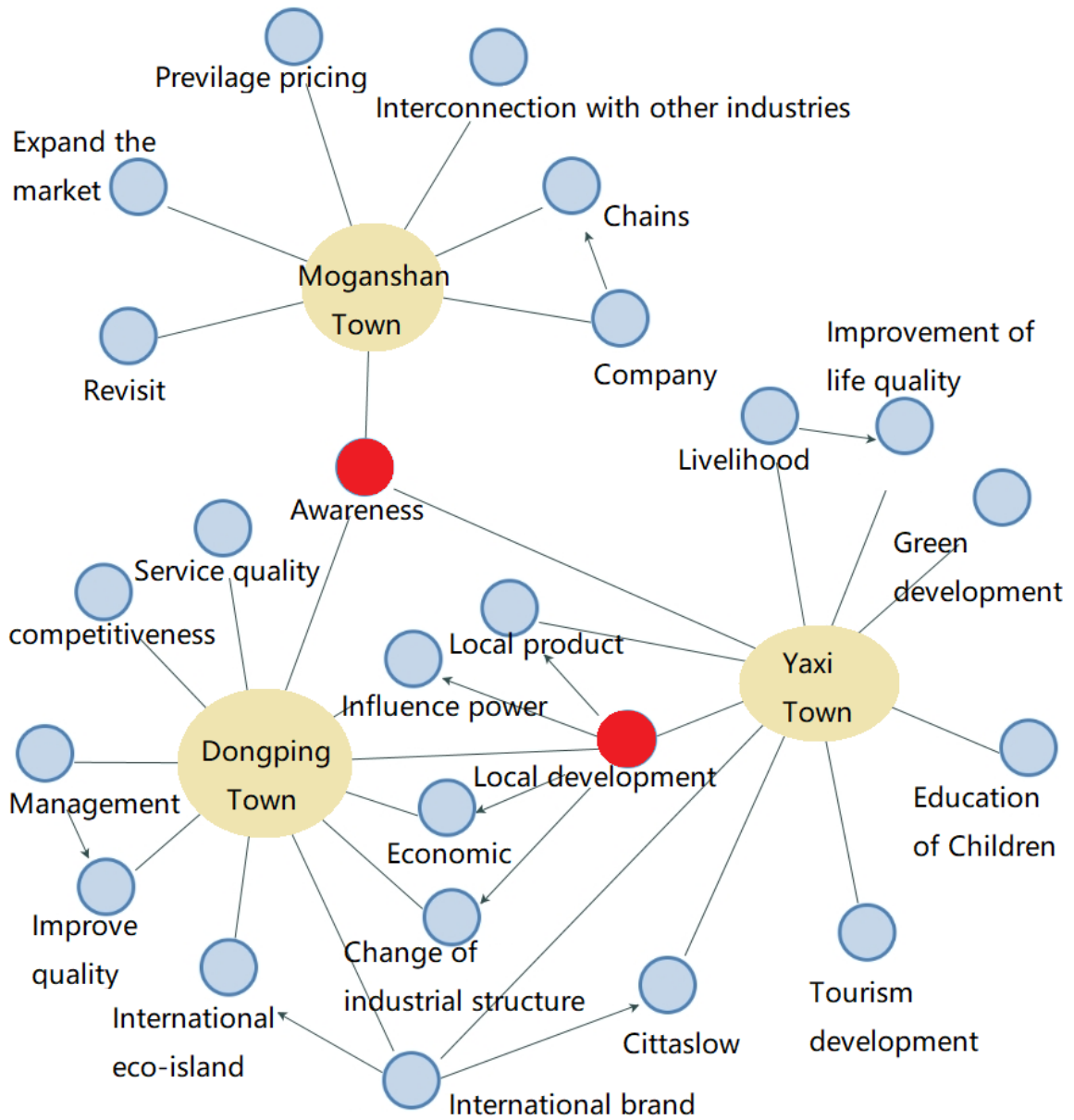


Figure 4. 7 Brand value in the three sites

4.4.5 Future plan

Figure 4.8 shows the future plan of the three sites. For Yaxi town, the government plan to diversify the tourism industry and specify the market. Tourism complex and pastoral complex become the new focus in tourism development. The government will continue to emphasize the Cittaslow brand and develop around this theme, such as the construction of Cittaslow museum for a demonstration of the Cittaslow culture and development in China.

More activities will be developed, such as workshops, recreational vehicle. It is noticeable that there is a trend of integration in the development of Yaxi. The government encourage more companies to take part in the tourism business. For example, the government has signed a contract with the BAU design company in Australia for the project of Cittaslow town. (http://www.bau.com.au/bau487_nanjing-yaxi-citta-slow/)

For Dongping town, it shares many common features with Yaxi since the government will play a more important role in the future plan. The spatial structure is proposed to be “One Center, three nodes, and one route.” Dongping town center will be designated as the core area and serves as the center of tourism complex. “Three nodes” refer to “Happy farmers,” leisure sport in forest park and theme park. These will become the development focus in the future. “One route” means a recreational belt connecting the “one center” and “three nodes.” This belt is supposed to combine the resources and boost the tourism development in Dongping town. Moganshan town plans to enhance its current management in homestay business. They plan to set up standards for homestay business and improve the service quality. They will continue to revitalize more old village houses. To increase income, they hope to obtain more investment in their own business and in the

same time they hope to outsource some part of business to other companies. Then they could collect rent from tenants.

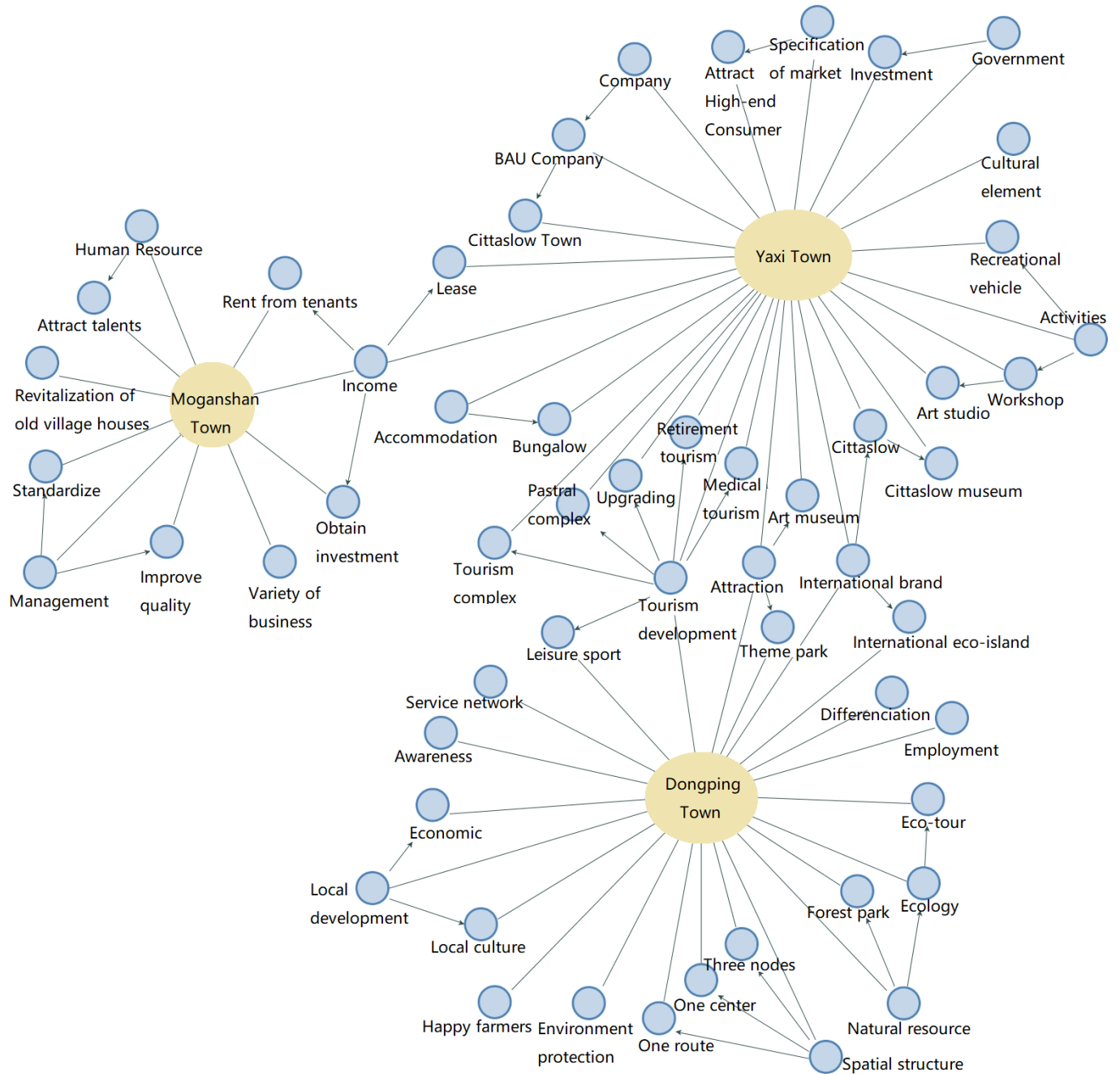


Figure 4. 8 Future plan of the three sites

4.5 Summary

This chapter introduces the three study sites and utilized them as representatives of the three types of rural tourism destinations. In-depth interview with the tourism proponent at each site provides information in five main aspects, which are history of rural tourism development, tourism products, promotion, brand value, and future plan.

By comparing the three types of rural destinations, the five aspects could be concluded as following: they started their business based on the rich natural resources. The the government function is different. It plays an essential role in starting the tourism business in Yaxi; it supervises the tourism business in Moganshan; while the government had a weak influence at the initial stage of tourism development in Dongping. The current tourism products focus on emphasizing local natural resources, festivals and activities. All the three sites attach great importance to online marketing as an effective approach to promote the destination. As for brand value, the major benefits are bringing awareness and boosting local development. In their future plan, it is perceived that future direction of the three types of business are different, which means they have paid attention to differentiate their destinations with others. The government will play a more important role in rural tourism development and cooperation between different stakeholders is another trend.

Chapter 5 Results and discussions: rural destination image factors

This Chapter is mainly composed of three parts. The first part includes the descriptive analysis of tourist characteristics and visitation information; the second part aims to evaluate the current brand of the three study sites by conducting Familiarity and Favorability Analysis; the last part investigates the rural destination image attributes in China, especially for those located in the suburban areas. PCA is utilized to generate major factors. Based on the major image factors, Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) are conducted.

5.1 Reliability test

Before data analysis, there is the need to ensure the reliability of the data set by conducting reliability test (Cronbach, 1951, 2016). Gliem & Gliem (2003) argued that it is necessary to test the internal consistency against Cronbach's alpha when the data is in Likert scales.

In this research, reliability test is conducted, and Cronbach's coefficients of the Likert-scale variables are reported, which include "destination image importance", "destination image performance" and "travel motivation". According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black (1998), the value of 0.70 for Cronbach's coefficient is the minimum standard of passing reliability test. The results are shown in Table 5.1 and it can be seen that the Cronbach's alpha is larger than 0.70 for all the variables in the questionnaire collected from all three study sites. Most of the variables tested have obtained a Cronbach's alpha larger than 0.80, indicating that the internal consistency of the data is quite good.

Table 5. 1 Cronbach's coefficients of questionnaire data in three study sites

Variables	Cronbach's alpha		
	Yaxi town	Moganshan town	Dongping town
Destination image importance	0.930**	0.925**	0.971**
Destination image performance	0.940**	0.924**	0.972**
Travel motivation	0.899**	0.868**	0.939**

** Significant level of $p < 0.01$

5.2 Tourist demographic characteristics and visitation information

This research collected 503 responses in total from the three study sites. This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents (Table 5.2). It can be seen that the three groups of tourists share a number of common features. All the three groups have shown generally even distribution in gender; most of them are well educated with an average of a bachelor degree; majority are employed with monthly income level at above RMB8000. As for the age group, the majority of tourists are 21 to 30 years old in Moganshan and Dongping town while the major age group in Yaxi town is 41-50 years old.

Table 5. 2 Tourist Demographic Characteristics in the three study sites

		Yaxi (n=152)		Moganshan (n=159)		Dongping (n=192)	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	81	54.7	79	50	77	41.4
	Female	67	45.3	79	50	109	58.6
	Total	148	100	158	100	186	96.9
Age	Below 20	6	4.1	7	4.5	1	0.5
	21-30	21	14.5	76	48.4	100	54.9
	31-40	50	34.5	44	28	56	30.8
	41-50	62	42.8	27	17.2	21	11.5
	51-60	3	2.1	1	0.6	4	2.2
	Above 60	3	2.1	2	1.3	0	0
	Total	145	100	157	100	182	100
Education	Primary school or below	4	2.8	4	2.6	1	.6
	Junior secondary	5	3.8	9	6.0	4	2.2
	Senior secondary	6	4.2	13	8.6	11	6.1
	Vocational education	10	7.0	7	4.6	11	6.1
	Bachelor degree	96	67.1	96	63.6	126	70.0
	Postgraduate or above	22	15.4	22	14.6	27	15.0
	Total	143	100	151	100	180	100
Working status	Employed	121	79.6	127	81.4	139	75.5
	Unemployed	4	2.6	1	0.6	5	2.7
	Retired	10	6.6	6	3.8	2	1.1
	Student	17	11.2	18	11.5	19	10.3
	Others	0	0	4	2.6	19	10.3
	Total	152	100	156	100	184	100
Monthly income (RMB)	Below 4000	25	18	43	29.9	6	3.4
	4000-5000	13	9.4	21	14.6	5	2.8
	5000-6000	17	12.2	15	10.4	34	19.2
	6000-7000	31	22.3	13	9	29	16.4
	7000-8000	7	5	9	6.3	30	16.9
	Above 8000	46	33.1	43	29.9	73	41.2
	Total	139	100	144	100	177	100

As shown in Table 5.3, the majority of the tourists choose to visit the destination by car. The major sources of information are Internet and friends and relatives, however, Yaxi and Moganshan rely more on internet promotion than Dongping while Dongping depends more on word-of-mouth than the other two towns. Most of the visitors are first-time visitors for all the three sites. As for the duration of stay, most of the visitors choose to stay for 1 day in Yaxi and Dongping town while visitors tend to stay longer (on average 2 days) in Moganshan town. Most of the visitors spend less than RMB500 in Yaxi and Dongping town while visitors to Moganshan town spend much more (more than RMB1000) than in the other two towns.

