CHINESE OUTBOUND TOURISM SEGMENTATION:
A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

Abstract
The growth of Chinese outbound tourism over the past two decades is attracting great attention among researchers. After an initial stage where this market was analyzed as a whole, the number of studies focusing on segmentation is on the rise. This paper carries out a systematic review of 171 articles published between 1995 and 2020 in top-tier tourism journals that either focused on a specific segment or established segments of mainland Chinese outbound tourists. The literature review reports an analysis of publication outlets, chronological evolution, destinations, research methods, segments, and main findings. It also identifies research gaps and suggests potential future research avenues.

Keywords Chinese outbound tourism, market segmentation, literature review.

中国出境旅游市场细分：系统性回顾和研究议程
摘要
中国出境旅游过去二十年的增长引起了学术界的极大关注。在对中国出境旅游市场进行整体分析的初始阶段后，专注于市场细分的研究数量正在增加。本文对1995年至2020年间发表在顶级旅游期刊上的171篇文章进行了系统性回顾，这些文章关注中国大陆出境游客的特定市场细分或已建立的市场细分。此文献综述对出版渠道、时间演变、目的地、研究方法、市场细分和主要发现做出了分析。本文还确定了研究空白并提出了未来潜在的研究路径。

关键词：中国出境旅游，市场细分，文献综述
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INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the World Tourism Organization predicted that the number of outbound tourists from China would reach 100 million by 2020 (World Tourism Organization, 2004). That forecast was surpassed six years earlier, in 2014. Nowadays, China has become one of the largest sources of outbound tourists and an engine of tourism market growth. Outbound travels from China grew fast over the past 15 years, with a sharp increase since 2010 as the volume of trips has been growing by an annual average of 15% (European Commission, 2017). According to the China’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Chinese citizens made 169.21 million outbound trips in 2019 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020). Yet, only 10% of China’s population owns a passport and less than 10% are currently traveling abroad, hence reinforcing the potential of China’s outbound tourism market (Ctrip & China Tourism Academy, 2018).

Apart from the potential market growth, two additional characteristics of China’s outbound tourism represent opportunities for many overseas destinations. First, China is leading global outbound tourism in terms of expenditure, each Chinese traveler spending on average more per trip than tourists from any other country (World Tourism Organization, 2017, 2018). Second, Chinese travelers represent a useful tool for fighting against seasonality since they may travel outside the traditional western holiday periods. This is because most Chinese use to travel during the so-called Golden Week holidays (Huang & Wei, 2018): Chinese Lunar New Year (January-February) and National Day (around October 1st).

As a result, Chinese outbound tourism is becoming one of the most promising research topics and is attracting the attention from an ever-increasing number of scholars from different fields. Several literature reviews analyzed the growing amount of research studies focusing on Chinese outbound tourism (Cai et al., 2008; Jin & Wang, 2016; Jørgensen et al., 2017; Keating & Kriz, 2008; Keating et al., 2015; Law et al., 2016; Lojo et al., 2019; Tse, 2015). One of the main conclusions of these state-of-the art reviews is that many existing studies tend to consider
Chinese outbound tourists as a homogenous group without addressing the diversity and potential differences among segments within this market (Jørgensen et al., 2017). Notwithstanding the foregoing, some recent studies are focusing on certain segments of Chinese outbound tourists, investigating their distinctive behavioral patterns. Li, McCabe, et al. (2017) argue that the Chinese long-haul outbound tourism market shows differences among subgroups in terms of age, motivations, preferences, travel experience, travel arrangement type, etc.

Market segmentation has been extensively used in the tourism industry, applying geographical, socio-economic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral criteria with the aim of identifying homogeneous groups of tourists that facilitate targeting and positioning when developing marketing strategies (Bigné et al., 2008). Prior literature reviews addressed the topic of tourists’ segments, highlighting how data-driven market segmentation is conducted in tourism research (Dolnicar, 2002), what are the main a priori and a posteriori segmentation criteria used in tourism studies (Bigné et al., 2008), how the market segmentation process should be designed to aid decision-making of destination-marketing organizations (Hanlan et al., 2006), and how information and communication technologies affect tourism market segmentation (Pesonen, 2013). However, none of these past literature reviews dealt specifically with Chinese outbound tourism market segments.