Table 5. 3 Tourist visitation information

		Yaxi (n=152)		Moganshan (n=159)		Dongping (n=192)	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Travel mode	By car	120	78.9	139	89.7	118	63.1
	By bus	32	21.1	8	5.2	43	23.0
	By air	0	0	0	0	22	11.8
	By train	0	0	8	5.2	1	0.5
	Others	0	0	0	0	3	1.6
Source of information	Internet	71	46.7	61	38.6	49	25.7
	Books and newspaper	0	0	12	7.6	4	2.1
	TV	6	3.9	16	10.1	29	15.2
	Friends and relatives	72	47.4	57	36.1	98	51.3
	Travel agency	0	0	7	4.4	4	2.1
	Fairs and/or exhibitions	3	2.0	5	3.2	7	3.7
	others	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of visit	One time	62	40.8	113	71.5	71	37.2
	Two times	61	40.1	26	16.5	55	28.8
	More than three times	29	19.1	19	12	65	34
Duration of stay	1 day	136	89.5	19	11.9	183	95.3
	2 days	16	10.5	114	71.7	9	4.7
	More than 3 days	0	0	26	16.4	0	0
Expenditure (RMB) at the destination	Less than 500	140	92.1	5	3.1	187	97.4
	500-1000	12	7.9	73	45.9	5	2.6
	More than 1000	0	0	81	50.9	0	0

Based on the descriptive analysis, it could be seen that the rural visitors share many common traits regarding tourist characteristics and visitation information. Moganshan town stands out in terms of visitors' duration of stay and expenditure at the destination. Generally speaking, visitors stay longer and spend more in Moganshan than the other two towns.

5.3 Familiarity and Favorability Analysis of current brand in the destination

Familiarity and Favorability analysis is useful for organizations to track brand performance (Gregory, Paladino, & Akman, 2009) and it is also applied in measuring destination brand performance (Chan, Peters, & Marafa, 2015). Respondents were asked to rate on two statements in the questionnaire survey to understand the current branding effect of the three rural destinations. The first statement is "I am familiar with the current brand of Yaxi/Moganshan/Dongping" while the second statement is "I like the current brand of Yaxi/Moganshan/Dongping". Both two statements are in 7-point Likert scale, in which 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 7 represents "strongly agree". The results are demonstrated in Table 5.4, from which it could be seen that the ratings of the current brands are relatively low (none of them are rated above 5).

Table 5. 4 Familiarity and Favorability Analysis of the current destination brand

	Yaxi (n=152)	Moganshan (n=159)	Dongping (n=192)
Familiar with the current brand	Mean=3.6 S.D.=1.34	Mean=4.44 S.D.= 0.54	Mean=3.02 S.D.=1.01
Favorable towards the current brand	Mean=4.72 S.D.= 1.29	Mean=4.53 S.D.=0.82	Mean=3.59 S.D.=0.89

Figure 5.1 demonstrates the ratings in a matrix format with X axis representing favorability ratings and Y axis representing familiarity ratings, which divides the brand performance into four quadrants. The figure shows that the three towns are located in three

different quadrants, which means the three sites have different brand performance. Moganshan is perceived to own a leading brand, with relatively high ratings on both familiarity (Mean=4.44) and favorability (Mean=4.53); Yaxi earns high familiarity rating but low favorability rating, thus it is regarded as a rebounding brand; Dongping town's current brand is challenged since the ratings of both familiarity and favorability are low. Figure 5.1 allows us to view the brand performance in a direct way. Although the three sites are all located in the suburban area in Yangtze River Delta and share a lot in common in terms of geographical characteristics and natural resources, the brand performance is distinct from each other. To figure out what forms the differences in brand performance, there is a need to find the latent variables of rural destination image attributes in the suburban areas in China.

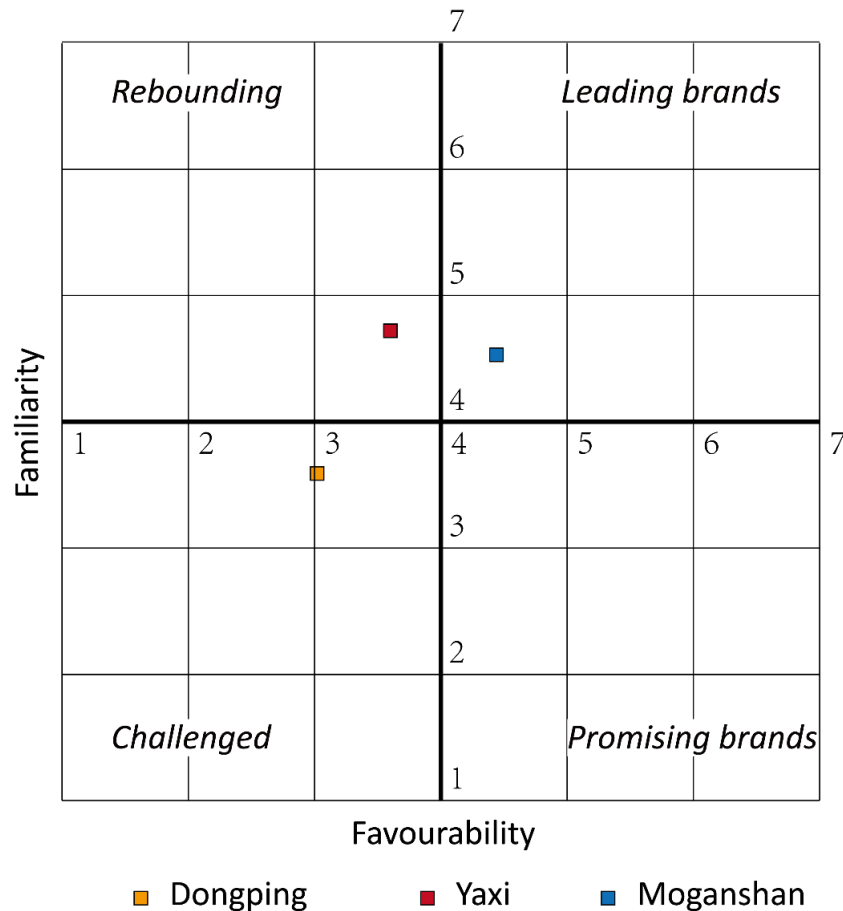


Figure 5. 1 Familiarity and Favorability Grid of the current destination brand

5.4 Rural destination image factors

As mentioned in Chapter Two, scholars argue that destination overall image is mainly composed of cognitive and affective evaluations. This research aims to find latent variables which influence cognitive evaluation and affective evaluation in rural destinations in China.

As for the cognitive evaluations, the measurement attributes from previous literatures are summarized into four major aspects: natural environment, social environment and culture, general infrastructure and tourism infrastructure, including 20 attributes in total. As for affective evaluations, we would like to use affective image scales developed by Russel (1980). The scale included 4 dimensions: Arousing-Sleepy, Pleasant-Unpleasant, Exciting-Gloomy, and Relaxing-Distressing. In this regard, there are in total 24 attributes for destination image.

Stevens (2009) considered a loading to be “large” when the factor loading exceeds 0.40. In this study, we adopt the same criteria and delete those factors with factor loadings less than 0.40. This research adopts the following criteria: (1) factor loading equal to or above 0.40, (2) eigenvalues equal to or above 1.0, and (3) results of the factor analysis explaining at least 60% of the total variance.

The study further employed a multi-attribute approach to measure rural destination image. As mentioned earlier, destination image was measured using a 24-item scale. PCA was employed with a typical orthogonal rotation (varimax). 7 items were removed because the factor loadings were less than 0.40 (Cairney, 2003). 4 factors are identified after conducting EFA on the importance of destination image attributes, explaining around 64% of the total variance.

Nunnally (1978) suggested that the cut-off criterion of Crobach’s alpha should be 0.7. According to this criterion, all the four identified factors passed this requirement, which are factor 1: “supporting facilities” (7 items, $\alpha=0.927$), factor 2: “tourism product” (8 items, $\alpha=0.805$), factor 3: “relaxation” (2 items, $\alpha=0.896$) and factor 4: “excitement” (2 items, $\alpha=0.958$).

It could be seen in Table 5.5 that the four factors have revealed unique characters of rural tourism. In supporting facilities, accommodation and restaurant are the major focuses.

Rural tourists pay more attention to whether there are enough choices of hotels, homestays, Nongjiale and whether they are comfortable to stay. They also require clean dining environment. Besides, they need safe travel environment and sufficient health services, such as clinics, pharmacies, etc. As for tourism product, comparing to urban tourism, rural tourism products rely more on natural resources, including clean air, scenery and rural landscape. Besides, the local culture is another major resource for tourism product. Tourists are attracted by the hospitality of local people as well as delicious local cuisine. The other two factors of rural destination image are relaxation and excitement. The four major factors have reflected the rural destination image in suburban areas in China.

Table 5. 5 Factor analysis of rural destination image

Variables	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
Accommodation is comfortable	0.828			
Sufficient choices of accommodation	0.803			
Price of accommodation is reasonable	0.755			
Health services are sufficient	0.560	0.430		
Restaurant is hygienic	0.556		0.434	
Sufficient choices of restaurant	0.552	0.415		
High level of safety for tourism	0.548	0.429		
Clear water		0.691		
Scenery and natural landscape		0.641		
Friendly and warm people		0.593		
Fresh air		0.552	0.405	
Delicious Local cuisine		0.520		
Good interpretation	0.434	0.514		
Biodiversity		0.463		
Inhabitants have interesting life style and traditions		0.411		
Destination is relaxing			0.787	
Destination is pleasant			0.709	0.432
Destination is exciting				0.838
Destination is arousing				0.810
Eigenvalue	5.154	4.425	3.030	2.693
Explained variance (%)	21.474	18.436	12.626	11.223
Accumulated variance (%)	21.474	39.911	52.537	63.76

Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.^a

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

To confirm whether those variables are loaded on each factor correctly, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is conducted afterwards. Haig (2005) mentioned that EFA is suitable to investigate on empirical phenomena by generating factorial hypotheses while CFA could help to confirm on the factorial hypotheses. SPSS AMOS is used to perform CFA based on the results of EFA. The correlation coefficients (Figure 5.2) demonstrate that each variable is strongly related to the factor which it belongs to. Goodness-of-fit (GFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) measures are evaluated. The GFI (ranges from 0 to 1) estimates the amount of variance explained by the models, and values larger than 0.80 indicate an acceptable fit. The CFA shows a GFI value of 0.889 thus we consider the result to be acceptable.

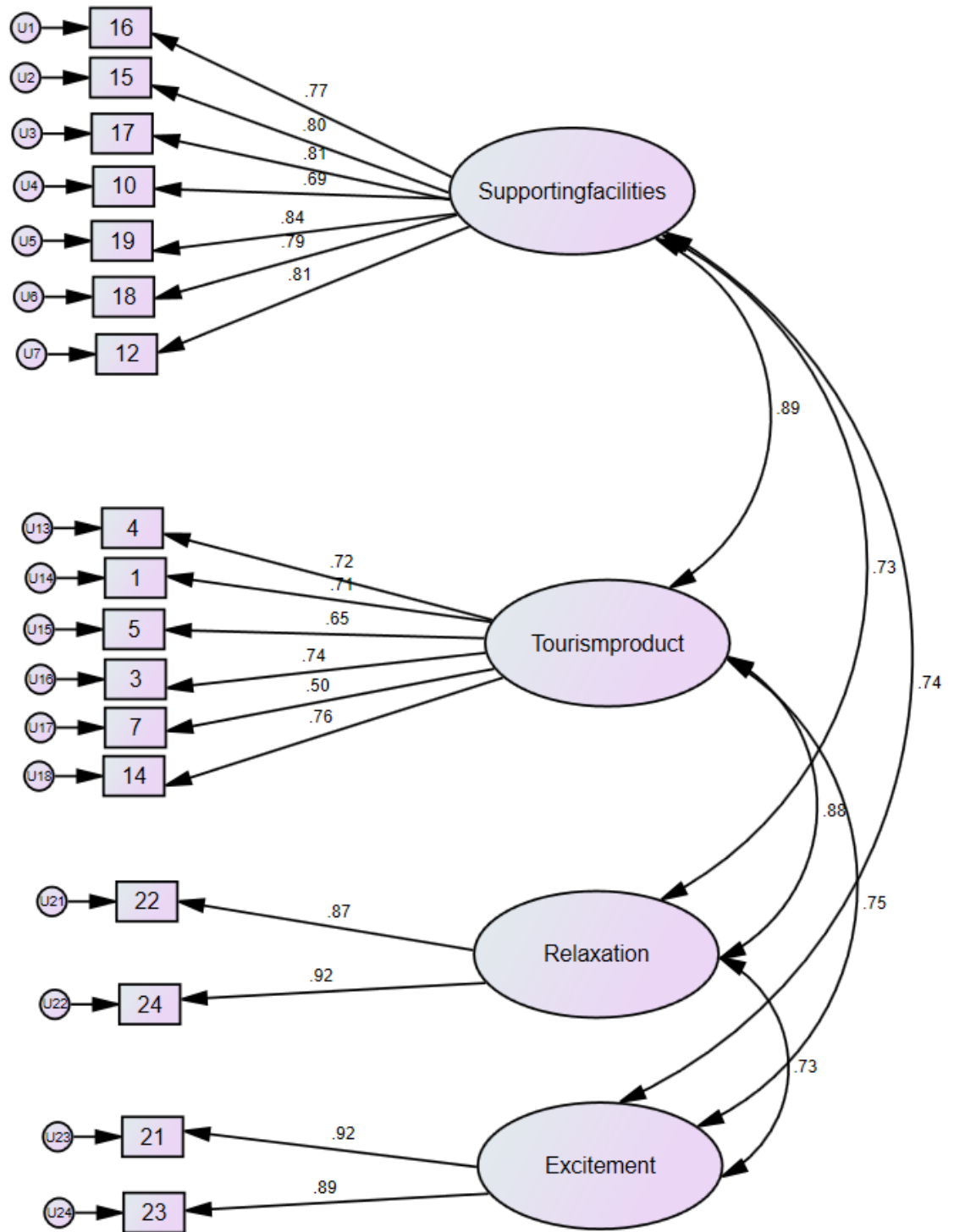


Figure 5. 2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis of rural destination image factors
 Notes: P=0.000; GFI=0.889; NNFI=0.880; CFI=0.788; RMSEA=0.054; AVE=0.678

From the EFA and CFA result, it could be concluded that the major factors of rural destination image in rural China are supporting facilities, tourism product, relaxation and excitement. This demonstrates that affective evaluations play an important role in the rural image.

5.5 Importance-performance analysis of rural destination image factors

IPA is very popular in measuring customer satisfaction and is widely used in tourism studies (Oh, 2001). By conducting IPA, results could be presented in a two-dimensional grid with strategic suggestions in four quadrants (Martilla & James, 1977). The matrix is formed with two dimensions: “importance” as the X axis and “performance” as the Y axis. The central tendency of importance and performance take the median as the slit for the matrix, which divide the matrix into four quadrants. It is recommended to use the median, instead of mean values for the importance axis when there is relatively a small amount of variance or the data sets show a non-normal distribution pattern (Martilla & James, 1977; Oh, 2001). Quadrant I contains items with high importance but low performance, which means these aspects should be improved with priority. Quadrant II represents the aspects with high values in both importance and performance ratings. On the contrary, Quadrant III demonstrates those with both low importance and performance. Quadrant IV includes aspects with high performance but low importance. According to the features of the four quadrants, they are named as “Quadrant I: Concentrate Here”, “Quadrant II: Keep up the good work”, “Quadrant III: Lower priority” and “Quadrant IV: Possible overkill” (Figure 5.3).

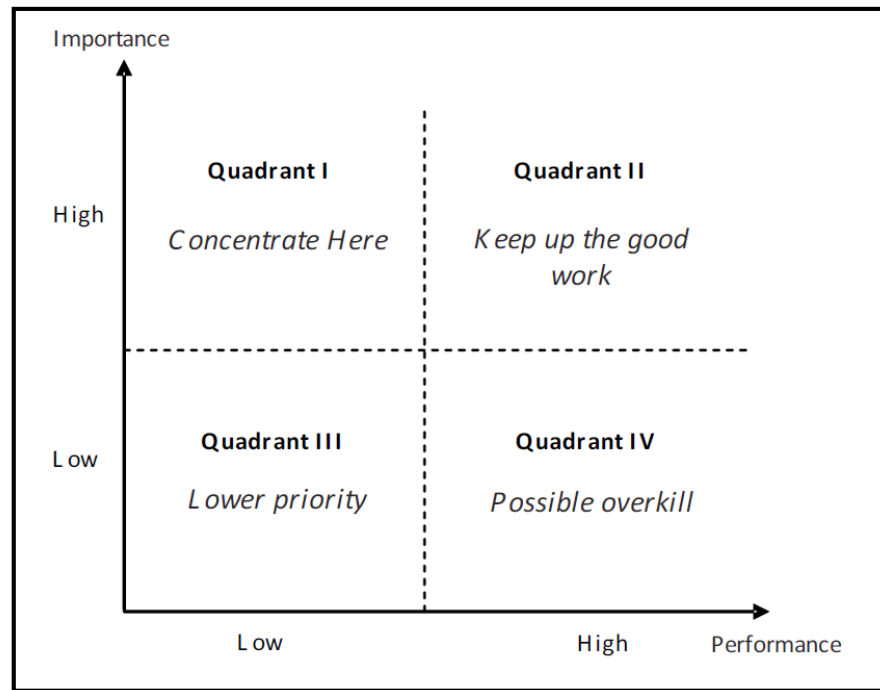


Figure 5. 3 IPA model

After generating the four destination image factors (tourism product, supporting facilities, relaxation and excitement), the performance of the four factors in rural destinations in China is evaluated by comparing the four factor means of the four destination image factors in IPA with SPSS version 22.

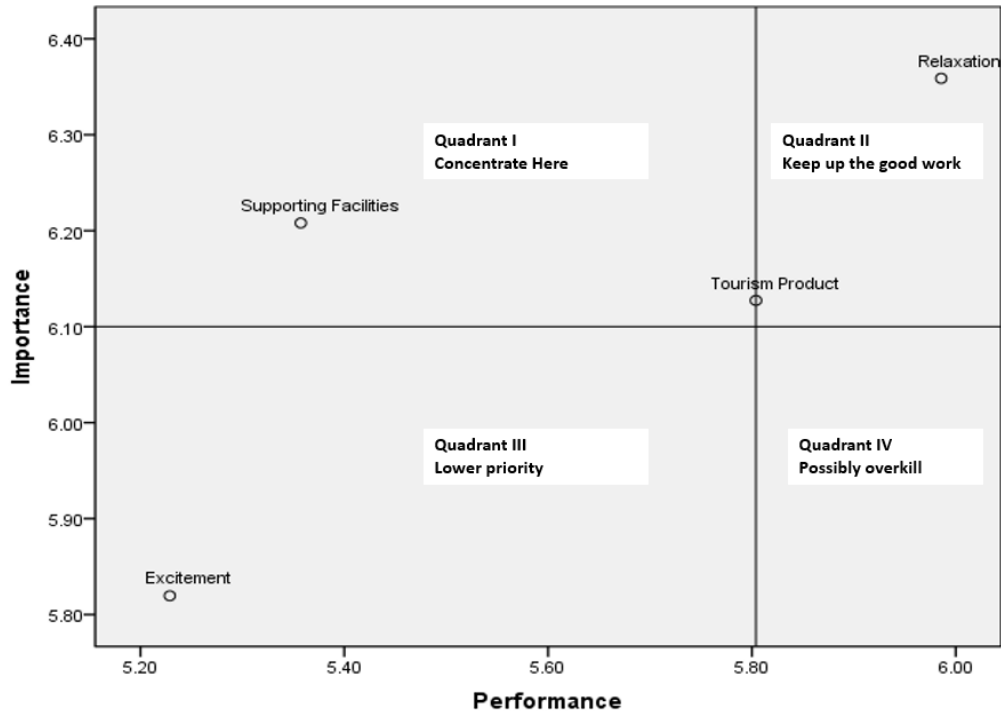


Figure 5. 4 IPA result of rural destination image factors

IPA (Figure 5.4) shows that the four factors are located in three quadrants, which means they should be treated with different strategies accordingly. Specific strategies for each of the four quadrants will be discussed in the following session: supporting facilities factor locates in Quadrant I. This factor has high importance value but low performance, which indicates that the supporting facilities needs to be improved. This reflects the general problem in rural China of insufficient facilities in rural China, such as inconvenient transportation, low-quality accommodation and so on. Thus, work needs to be concentrated here to make improvement. Relaxation factor is in Quadrant II, with high value of both importance and performance. It demonstrates that relaxation is the major impression upon rural tourism in China. Tourists hope to gain relaxation and current rural tourism has successfully provide a relaxing atmosphere for tourists to escape from urban environment. This is the unique feature for rural tourism destination image and they need to keep up the good work in this aspect. Excitement factor as another affective image locates in Quadrant III with low importance and performance, thus it should be treated with low priority. It reveals that people participating in rural tourism do not expect to gain

much excitement during their trip. The last image factor, tourism product has the median level of performance but high importance, which means it needs improvement on product quality so that tourists would be more favorable towards the destination.

5.6 Summary

This chapter provides information on the current rural tourist profile in sub-urban China, followed by Familiarity and Favorability Analysis of current rural brand performances. The result indicates that the three study sites belong to different categories:

Combing with the background information of the study sites in chapter four, it can be seen that rural destinations perform differently in terms of branding even in a same geographical area; Moganshan, as a representative of company-initiated operation mode of rural tourism, stands out among government-initiated and local residents-initiated modes.

To figure out how the differences are formed regarding the brand performance, destination image study is conducted since it has been mentioned in literature review that destination image is one most important component of destination brand. The latent factors of rural destination image are investigated. By conducting EFA and CFA, four main factors are generated, which are supporting facilities, tourism product, relaxation and excitement.

The last part of the chapter is IPA of the four image factors. The result demonstrates that the four factors are located in different quadrants, which means they need different strategies. In general, rural tourism destinations have been performing well in providing relaxation to tourists while it is not necessary to provide excitement since it is not a priority for tourists. Tourism products have an average performance while it still needs to be improved because of its great importance. Supporting facilities are observed to be not sufficient, thus it should be the focus in rural tourism development.

Chapter 6 Results and discussions: relationship between destination image and tourist motivations and behavior intentions

There are mainly two parts of this chapter: the first part identifies the travel motivation in rural destinations and investigates on the relationship between destination image factors; the second part evaluates the relationship between destination image and tourist behavior intentions, which includes willingness to revisit and willingness to recommend the place to others.

Knowing the image factors of rural destinations, we would be interested in what type of impact will the destination image bring and what aspects will affect destination image. Whether different travel motives affect the tourists' perception on the destination will be investigated. We would also explore whether the destination image affects tourists' behaviors. Furthermore, will destination image affect tourists' intention to revisit the place or recommend to others? This chapter would discuss those above questions.

6.1 Identify travel motivations in rural destinations

To successfully market a tourism destination, destination marketers have to understand tourists' travel motivations that lead to the travel decisions (Fodness, 1994). Previous studies on travel motivations have covered comprehensive internal aspects and lifestyles. After literature review on travel motivations to rural destinations, a list of 17 motives (Appendix II) is generated (Fodness, 1994; Cha, Mcclary, & Uysal, 1995; Lang, O'leary, & Morrison, 1997; Jang & Cai, 2002; Park & Yoon, 2009; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

In order to find the latent factors, explorative factor analysis (EFA) is conducted at the initial stage. Based on the questionnaire of 503 onsite respondents in three study sites, three factors are generated after EFA, explaining 63.7% of total variance. The identified factors shown in Table 6.1 are named as factor 1: "Relaxation" (5 items, $\alpha=.797$); factor 2: "Explore new things" (6 items, $\alpha=.874$) and factor 3: "Family togetherness" (2 items, $\alpha=.733$) reflecting the main travel motivations of rural visitors as shown in Table 6.1.

According to statistical requirement, the factors with factor loadings larger than 0.4 are remained (Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004).

Table 6. 1 Factor analysis of rural destination travel motivations

Variables	Factor		
	1	2	3
Get refreshed	0.779		
Relax daily tension	0.807		
Be physically active	0.658		
Not have to rush	0.681		0.471
Travel with friends	0.435	0.623	
Meet people with similar interests		0.808	
Explore new places		0.725	
Experience new and different lifestyles		0.697	
Learn new things, increase knowledge		0.715	
Travel to historical heritage sites		0.705	
Be together as a family			0.807
Have fun, be entertained			0.559
Eigenvalue	4.974	3.128	2.725
Explained variance(%)	29.261	18.397	16.030
Accumulated variance (%)	29.261	47.658	63.689

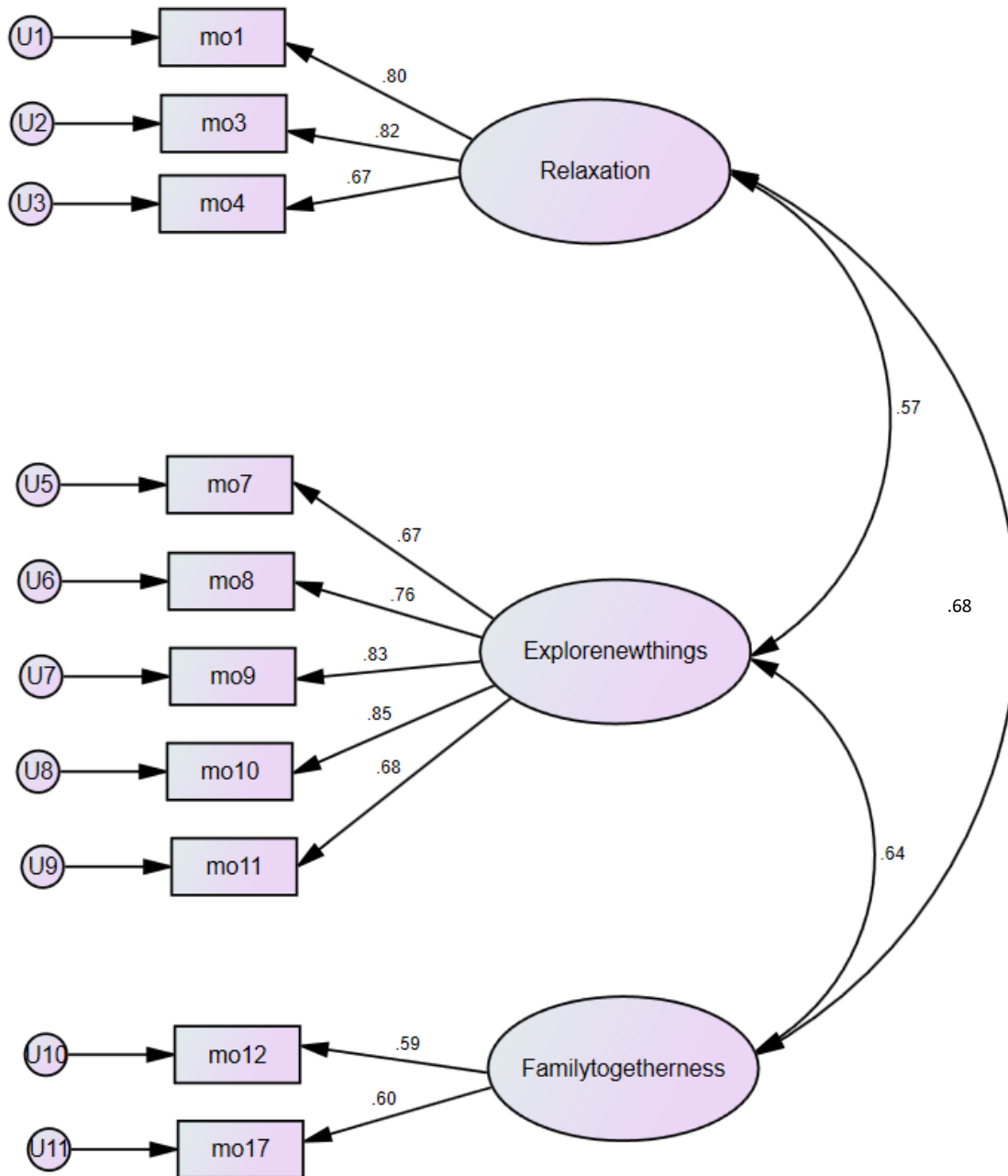
Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.^a

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Confirmative factor analysis is usually conducted to specify which variables load on which factors. It is either theory-driven or data-driven. In this research, since EFA has already helped to determine the number of factors, based on the existing data, CFA is conducted to confirm the three factors. In Figure 6.1, all the variables inside each factor are strongly correlated to the three factors with correlation coefficient larger than 0.5, which shows that all the variables are loaded on each factor correctly. The result confirms

that the major motivation for visiting rural destinations are to relax, explore new things and spend time with family.



Notes: P=.000; GFI=.930; NNFI=0.915; CFI=0.930; RMSEA=0.056; AVE=0.654

Figure 6. 1 Confirmatory factor analysis of rural destination travel motivations

6.2 the relationship between travel motivation and rural destination image

Upon identifying the essential components of rural destination image, the next step is to know whether there is a relationship between tourist motivation and destination image. Previous scholars have argued that destination image affects tourists' decision-making process before their trip (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a, 1999b) and destination image is considered as an important role in many tourist decision-making models (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Gartner, 1989; Crompton & Ankomah, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a;). However, previous studies have only pointed out that the more positive one destination image is, the higher possibility that it could be chosen as travel destination (Johnson & Thomas, 1992; Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996). We would like to further investigate on what type of relationship is between destination image and travel motivations.

CCA is useful when identifying the interrelationship between two sets of variables. The procedure attempts to maximize the correlation between those two linear combinations of variables (Hair et al.1998). CCA is thus adopted to test the relationship of tourism motive and destination image. In the construct of tourism motivation, we use the factors generated from EFA previously, which are relaxation (Motivation 1) and explore new things (Motivation 2) and family togetherness (Motivation 3). For destination image construct, we use the four factors generated from EFA of destination image attributes, which are supporting facilities (Image 1); tourism product (Image 2); relaxation (Image 3); and excitement (Image 4).

Table 6. 2 Canonical correlation analysis results

Canonical Correlations				
Variate 1	0.432			
Variate 2	0.224			
Variate 3	0.083			
Test that remaining correlations are zero:				
	Wilk's	Chi-SQ	DF	Sig
Variate 1	0.767	104.658	12.000	0.000
Variate 2	0.943	23.152	6.000	0.001
Variate 3	0.993	2.750	2.000	0.253

The procedure results in three canonical functions (Table 6.2), in which two of them (Variate 1&2) are meaningful functions significant at the 0.05 or better probability level. The third function (Variate 3) is ignored since the significant level is 0.253, which is above 0.05.

Table 6. 3 Canonical loadings for the two sets of variates

Canonical Loadings for Set-1		
	Variate 1	Variate 2
Motivation 1	-0.940	-0.031
Motivation 2	-0.456	-0.876
Motivation 3	-0.731	-0.192
Canonical Loadings for Set-2		
	Variate 1	Variate 2
Image 1	-0.832	-0.113
Image 2	-0.669	-0.734
Image 3	-0.784	-0.278
Image 4	-0.947	-0.124

As a rule of thumb, only variables with canonical loading greater than 0.40 should be considered for the variate interpretation. From the canonical loadings of the two sets of variates (Table 6.3), it could be seen that all the loadings of variate 1 are qualified. But most of those in variate 2 are disqualified. Therefore, variate 1 is employed to do the interpretation.

Table 6. 4 Standardized Canonical Coefficients for Set-1

	Variate 1	Variate 2
Motivation 1	0.814	0.558
Motivation 2	0.115	-1.163
Motivation 3	0.393	0.007

Table 6.4 could be expressed by Function 1:

$$\text{Function 1} = 0.814 \text{ Motivation 1} + 0.115 \text{ Motivation 2} + 0.393 \text{ Motivation 3}$$

This function could be rewritten as “Destination image=0.814 Relaxation + 0.115 Explore new things + 0.393 Family togetherness”. It demonstrates that rural destination image is mostly affected by tourist’s motivation to have relaxation since the coefficient is the highest among other motivations. It means that for those tourists who seek for relaxation in rural destinations, they usually perceive better destination image than others.

Table 6. 5 Standardized Canonical Coefficients for Set-2

	Variate 1	Variate 2
Image 1	0.521	0.675
Image 2	0.906	-1.427
Image 3	0.256	-0.456
Image 4	0.136	0.792

Table 6.5 could be expressed by Function 2:

$$\text{Function 2} = 0.521 \text{ Image1} + 0.136 \text{ Image2} + 0.256 \text{ Image3} - 0.906 \text{ Image4}$$

This function could be rewritten as “Travel motivation= 0.521 supporting facilities + 0.906 tourism product + 0.256 relaxation + 0.136 excitement”, which means travel motivation is mainly determined by tourism product since its coefficient is the highest among other factors. Tourist will be highly motivated to visit one rural destination when the tourism product is perceived to be good.

The result of CCA revealed that tourist motivation is directly related to destination image. The outcome establishes the duality of the relationship between the two constructs.

6.3 the relationship between rural destination image and tourist behavior intentions

Beerli and Martin (2004) have argued that tourist’s behavior is heavily affected by their perceived destination image instead of the objective reality. They have pointed out that the influence could not only be reflected from the travel decision-making process, but also can be seen from various tourist behaviors during and after the trip (Mansfeld, 1992; Johnson & Thomas, 1992; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a, 1999b). Therefore, to investigate on image factors is an important approach to study and predict tourist various type of behavior (Bigné et al., 2001). Previous studies have found out that positive destination image will generate more return visit and tourists are more willing to recommend to others (Court & Lupton, 1997; Bigné et al., 2001). Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou and Andronikidis (2016) have also pointed out that congruence between a tourist's view of ideal behavior and overall attitude towards a tourist destination can boost intention to revisit the tourist destination. This research aims to find out which aspects of destination image excise more influence on tourist’s behavior.

Chen and Tsai (2007) argue that destination image could be utilized by DMOs or private entities to influence on tourist behavior and cognitive image factors are easier to manipulate in order to magnify the impact on tourists’ behavior. It is questionable whether it is the same situation for rural destinations in China.

In this research, only two types of tourist behaviors after visiting the destination are included, which are “whether you would like to revisit” and “whether you would like to recommend the place to others”. It aims to find out whether the performance of rural destination image will affect tourists’ behavioral intentions. Logistic regression model is

chosen since it is useful when there are binary dependent variables, that is, where it can take only two values. In this case, the dependent variable is tourist behavior, which belongs to binary data. The independent variables are the destination image (Image1, Image2, Image3 and Image4). As a result, it is observed that Relaxation (Image3) and Excitement (Image 4) positively affect people's willingness to recommend to others.

Table 6. 6 Model summary for willingness to revisit

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	480.933 ^a	0.109	0.160

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001

From the model summary (Table 6.6) we could find the R square is above 0.1, which is acceptable for logistic regression analysis. The classification table (Table 6.7) shows that this model could predict 73.5% correctly out of the valid survey (n=464) respondents.

Table 6. 7 Classification table for willingness to revisit

Observed			Predicted		
			Revisit		Percentage correct
			No	Yes	
Step 1	Revisit	No	14	108	11.5
		Yes	15	327	95.6
Overall Percentage					73.5

Table 6. 8 Variables in the equation for willingness to revisit

	B	S.E	Wald	Sig.
Relaxation	0.362	0.149	5.935	0.015
Excitement	0.216	0.102	4.512	0.034
Product	0.167	0.219	0.578	0.447
Facilities	0.049	0.158	0.095	0.758
Constant	- 3.400	0.737	21.258	0.000

From the variables in the equation (Table 6.8), it could be found that relaxation and excitement have a significant influence on people's willingness to revisit the rural destination. Since the coefficient is positive, it could be seen that when the destination provides relaxation feeling as well as excitement for the visitor, it is more likely that the visitor is willing to revisit this place. Comparing to the affective factors, cognitive image factors (product and facility) are less influential in terms of affecting tourist's revisit intention.

Table 6. 9 Model summary for willingness to recommend

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	347.557a	0.102	0.177

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

The model summary (Table 6.9) for willingness to recommend that the R square (0.177) is acceptable in terms of model fit. Table 6.10 demonstrates that the regression model could predict 85.2% of the valid respondents (n=465).

Table 6. 10 Classification table for willingness to recommend

Observed			Predicted		
			Recommend		Percentage correct
			No	Yes	
Step 1	Recommend	No	9	62	12.7
		Yes	7	387	98.2
	Overall Percentage				85.2

Table 6.11 shows that only relaxation has a positive influence on visitor's willingness to recommend the rural destination to others, which means, when tourists could gain relaxation during their trip, it is most likely that they will recommend the destination to others.

Table 6. 11 Variables in the equation for willingness to recommend

	B	S.E	Wald	Sig.
Relaxation	0.363	0.170	4.577	0.032
Excitement	0.208	0.125	2.758	0.097
Product	0.349	0.259	1.815	0.178
Facilities	-0.019	0.193	0.009	0.924
Constant	-3.252	0.818	15.818	0.000

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: relaxation, excitement, product, facilities.

From the two logistic regression models, it could be concluded that the affective factors are more important in terms of affecting visitor's willingness to revisit and recommend the place to others comparing to cognitive image factors. Chen and Tsai (2007) mentioned that cognitive image factors are easier to be utilized to influence on tourist behavior, however, from the two logistic regressions, it could be clearly seen that it is a

different situation for rural tourism in China. Affective factors are playing dominant role in affecting tourists' behavioral intentions, which means to some extent, tourists' emotions and feelings towards a destination is more important than the actual situation in the place.

6.4 Summary

The first part of this chapter investigates on the relationship between destination image and tourist motivation. Previous scholars have proved the relationships exist but no further studies were conducted on what type of relationship do they have. This chapter has found out that there are three major travel motivations for rural tourists, which are relaxation, explore new things and family togetherness. By conducting canonical correlation analysis, it is found that destination image is positively related with the travel motivation of having relaxation on the trip; and travel motivation is heavily associated with tourism product.

The second part of this chapter evaluates the relationship between destination image and tourist behaviors. Through regression functions, it is found that affective image factors have more powerful influence over tourist behaviors: tourists are likely to revisit the place when they gain relaxation and excitement during their trip; tourist tend to recommend the place to others when they feel relaxed on the trip.

From the above relationships, it could be concluded that it is important to understand destination image, especially the affective factors in order to manipulate tourists' travel motivation and behavioral intentions. Thus, more efforts need to be allocate on stimulating tourists' positive emotions regarding the image construction. The following chapter would find an appropriate way to evaluate destination image from both demand and supply side, and investigate on the image congruency from the two sides

Chapter 7 Results and discussions: image gaps and rural destination branding framework

Previous chapters have identified the key image factors of rural tourism in China (chapter 5) and proved that destination image has powerful impact over tourist motivation and tourist behaviors (chapter 6). Therefore, it is of great importance to understand the destination image in order to better promote the destination. Tourists are usually attracted by a destination image in their mind instead of the destination itself, but successful branding requires the destination image to be anchored in a true destination identity (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007). Thus, it is important to keep the destination image congruent.

As mentioned in literature review (Chapter Two), previous studies have divided the destination image concept into projected image and perceived image. Projected image is from the supply side, which is the destination management and marketing authorities; while perceived image is from the demand side, which is the tourist. With the rapid development of technology, “creating destination image is no longer a one-way ‘push’ process of mass communication but a dynamic one of selecting, reflecting, sharing, and experiencing” (Govers & Go, 2004: p 165). Therefore, there is a need to study both projected image and perceived image of one destination and observe whether there is any gap between the two sides. Költringer and Dickinger (2015) mentioned that one important criterion to test whether the destination branding is successful is to see whether it is consistent between projected image and perceived image. It is argued that “strong destination brand images occur when a DMO’s projected image is similar to stories reported by other information sources” (p.1837).

In this research, projected image and perceived image are further categorized based on different information sources including both online information and on-site respondents. For projected image, it is obtained online from DMO and entrepreneurs. The destination image they projected is a major source for potential tourists to gain information of the destination (Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015; Hunter, 2016). For perceived image, online comments of a destination can be viewed by potential tourists and thus influence visit intention (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). The other part of perceived image is gained from the on-site visitors, which is also important due to the influential power of the word-of-mouth.

This chapter mainly includes two parts. The first part investigates the congruency of projected image and perceived image by content analysis. The second part proposed a rural destination branding framework in order to fill the image gaps.

7.1 Data collection and cleaning

Data selection is the first step in this chapter. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the data is obtained from both website contents and on-site survey. For projected image, official websites and business websites are included while for perceived image, on-site survey and social media comments are collected. The samples include three official websites of the three rural destinations, which are Cittaslow China (www.chinacittaslow.com/), Mogan Mountain (www.mogan-mountain.com) and Chongming Travel (www.cmtravel.com.cn); five most popular travel companies websites including Mafengwo (<http://www.mafengwo.cn>), Ctrip (<http://www.ctrip.com/>), Elong (www.elong.com), Qunar (www.qunar.com) , Tripadvisor (www.tripadvisor.com) and survey from on-site respondents. Relevant documents are collected by a web crawling agent called Bazhuayu (www.bazhuayu.com), which could help capture the webpage contents from the selected websites.

The web crawling process was conducted from 2015 to 2017, which was in the same period of the questionnaire survey. All the text posted on the selected websites relating to the three study sites were collected during that period. For projected image, the articles on official websites and business websites were downloaded. For perceived image, the comments that are posted on the selected websites are collected.

The final data set contains 165 official website (DMO) documents, 178 business website (Entrepreneurs) documents, 310 UGC documents and 127 on-site respondents' surveys. The documents are transformed to plain text for content analysis. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Nvivo 11 Pro is a text-mining software program based on artificial neural networks. This software is used for content analysis in this research. To better analyze the text, data cleaning was conducted after the collection of data. Redundant paragraphs and headings were removed to avoid bias in the result (Scharl, Dickinger, & Weichselbraun, 2008).

7.2 Content analysis methods

7.2.1 Nodes building and data coding

Previous studies (Govers & Go, 2005; Douglas & Mills, 2006; Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007c; Stepchenkova et al., 2009) tend to use computer-aided text analysis tools, such as CATPAC, to analyze the most frequently used words. However, the limitation of this approach is that it often generates a list of meaningless words (Stepchenkova et al., 2009; Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015). To avoid this result, coding process is necessary before the analysis. It would help to better understand the text content by coding specific words and sentences into nodes since “many words of text can be classified into much fewer content categories” (Weber, 1990, p.7).

As mentioned in chapter three, directed approach of content analysis is adopted for this research. Therefore, the nodes are developed before and during the data analysis, which means the nodes are derived from certain research findings. In this research, nodes are developed based on the four destination image factors identified in Chapter Five, which are tourism product, tourism infrastructure, relaxation and excitement. The text including words or sentences relating to any of the four factors are identified and coded under the four categories. Apart from the existing nodes, new nodes are developed along with the coding process, when there is new content which cannot fit into any existing nodes.

The coding process is conducted by the author and two research assistants, who are fluent in both Chinese and English since the data coding is based on the Chinese texts. First, the author and the research assistants conduct the coding individually by fitting the texts into the image categories and creating new nodes. Second, the results are compared and discussed together. Finally, all the text is coded into certain nodes with agreement from all sides. The data accuracy is ensured in this way.

After the coding process, four new nodes are developed under tourism product category, including attraction, activity, souvenir and package tour. Two new nodes are created under cognitive image category, which are “geography background” and “social & culture”. The node of “health services” is deleted because no relevant information is mentioned in the samples (Table 7.1).

Table 7. 1 List of nodes

Name	Sources	References
Cognitive		
Tourism Product		
Water quality	19	39
Scenery and natural landscape	59	394
Air quality	28	173
Animals	31	146
Local cuisine	42	210
Local resident	24	66
Interpretation	9	23
Attraction	57	409
Activity	44	251
Souvenir	21	37
Package tour	17	148
Tourism infrastructure		
Accommodation quality	38	217
Choices of accommodation	35	281
Price of accommodation	23	68
Hygiene of Restaurant	7	13
Choices of restaurant	17	70
Level of safety for tourism	6	6

Transportation	47	242
Geography background	42	154
Social and culture	46	158
Affective		
Exciting		
Destination is arousing	14	31
Destination is exciting	19	56
Relaxing		
Destination is relaxing	46	228
Destination is pleasant	46	261

Table 7. 2 Samples description

	DMO	Entrepreneurs	UGC	Survey
No. of documents	165	178	310	127
No. of nodes covered	13	17	29	18
No. of references	159	244	596	161

The text contents collected are divided into four categories, which are DMO (165 documents), Entrepreneurs (178 documents), UGC (310 documents) and Survey (127 documents). In DMO documents, 13 nodes were covered in 159 references; in entrepreneurs' documents, there are in total 17 nodes in 244 references; while the on-site survey covers 18 nodes in 161 references. The samples description is demonstrated in Table 7.2.

7.2.2 Sentiment Analysis

For the coded references under each node, the sentiment is detected in two categories, which are “positive” and “negative”. Sentiment detection is important because it could help to enhance meanings of the content. It was argued that only lists of words can express limited meanings without taking the sentiment into account (Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015; Weber, 1990).

7.2.3 Cluster analysis

Cluster analysis is conducted after building the nodes (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014; Stepchenkova et al., 2009). Nvivo could help generate a diagram that cluster selected sources if they are coded by many same nodes. The clusters are based on the coding similarity. Cluster analysis is conducted to find out whether the image is congruent among different information sources.

7.3 Results of content analysis

7.3.1 Gap in projected image: DMO websites v.s. Business websites (entrepreneurs) (Gap 1)

The chart of nodes (Figure 7.1) shows the top 10 most frequent nodes of the projected image on official website are geography background, attraction, social & culture, activities, animals, choices of accommodation, accommodation quality, transportation, air quality and local cuisine. This chart demonstrates that official websites locates more efforts in promoting the destination and providing more background information to the tourists, especially on the top three areas, which are geography background, attractions and social & culture. Example 1 is retrieved from one paragraph in the official website of Moganshan. It introduces the geography background of the mountain which enriched the geological knowledge of the website visitors.

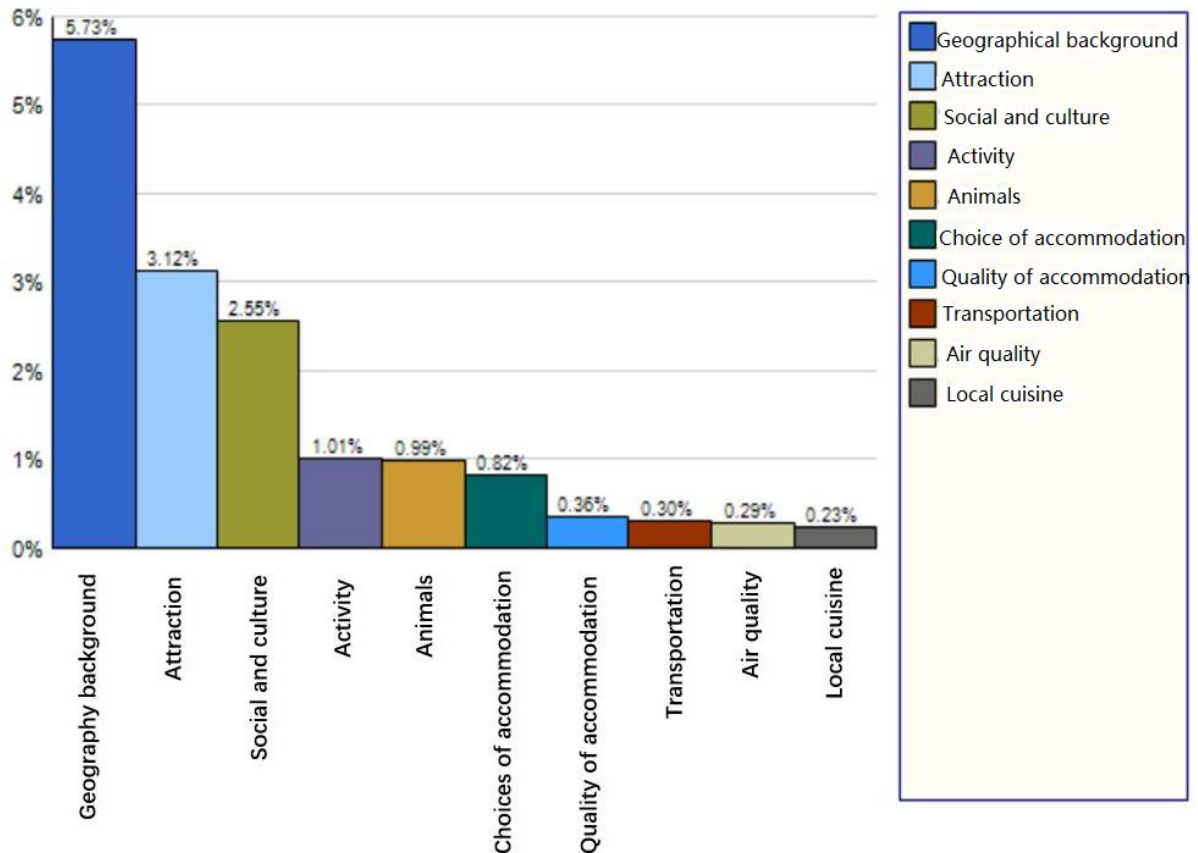


Figure 7. 1 Projected image on official websites

Example 1: Projected image on official websites

“Moganshan was formed in the Late Jurassic movement of the Mesozoic and later the Himalayan movement. This period was accompanied by strong volcanic eruptions and magmatic intrusion activities and unbalanced rise and fall of the landscape, resulting in a volcanic uplift structure dominated by volcanic rocks. The main peak is 719 meters above sea level. The mountain body is oriented from north to east. The western part is characterized by low mountain erosion and eroded tectonic features, and the eastern part is erosion - piedmont plain features.” (Adopted from Moganshan Official website: <http://www.mogan-mountain.com/about/%E5%9C%B0%E7%90%86%E7%8E%AF%E5%A2%83>).

The nodes chart of the projected image on business websites (Figure 7.2) shows that the top 10 most frequent nodes are attraction, choices of accommodation, package tour, activity, accommodation quality, the price of accommodation, social & culture, scenery and natural

landscape, geography background and transportation. From this list, it could be seen that business websites mostly focus on the promotion of tourism products, such as the attraction, accommodation and package tour. Example 2 is obtained from the travel guide on Mafengwo, a travel company website. The highlight on the accommodations in Moganshan reflects the profit-orient nature of entrepreneurs.

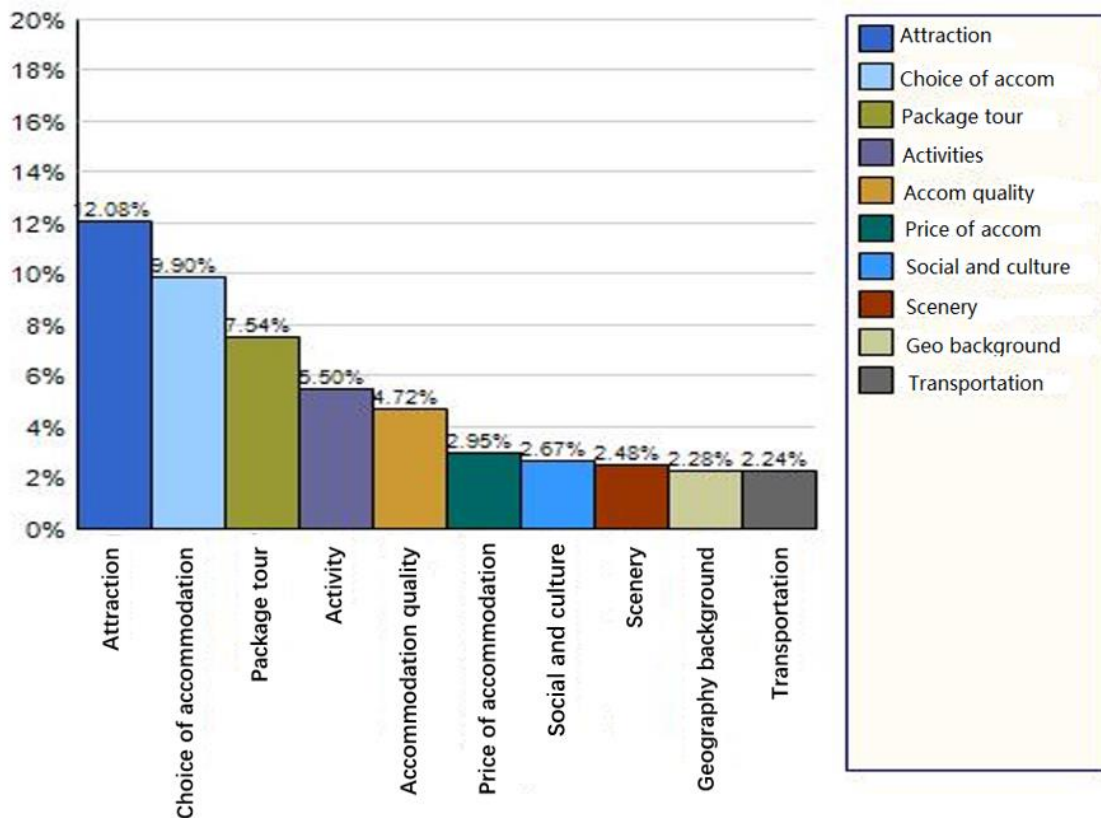


Figure 7. 2 Projected image on business websites

Example 2: Projected image on business websites

“Moganshan is most famous for the homestays. Some people say that even if they missed Moganshan Mountain, they should never miss the homestays in Moganshan. This is not the traditional homestays, but a more integrated element of a boutique hotel. In general, it is suggested to stay in Moganshan for at least two or three days, and during the stay, the local homestay is an indispensable quality experience.” (Adopted from Mafengwo: <http://www.mafengwo.cn/gonglve/ziyouxing/3116.html>)

Cluster analysis confirms that there is a gap between the projected image on official websites and business websites. The cluster analysis generates two major clusters (Figure 7.3), which divides the official website with business website. Therefore, the first hypothesis which indicates that there is a gap between the projected image from DMO and the projected image from tourism entrepreneurs is thus accepted.

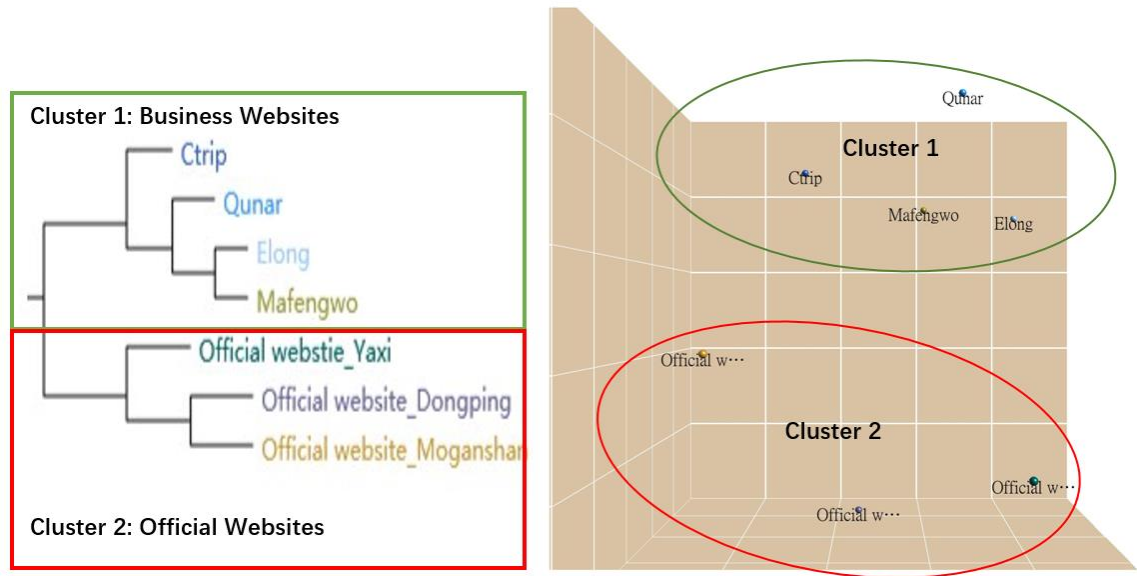


Figure 7.3 Cluster analysis of projected image

7.2.2 Gap in perceived image: UGC v.s. on-site survey (Gap 2)

The nodes chart of comments on social media is demonstrated in Figure 7.4. The top 10 most frequently appeared nodes are attraction, transportation, positive, activity, animals, destination is pleasant, social & culture, local cuisine, and destination is relaxing. It could be seen that social media comments includes not only information of the destination, but also personal emotions. Many of the comments report that the visitors feel the place is relaxing and pleasant (Example 3) The sentiment content is shown in the social media, and majority of them are positive. As identified in Chapter Six, it is found that affective image factors cast more powerful influence over tourist behavior intentions. Thus, rural tourism proponents need to focus on social media marketing in order to highlight the positive sentiment contents, which may lead to visitors' revisit and recommendation to others. It is also an evidence to prove online marketing is an effective way for destination branding.

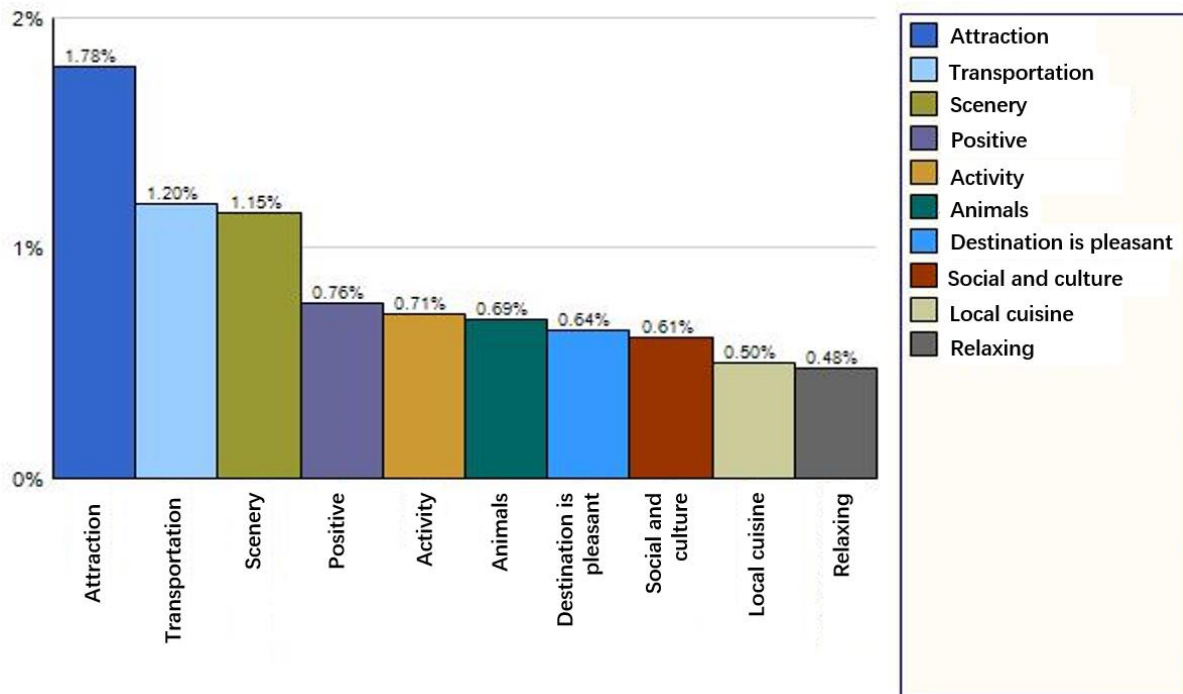


Figure 7. 4 Perceived image on social media

Example 3:

“The Cittaslow is very close to Nanjing, driving for more than an hour. When I went there was a light rain, it was definitely a nice sunny day. There are a lot of rape fields, and the village covers a large area. You can take a tour bus or rent a bike for excursions. I personally

recommend that it will be very relaxing to go cycling when the weather is good! In short, it is a good destination for children and elderly people to visit.” (one comment of Yaxi town on Ctrip website at: <http://you.ctrip.com/sight/nanjing9/1479008.html>)

For on-site visitors, there are both negative and positive sentiment contents (Figure 7.5). A large amount (7.39%) of the perceived image from on-site visitors is negative while only 1.76% of the contents are positive. As for the affective image, “The destination is relaxing” (10.5%) is mostly mentioned. “destination is pleasant” (1.22%) is mentioned as well. The other cognitive contents of top frequency are water quality, scenery and natural landscape, attraction, air quality, activity, local cuisine and accommodation quality. It is an interesting phenomenon that the sentiment component is opposite with the perceived image in social media. It shows that the satisfaction level of on-site rural visitors is relatively lower than online comments (Example 4).

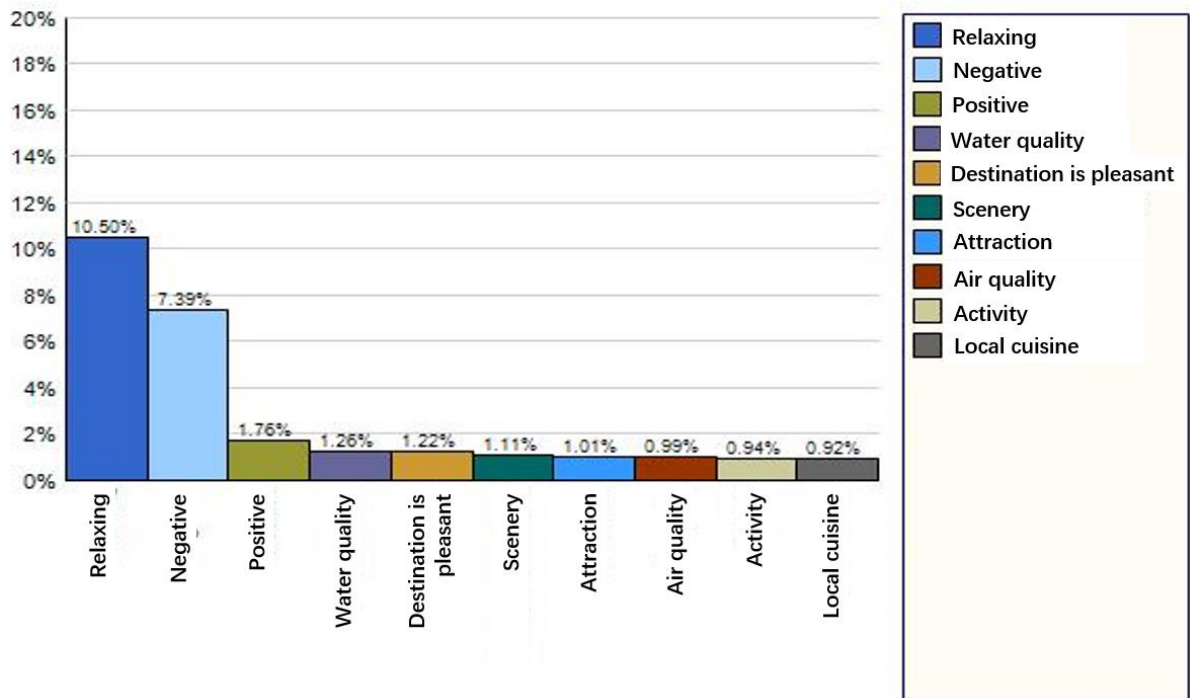


Figure 7. 5 Perceived image from on-site visitors

Example 4:

“The environment of Dongping Forest Park is not bad, but there are no entertainment facilities in the surrounding areas, and there are not many things to do. The Nongjiale

conditions on Chongming Island are also not very good and overall it is a bit disappointing.” (one comment from an on-site visitor in Dongping Town)

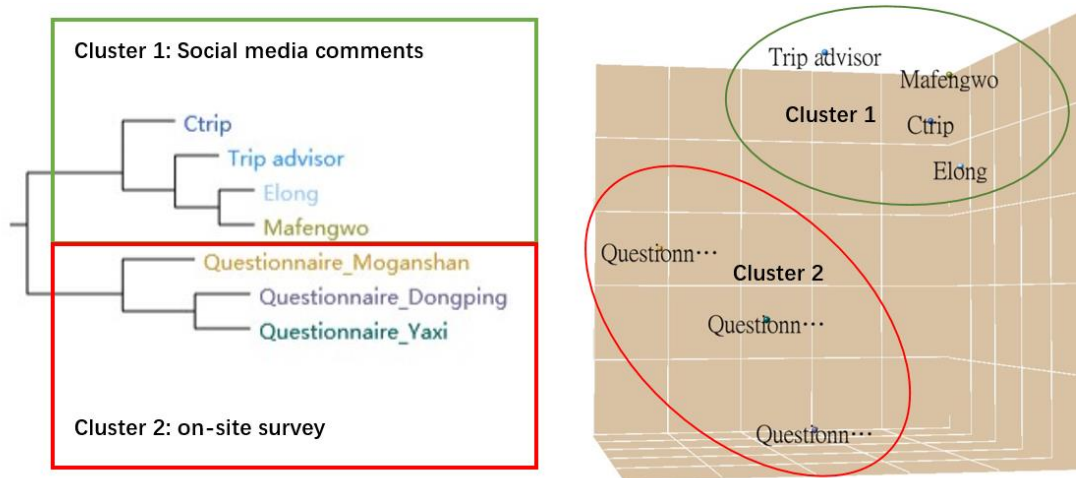


Figure 7. 6 Cluster analysis of perceived image

The cluster analysis result (Figure 7.6) echoes with the differences identified in the nodes charts. Two main clusters are generated which clearly divides the social media contents with on-site survey. It demonstrates that in tourism demand side, there is a gap between the perceived image from the on-site visitors and the perceived image from the UGC. Then, the second hypothesis is accepted as well.

7.2.3 Gap between projected image and perceived image (Gap 3)

After combining the text contents, the overall projected image of rural tourism could be illustrated in Figure 7.7. It demonstrates that most of the projected image focus on transportation, attraction, package tour, choice of accommodation, geography background, social & culture, activity, accommodation and scenery and natural landscape. It could be seen that cognitive image is the dominant in project image. More descriptive words and informative contents appear in the projected image from both official websites and business websites. In the top frequency nodes list, there is no sentiment or affective image involved.

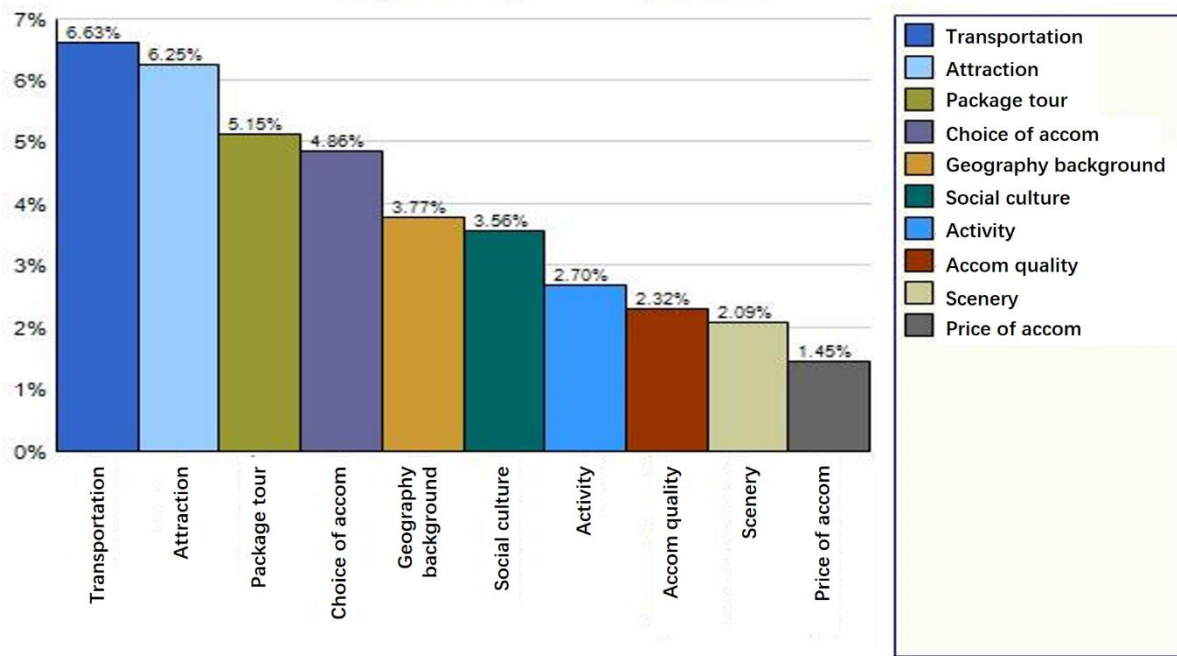


Figure 7.7 Projected image of rural tourism in China

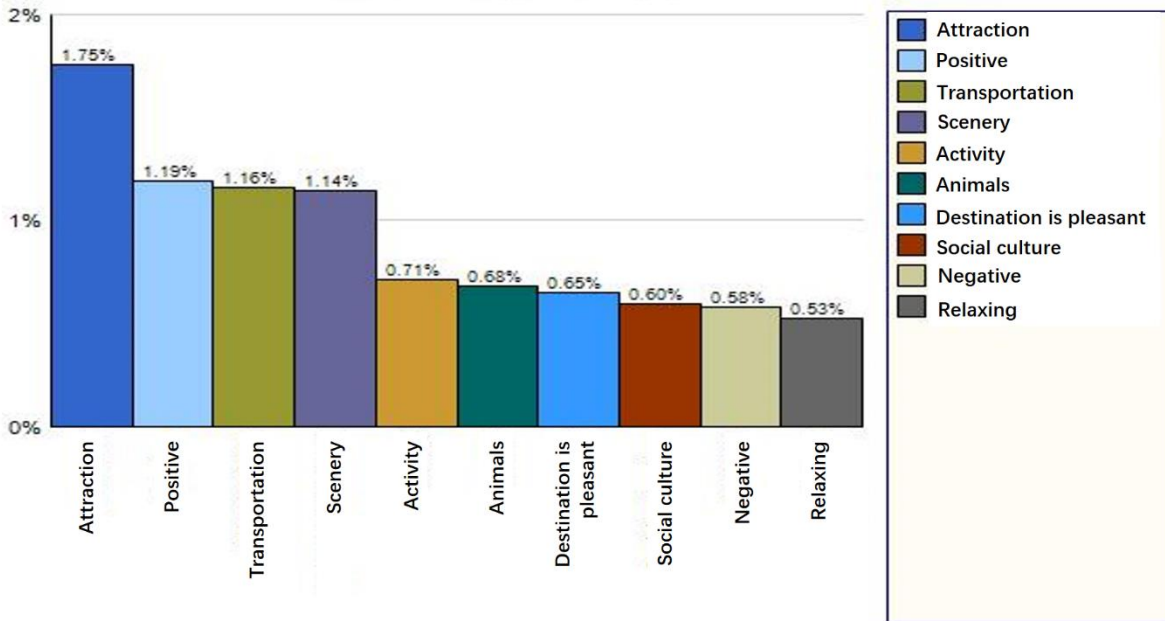


Figure 7. 8 Perceived image of rural tourism in China

For perceived image from both visitors online and on-site, more affective image and sentiment contents exist. The top frequency nodes list in Figure 7.8 shows that, apart from the cognitive image components, the perceived image from online and on-site visitors always contains personal feelings towards a destination. It shows both positive and negative contents, while positive contents are more than negative ones. Two affective image factors are also included in the top 10 frequency nodes, which are “the destination is pleasant” and “Relaxing”.

The cluster analysis (Figure 7.9) proved that there are differences existing between projected image and perceived image. The contents achieved from social media comments and on-site survey contains more affective components while the contents projected online from the official websites and business websites emphasize on the cognitive components, such as the destination background, itinerary, transportation, accommodation, etc. Thus, there is a gap between the projected image from the tourism supply side and the perceived image from the tourism demand side. Therefore, the third hypothesis is accepted.

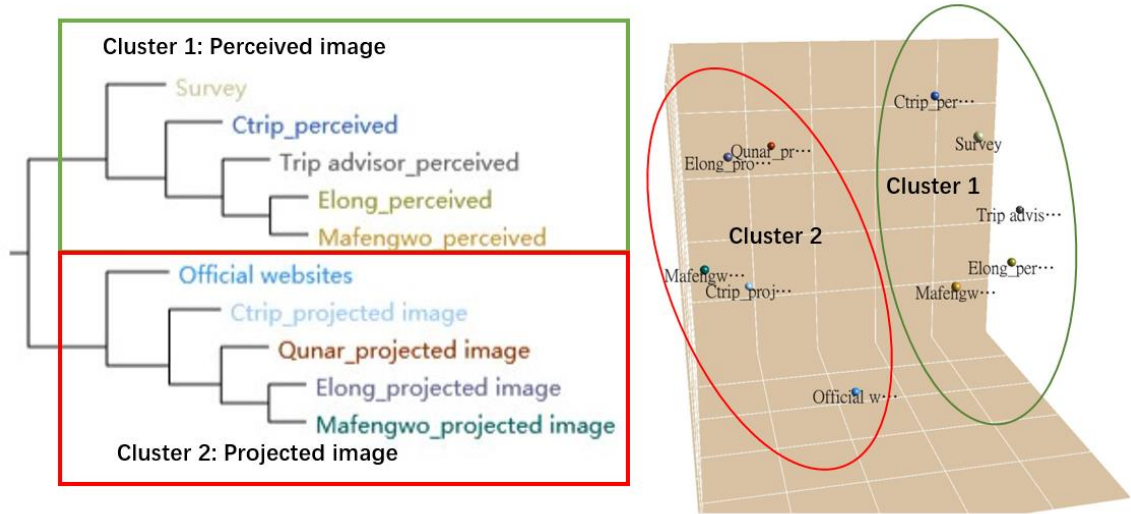


Figure 7. 9 Cluster analysis of perceived image and projected image

7.4 Rural destination branding framework

Upon the acceptance of the three hypotheses, a rural destination branding framework is proposed based on the three gaps identified from content analysis (Figure 10). The framework contains two major parts, which are supply side and demand side. The supply side is the tourism product provider who projects the destination image to the public. In this side of the framework, projected image is divided into DMO projected image and entrepreneur projected image. Due to the acceptance of hypothesis one, the first gap is identified between the two types of projected image. The demand side refers to the tourism product consumer. Their perceived image is attained from both UGC and on-site visitors. The second gap is confirmed due to the acceptance of hypothesis two. The third gap is identified between the supply side and demand side, which means there is a gap between the projected destination image and perceived destination image. After identifying the three gaps, branding strategies are categorized into three steps in terms of filling each gap.

Step 1: Rural Destination Positioning.

This is the very first step in the framework, which is the foundation for establishing a unique destination brand. In this step, destination identity is the anchor. The destination image should be rooted to a genuine local identity (Govers & Go, 2005; M. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). To represent the authentic destination identity, brand knowledge needs to be established. As mentioned in chapter two, Hsu and Cai (2009) argue that brand knowledge includes brand awareness, cognitive image and affective image. From the tourism supply side, both DMO and entrepreneurs are responsible to formulate branding strategies reflecting the true destination identity. Branding knowledge should be developed with this anchor. The first gap will be filled when the projected image from DMO and the entrepreneurs are in line with the authentic destination identity and appropriate brand knowledge.

Step 2: Specification of rural tourist demand

From the demand side, the content analysis demonstrates that the UGC is more skewed towards favorable experience than on-site visitors. Since the perceived image shown in UGC can transform into projected image for the internet user who are the potential tourists, this gap inside perceived image may result in setting up unrealistic tourists' expectations, which means

it conflicts with the actual destination identity. To avoid this gap, there is a need to understand the rural tourist demand from both online UGC and onsite visitors. Brand trust should be built by setting up proper expectations. Since it is found that the travel motivation for rural tourists could be categorized into relaxation, explore new things and family togetherness (chapter 6), the tourism products should be designed to meet the tourist expectations. Brand loyalty should be built based on the understanding of tourist behaviors, that is to understand the reason why the tourist revisit and recommend the place to others.

Step 3 Adjustment of current rural brand

This is the last step in the branding framework. The gap between the projected and perceived image occurs when the destination positioning cannot meet with the tourist demand. It may be caused by the projection of an “unrealistic or incomplete destination image” or the perceived image is “distorted because of temporal environmental and situational influences, interaction with others or the person’s own identity” (Govers & Go, 2004, p 174). Once there is a gap between the projected and perceived image, there is a need to adjust the current rural brand. The adjustment should be based on the understanding of actual destination identity, tourist expectation and behaviors. From the supply side, tourism products should emphasize on the unique local characteristics and authentic sense of place; from the demand side, tourist satisfaction should be enhanced in order to improve the destination image. Only when the supply side and demand side are in line with each other, the destination brand could be considered successful (Költringer and Dickinger, 2015).

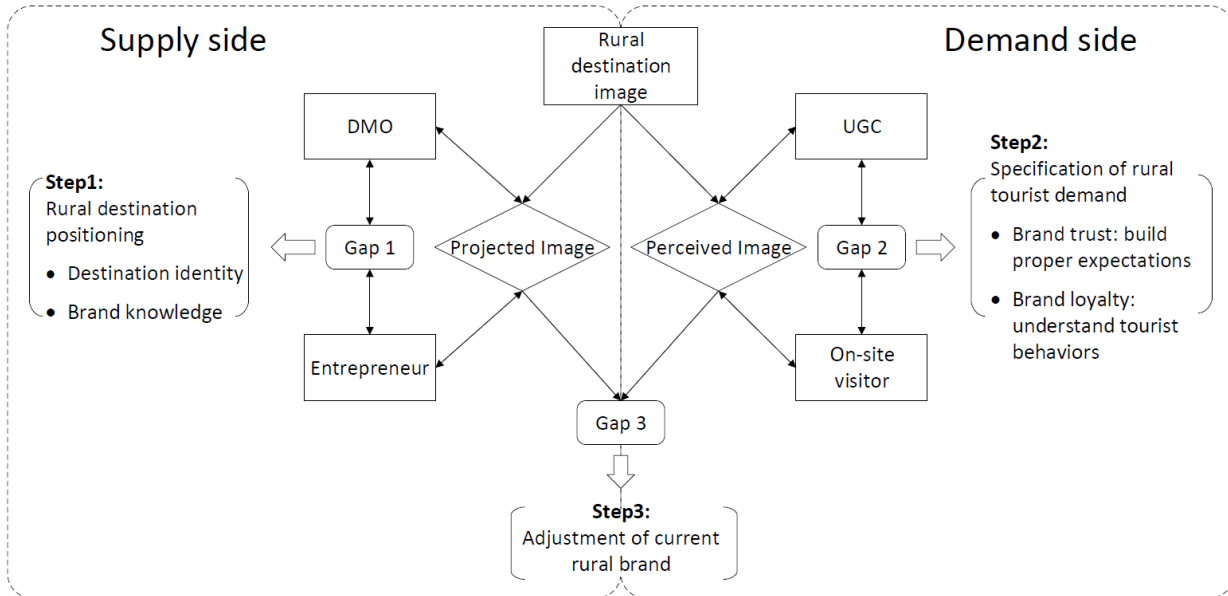


Figure 7. 10 Three-gap rural tourism destination branding framework

7.5 Summary

The chapter responds to the last research objective, which is “to assess the congruency of the projected and perceived image of rural destinations”. Content analysis is adopted as the main research method. Three image gaps are identified; thus, the hypotheses are all accepted.

Due to the acceptance of the three hypotheses, a three-gap rural tourism branding framework is established. Three steps are developed in response to the three image gaps, which are “rural destination positioning”, “specification of rural tourist demand” and “adjustment of current rural brand”.

Chapter 8 Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter summarizes the findings from the previous chapters, where information from the research can provide recommendations and possibly help bring branding strategies for rural tourism development in China in order to bridge the identified image gaps.

First part of this chapter summarizes the research process and methodologies utilized in the research and presents the major research findings regarding to the research objectives. The second part brings recommended branding strategies for rural destinations in China based on the research findings. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the limitations of the current research along with recommendations for further study.

8.1 Summary of research processes, methodologies and findings

8.1.1 Research processes and methodologies

The conceptual framework of this research is based on literature reviews of previous destination image and branding models in Chapter Two. Through the overview, three types of destination branding models are identified, which are destination-based approach, stakeholder-based approach and identity-based approach. A new destination branding framework is proposed to combine the three approaches, taking consideration of attracting visitors while balancing the stakeholders and enhance the place identity.

Chapter Three discusses the conceptual framework and makes references to the four stages of the research framework, which are in line with the three research objectives. Integrated research methodologies are adopted in the thesis, including both qualitative and quantitative approach. The quantitative data contains 503 on-site questionnaire surveys while the qualitative data includes in-depth interviews with the tourism proponents at the three study sites. Chapter Four introduces the background of the three study sites with the interview content and compares the study sites by conducting content analysis.

The current research focuses on the image study of rural tourism destinations located in suburban areas. The study contains three major stages, regarding the three research objectives. The results are written in Chapter Five, Six and Seven. First, descriptive

analysis is conducted to understand the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. Factor analysis, correlation, regression and other statistical applications are adopted in Chapter Five and Six to investigate on rural destination image factors, relationships with travel motivation and travel intentions. And three hypotheses are tested in Chapter Seven. The following sections summarize the major findings of the research.

8.1.2 Performance of current rural destination brands

The rural destination image factors, which are generated from the three study sites are recognized as supporting facilities, tourism product, relaxation and excitement by conducting EFA and CFA. To further authenticate the factors, familiarity and favorability analysis is conducted to measure the current performance of three study sites.

It is found that three types of rural destinations perform differently in terms of branding even in a same geographical area. The company-initiated operation mode stands out among government-initiated and local residents-initiated modes. IPA is followed to test the importance and performance regarding the four factors. The results demonstrate that rural tourism destinations have been performing well in providing relaxation to tourists while it is not necessary to provide excitement since it is not a priority for tourists. Tourism products need to be focused because of their great importance in rural destinations. Supporting facilities are observed to be insufficient and need to be improved.

8.1.3 Relationship between destination image and travel motivation & visiting intentions

After evaluating the performance of current rural destination brands and identifying the rural destination image factors, it is important to know whether these factors can affect tourists' travel motivation and visiting intentions. Factor analysis finds that there are three main travel motivations for rural tourism participants, which are relaxation, exploring new things and family togetherness. By conducting CCA, it is found that destination image is positively related with the travel motivation of having relaxation on the trip; and travel motivation is heavily associated with tourism product, which means the perceived image of the tourism product affects the tourists' travel motivations. As for the relationship between destination image and tourist behaviors, through logistic regression analysis, it is found that affective image factors are more influencing than cognitive factors. tourists are

likely to revisit the place when they gain relaxation and excitement during their trip; tourists tend to recommend the place to others when they feel relaxed on the trip. This result is different from previous study which argues that cognitive image factors are easier to manipulate in order to magnify the impact on tourists' behaviors. In this research, it is found that affective image factors are more powerful in influencing tourist behaviors.

8.1.4 Image gaps and three-gap rural destination branding framework

It is proved that rural tourism destination image is strongly related to tourists' travel motivation and behaviors. Thus, it is important to understand the rural destination image in order to better promote the destination. Govers and Kumar (2007) argue that successful branding requires the destination image to be rooted in a true destination identity. Chapter Seven investigates the image congruency within and between supply side (projected image) and demand side (perceived image). They are further categorized based on different information sources. For projected image, it is obtained online from DMO and tourism entrepreneurs. The destination image they projected is a major source for potential tourists to gain information of the destination (Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015; Hunter, 2016). For perceived image, online comments of a destination can be viewed by potential tourists and thus influence visit intention (Litvin et al., 2008). The other part of perceived image is gained from the on-site visitors, which is also important due to the influential power of the word-of-mouth. Through content analysis, three image gaps are identified, which leads to the acceptance of the three hypotheses. It could be concluded that in tourism supply side, there is a gap between the projected image from the DMO and the tourism entrepreneurs; in tourism demand side, there is a gap between the perceived image from the on-site visitors and the perceived image from the user generated contents (UGC). Furthermore, there is a gap between the projected image from tourism supply side and perceived image from the tourism demand side.

Based on these findings, a three-gap branding framework is established. The framework contains two main part: supply side and demand side. In supply side, the projected image is obtained from both DMO and entrepreneurs. To fill the image gap inside the projected image, it is suggested to focus on the rural destination positioning at the very first step, which requires comprehensive understanding of the local destination

identity and current brand knowledge. In demand side, the perceived image is collected from UGC and on-site visitors, the branding strategy for filling the gap between them is to specify the demands of rural destination tourists through leading tourists to build proper expectations and understanding rural tourist behaviors. The last step of this framework is to fill the gap between projected image and perceived image. If there is any incongruity between the two types of image, adjustment of current rural destination brand is required. From the supply side, tourism products should emphasis on the unique local characteristics and authentic sense of place; from the demand side, tourist satisfaction should be improved in order to improve the destination image. Only when the supply side and demand side are in line with each other, the destination brand could be considered successful (Koltringer & Dickinger, 2015). Based on the findings in this research, three aspects of branding strategies are suggested in the following sections:

8.2 Recommended branding strategies for rural destinations in China

8.2.1 Link tourists' memory with nostalgia

Since affective image is found to be more influential to tourist behaviors (Chapter Six), rural destinations marketers should focus on tourist experience and create emotional connections with rural tourists.

Nostalgia is a key element of attracting rural tourists. As many onsite visitors mentioned, rural lifestyle can stimulate the nostalgic feelings since the visitors have spent the childhood or have lived in a village before. Many urban residents have lived in the rural areas before, thus nostalgia is a key to open the door of memories and connect emotions with the tourists. In experience economy, “new” experience-based consumerism is occurring (Ong & Jin, 2017). Tourists look for authentic experiences in which they can find their real selves, and they desire more emotional connections in tourism activities (MacCannell, 1999; Duan, Chan, & Marafa, 2018). In rural tourism, some countryside landscapes are branded as the “natural” rural idyll. The rural becomes a refuge from urban life which can evoke a feeling of relaxation and nostalgia (Daugstad, 2008). This research also finds that relaxation is one major image factor of rural destinations (Chapter Five). Thus, the rural tourism developer needs to fulfill tourists' needs of achieving nostalgic feeling. It is suggested to utilize the rural tourism landscape, including farms, ancient villages, cultural heritage as a platform to share and represent the collective

memory with nostalgia. The form of “roots tourism” is now becoming increasingly popular in China, in which tourists travel to rural destinations where they or their ancestors originally come from. This branding strategy responds to the Gap 1 in the branding framework, which helps to position the rural destination with an authentic identity from the supply side.

8.2.2 Diversify Rural tourism product

The second branding strategy is innovation on rural tourism product, which responds to the second gap in the rural destination branding framework. In the demand side, the destination marketer should specify the needs of rural tourists. Chapter Six mentioned that tourists are highly motivated to visit one rural destination when the tourism product is perceived to be good. Currently, the rural tourism products are quite homogeneous in China. The most commonly seen products are the agriculture products which could be made into local dishes. It is suggested to combine innovation and authenticity in the rural tourism products. To provide freshness to the rural visitors, DMOs need to diversify rural tourism products with innovation. However, innovation should always in line with the local identity, which means the rural tourism products need to highlight the unique characteristics of the destination. Many rural destinations are doing well in terms of product innovation. For example, some rural villages in Henan province in China utilize wheat, which is a local agriculture plant, to produce wheat-straw painting.

Rural products can also be a brand for a destination and provide a platform for other activities. For instance, Sichuan province is famous for the habitat of Panda. It is also the production place of Bamboo. Daoming village, which is located near Chengdu has created bamboo products, buildings, and even organized events based on the products. Thus, the rural tourism contents are enriched.

8.2.3 Target on different market segmentation

As discussed in Chapter Five, the demographic information of rural destination visitors shares a lot in common. The DMOs need to utilize the visitor information and target on specific market segmentations. Based on the survey conducted in sub-urban

areas of Yangtze River Delta, most of the visitors are well educated with average bachelor degree; majority of them are employed with monthly income level of above RMB8000. This information indicates that the rural visitors are generally rich and thus may be inelastic to the price of tourism products. Instead, they may be more sensitive to product quality.

As for the age group, the majority of tourists are 21 to 30 years old in Moganshan and Dongping town while the major age group in Yaxi town is 41-50 years old. The different age groups should be treated as different market segments since their characteristics and needs of them are different. For Moganshan and Dongping town, they should target on the young generation with innovative product design and more promotion campaigns should be done on the electronic platform. For Yaxi town, since the mid-aged visitors are the majority group, it indicates that the “slow life” philosophy is more attractive to them. Future promotions should focus on this theme and tourism products also needs to anchor on this main theme. Promotion needs to be done on some traditional channels, such as TV and newspaper.

8.3 Rural branding good practice and implications

Besides the findings of the current research, some lessons can be learnt from rural branding good practice around the world. The examples are successful rural branding cases which can shed some lights on the proposed branding framework in this research. The implications are demonstrated in the following.

First, Cai (2002) raised a concept of “cooperative branding”, which means that the nearby rural destinations cooperate with each other to gain more awareness and profit. Old West Country organization (OWC) is a good example in applying for the “cooperative branding”. It is formed by four counties in Southwestern New Mexico in United States in 1982. Due to the establishment of OWC, the cooperation among the counties are enhanced. They took advantage of the similar geographical location as well as the cultural background and branded themselves with a common theme of Cowboys and Indians and multicultural heritage. The cooperation is a successful branding strategy that integrated regional resources with synergy effect.

In China, some rural destinations have applied this clustering strategy as well. Many rural accommodations have made similar attempts in the industry by using the “homestay community”. The development of homestay clusters is an inevitable trend in rural tourism. Entrepreneurs are the most commonly seen initiators of the clusters. In 2017, one company called “Qianlizoudanji (千裏走單騎)” cooperated with the industry's four homestay brands and initiated the "5+N" B&B cluster strategy. 5 represents 5 B&B brands while N represents various industries, including catering, entertainment, parent-child farm activities and so on. These five relatively well-known domestic homestay brands form alliances to jointly formulate a cluster development alliance convention and evaluate other cooperation brand qualifications. The homestay clusters compete with the local government for resources, and the five homestays are stationed with different formats that they are good at and will make this area a comprehensive holiday destination that can accommodate multi-dimensional holiday needs in the future.

The second good practice in rural destination branding is utilizing multi-media as promotion channel. Many Chinese rural destinations are doing well in term of branding in new media platform, including social media, TV shows. For example, there is an increasing number of TV reality shows in China shooting in the rural area, such as “The Inn (親愛的客棧)”, “Back To Field (向往的生活)”. These type of TV programs branded the tourism destinations with slow lifestyles in countryside and help increase the brand awareness of rural tourism destinations in China.

These successful branding cases have provided references and indicated the trends in rural tourism. To sum it up, the implication is two-fold, which includes homestay clustering and innovation on promotion channels.

8.4 Limitations of the research

Overall, there are some major limitations of the current research. First, there is limitation in site selection part. Due to the broadness of rural areas in China, the selection of three sites in Yangtze River Delta are not sufficient to represent the overall rural destinations near major urban centers. Apart from the Yangtze River Delta, there are many other major city centers, such as the Pearl River Delta, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei city clusters, etc. The rural destinations near those urban centers are not included in the current research.

Second, in the data collection part, limitations exist in both questionnaire survey and interviews. For questionnaire survey, convenience sampling is adopted. This non-random sampling approach may weaken the explanatory power in the statistical analysis. Nevertheless, since the study target is the tourist, it is deemed as the only possible way to collect information from on-site visitors. In the interview part, a variety of stakeholders and authorities have been involved in the branding process. However, the current research cannot cover the perception of each stakeholder. The stakeholders only include those in the supply and demand side of rural tourism. The local residents are not in the scope of this research. Some tourism proponents refused to participate or did not have enough time to discuss the issues in detail.

The third limitation is in data analysis part. The current research requires tremendous amount of data. For the quantitative method part, statistical errors may happen during the analysis. In CFA part, the model fit shows that both of the two CFA models slightly passed the acceptable threshold. As for content analysis, it is one of the major research methods in analyzing the UGC online. However, the amount of available UGC data online is huge, so the researcher has to select data from specific period in order to analyze. Besides, the data is coded manually, which is a subjective process and may lead to bias.

The fourth limitation is the simplicity of the branding framework constructed in Chapter Seven. There may be deficiency in explaining the whole picture of rural destination branding. It is only proposed based on the results generated from the content analysis, which is designed empirically instead of grounded theory.

Last but not least, there is time and resource constraints. The time is limited in terms of surveys and interviews. The length of questionnaire and interview questions are shortened because of the time constraints. For example, the underlying reason for rating the image of a destination is not further investigated. The sample size is 503 and the study sites are all located in Yangtze River Delta, which is not sufficient to study the overall rural destinations located near the city centers in China.

8.5 Suggestions for further studies

Further studies could be conducted in several aspects. First, data collection could be expanded. In the current research, three rural destinations in Yangtze River Delta are selected. Further researches could be done in other locations to find whether the situation is the same regarding rural tourism image and branding. In data collection part, more stakeholders could be involved in the survey in the future, such as the residents, which are one important factor in the branding process. Further future research could be conducted from a bottom-up approach. Moreover, it is also suggested to comprehend the rural branding process from the government policy level. For example, the relevant policies could be analyzed from a top-down approach. The study conducted in this way could therefore be replicated elsewhere.

In data analysis part, some statistical analysis could be expanded. For the familiarity and favorability analysis, it is suggested to develop a measurement scale for both familiarity and favorability. In this way, further investigation could be conducted to explore the underlying reason why people like or dislike one place. Another improvement could be made in the EFA of rural destination image factors. EFA could be conducted separately in different sites to identify specific image factors for each destination.

In the study of tourist behavior, the current research only includes two categories, which are willingness to revisit and willingness to recommend to others. In future studies, more tourist behaviors could be studied such as willingness to pay and any other behavioral aspect of tourists that can make a rural destination continuously attractive. Furthermore, based on the current statistical results of the four stages, structural equation modeling (SEM) could be applied to describe the overall rural branding in China.

Theoretically, the rural destination branding framework provides opportunities for constructing branding framework for specific destinations in the future. For future studies, it could be modified to fit in specified places and provide reference for branding destinations in other places in China or even in other countries.

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Appendices:

Appendix I: List of 24 variables in measuring destination image

Destination image	Category	Variables
Cognitive Image	Natural Environment	Scenery and natural landscape
		Biodiversity
		Clean air
		Clear water
	Social and cultural Environment	Friendly and warm people
		Interesting cultural events/activities
		Delicious Local cuisine
		Inhabitants have interesting life style and traditions
	General infrastructure	Private and public transportations are sufficient
		Health services are sufficient
		General price level is reasonable
		High level of safety for tourism
	Tourism infrastructure	Clear signage of attractions
		Good interpretation
		Sufficient choices of accommodation
		Accommodation is comfortable
		Price of accommodation is reasonable
		Sufficient choices of restaurant
		Restaurant is hygienic
		Price of food is reasonable
Affective Image	Affective evaluations	Destination is arousing
		Destination is pleasant
		Destination is exciting
		Destination is relaxing

Appendix II: List of 20 variables in measuring tourist motivation

Relaxation	Get refreshed
	Escape from a busy job
	Relax daily tension
	Be physically active
	Not have to rush
Socialization	Travel with friends
	Meet people with similar interests
Learning	Explore new places
	Experience new and different lifestyles
	Learn new things, increase knowledge
	Travel to historical heritage sites
Family togetherness	Be together as a family
	Experience traditional culture for their kids
Personal emotion	Experience solitude
	Indulge in luxury
	Find thrills and excitement
	Have fun, be entertained

Appendix III: questionnaire used in the current research in both English and Chinese version

1) English version

Questionnaire on rural destination image and branding in sub-urban areas in China

Information obtained is only used for academic purpose

Part A: Destination image

A1: Please rate each element of tourist destination.

	The level of IMPORTANCE							The level of PORFORMANCE								
	unimportant-----important							Not available	dissatisfied-----satisfied							Not available
➤ Natural environment																
1. Scenery and natural landscape	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
2. Biodiversity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
3. Clean air	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
4. Clear water	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
➤ Social and cultural Environment																
5. Friendly and warm people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A

6. Interesting cultural events/activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
7. Delicious Local cuisine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
8. Inhabitants have interesting life style and traditions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
➤ General infrastructure																
9. Private and public transportations are sufficient	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
10. Health services are sufficient	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
11. General price level is reasonable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
12. High level of safety for tourism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
➤ Tourism infrastructure																
13. Clear signage of attractions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
14. Good interpretation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
15. Sufficient choices of accommodation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
16. Accommodation is comfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
17. Price of accommodation is reasonable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A

18. Sufficient choices of restaurant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
19. Restaurant is hygienic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
20. Price of food is reasonable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
➤ Affective evaluations																
21. Destination is arousing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
22. Destination is pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
23. Destination is exciting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
24. Destination is relaxing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A

A2: Please describe the destination image in story format (using complete sentences, not single words).

1. What is your experience in this destination? What did you do or see, feel, hear, smell, taste there?

2. What are the images and thoughts come to mind BEFORE and AFTER your visit in this destination?

Before:

After:

Part B: Visitation information

B1: General information

1. How did you arrive at this destination?

- 1). By car.
- 2). By bus.
- 3). By air.
- 4). By train.
- 5). Others, please indicate: _____

2. Where did you hear about this destination?

- 1). The Internet.
- 2). Books and guides.
- 3). TV.
- 4). Friends and relatives.
- 5). Travel agency.
- 6). Fairs and/or exhibitions.
- 7). Other, please indicate: _____

3. How many times have you visited this destination, including this time?

- 1) One time
- 2) Two times
- 3) More than three times, please indicate the times: _____

B2: Tourist motivations

Please rate each element of travel motivations for visiting this destination.

Element of tourist motivations	unimportant-----important							N/A
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
➤ Relaxation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
1. Get refreshed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
2. Escape from a busy job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
3. Relax daily tension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
4. Be physically active	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
5. Not have to rush	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
➤ Socialization								
6. Travel with friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
7. Meet people with similar interests	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
➤ Learning								
8. Explore new places	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
9. Experience new and different lifestyles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A

10. Learn new things, increase knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
11. Travel to historical heritage sites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
➤ Family togetherness								
12. Be together as a family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
13. Experience traditional culture for their kids	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
➤ Personal emotion								
14. Experience solitude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
15. Indulge in luxury	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
16. Find thrills and excitement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
17. Have fun, be entertained	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A

B3: Tourist behavior

1. Will you consider revisit this destination?	Yes	No	Not sure
2. Will you consider recommend this destination to others	Yes	No	Not sure

Part C: Personal information

Gender	Male			Female		
Age	Below 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Above 60
Education	Primary school or below	Junior secondary	Senior secondary	Vocational education	Bachelor degree	Postgraduate or above
Working status	Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Student	Others:	
Monthly income (RMB)	Below 4000	4000-5000	5000-6000	6000-7000	7000-8000	Above 8000
Place of origin	Country:		Province/State:		City:	

~Thank you for your cooperation~

2) Simplified Chinese version

乡村旅游目的地形象以及品牌调查问卷

此问卷获得的资料只会作学术用途

A 部分：目的地形象

A1：请为乡村旅游的各项指标重要性以及此当地的表现打分

	指标的重要水平							指标的表现水平								
	不重要	-----					重要	不清楚	不满意	-----					满意	不清楚
➤ 自然环境																
1. 景观及自然地貌	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
2. 生物多样性	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
3. 新鲜的空气	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
4. 干净的水	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
➤ 社会环境及文化																
5. 友善的本地居民	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
6. 有趣的文化事件活动	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
7. 美味的当地食品	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚

8. 有趣的居民生活方式及当地传统	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
➤ 基础设施																
9. 良好的个人及公共交通设施	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
10. 充足的医疗设施	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
11. 整体物价合理	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
12. 社会治安良好	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
➤ 旅游设施																
13. 景点清晰的指示牌	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
14. 良好的解说牌	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
15. 众多的住宿选择	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
16. 舒适的住宿环境	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
17. 合理的住宿收费	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
18. 众多的餐饮选择	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
19. 卫生的就餐环境	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
20. 合理的餐饮收费	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚

➤ 情感形象																
21. 此目的地令人心情振奋	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
22. 此目的地令人心情愉悦	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
23. 此目的地令人心情激动	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚
24. 此目的地令人心情放松	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不清楚

A2: 请用完整的句子描述目的地形象

3. 请描述一下您在此地的经历。您有什么具体的感受？（例如：参观了哪些景点，看到了什么，听到了什么，闻到了什么，品尝到了什么，等等）

4. 请分别描述一下参观前和参观后，您对此地的印象

参观前:

参观后:

B 部分: 游客参观信息

B1: 基本信息

4. 您是如何抵达此地的?

- 1). 乘坐自驾车
- 2). 乘坐公交车
- 3). 乘坐飞机
- 4). 乘坐火车
- 5). 其他途径, 请注明: _____

5. 您从哪里得知此地?

- 1). 网络
- 2). 书籍和指南
- 3). 电视
- 4). 朋友和亲戚
- 5). 旅行社
- 6). 活动和展览
- 7). 其他途径, 请注明: _____

6. 包括本次, 您一共来过此地几次?

- 4) 一次
- 5) 两次
- 6) 三次以上, 请注明次数: _____

B2: 旅游动机

请您来此地的旅游动机打分

旅游动机	不重要-----重要	不适用
➤ 放松		
1. 恢复精神	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
2. 逃离工作学习	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
3. 舒缓平日的压力	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
4. 保持身体健康	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
5. 放慢生活节奏	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
➤ 社交		
6. 和朋友一同游览新地方	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
7. 结识志同道合的新朋友	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
➤ 学习		
8. 探索发现新地方	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
9. 发掘新的生活方式	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用
10. 学习新东西，增长见识	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	不适用

11. 参观历史文物	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不适用
➤ 家庭								
12. 享受家庭时光	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不适用
13. 让孩子学习传统文化	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不适用
➤ 个人情感								
14. 体验与世隔绝	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不适用
15. 体验奢华的生活	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不适用
16. 找寻刺激和兴奋感	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不适用
17. 寻求娱乐开心	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不适用

B3: 游客行为

1. 您会考虑再次游览此地么?	会	不会	不确定
2. 您会推荐此地给别人么?	会	不会	不确定

C 部分: 个人信息

1. 性别	男			女		
2. 年龄	20 岁以下	21-30 岁	31-40 岁	41-50 岁	51-60 岁	60 岁以上
3. 教育背景	小学及以下	初中	高中	职业教育	大学	研究生及以上
4. 工作状态	在职	失业	退休	学生	其他:	
5. 月收入 (元)	低于 4000	4000-5000	5000-6000	6000-7000	7000-8000	8000 以上
6. 居住地	省:			市:		

~感谢您的参与~