In light of the above, the aim of this article is to carry out a comprehensive literature review of existing research that either analyzed a specific segment of mainland Chinese outbound tourists or identified several market segments. More precisely, this review seeks to answer the following questions: What segments of Chinese outbound tourists have been identified? What are the main findings reported for each segment? Which relevant segments have been under-researched and therefore represent promising future research avenues?

The contributions of this article are threefold. First, it complements prior literature reviews on Chinese outbound tourism that did not specifically focus on segments, but rather
addressed the Chinese outbound tourism market as a whole. Second, it offers useful insights that may be used in future research efforts on tourism market segmentation. Third, it provides helpful cues for tourism managers and policymakers that may facilitate the development of tailor-made strategies to meet the specific needs of this heterogeneous market.

The review is organized as follows. First, a background and research overview are provided, highlighting some current trends of China’s outbound tourism market with a special focus on the need for a segment-based analysis. Then, the methodology employed and some descriptive data are presented. After that, the main results regarding the most researched segments are reported. Finally, several contributions and limitations as well as potential avenues for future research are outlined.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH OVERVIEW
The ‘first wave’ of Chinese outbound tourists during the early years of the 21st century still showed the following traditional profile (Andreu et al., 2013): leisure trips’ length between 10-15 days visiting several countries in the same trip; cultural sites and shopping as the main travel motivations; liking for Chinese-friendly hotels providing them with Chinese food, a kettle or hot water point, Chinese TV channels, etc.; and a strong preference for traveling in organized groups. This traditional preference for package tours derived from their lack of experience in traveling abroad, but also because it was a cheaper and easier way for doing so. Moreover, state-owned Chinese travel agencies dominated the market with exclusive rights to arrange tours (ChinTell, 2018). However, the Chinese outbound tourism market is evolving, and new trends are now reshaping it (Arlt, 2018; Hernández, 2018).

Second-tier cities
Although first-tier cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen are still the main home base of Chinese outbound tourists, second-tier cities like Chengdu in southwestern China
are on the rise. The increasing per capita income as well as the opening of new international air connections from second-tier cities are behind this trend.

**Online connected**

Chinese consumers are increasingly connected, using mobile phones for everything. Trip.com (online travel agency, formerly known as Ctrip), WeChat and Weibo (social media channels), Zhihu (social Q&A site), Huajiao (live streaming platform), and Qiongyou (content platform), among others, are now essential tools for Chinese tourists when looking for information, sharing travel moments and booking tourism services. In particular, payments through mobile devices are becoming an intrinsic part of Chinese consumers’ culture. Therefore, Chinese outbound tourists will appreciate not only that China’s UnionPay credit cards are accepted by tourism service providers, but also that WeChat Pay and Alipay (the most popular mobile payment platforms in China) can be used during their trips abroad.

**More self-organization**

The ‘second wave’ of Chinese outbound tourists includes more experienced travelers that do not always need tour guides. This new profile arises from the growth of urban middle class that can now afford to spend more time and money on having fun. By relying on the above-mentioned online platforms, they may travel self-organized as fully independent travelers and modular outbound travelers. The latter book parts of tourism services from specialized online platforms that allow them to create their own modular tour as a personalized trip (Arlt, 2015).

**Further segmentation and new travel motivations**

The new trend of customized trips is opening opportunities for further segmentation in the Chinese outbound tourism market. These are some outstanding examples (ChinTell, 2018; Ctrip & China Tourism Academy, 2018; European Commission, 2017): foodies or chihuo (the intrinsic passion of Chinese citizens for food is leading some of them to try and learn about local food when visiting a foreign country); culture lovers (with cultural heritage interests...
linked to arts, literature, and architecture); shoppers (who still enjoy buying products, in particular, luxury goods); polar travelers (attracted by natural phenomena like aurora borealis in North Europe); family travel (including amusement parks for parent-children trips and visiting relatives who are studying overseas); millennials (young, adventurous and independent travelers who prefer off-the-beaten-track places); senior or silver tourists (elder Chinese who still prefer package tours, sometimes looking for new experiences such as cruises); and women tourists (who are increasingly traveling abroad on their own will, attracted by movie location tours among other motivations). Consequently, each segment has different travel motivations and preferences as it is depicted below.

**METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS**

This literature review is a domain-based one. More precisely, it is a structured review focusing on the main methods, topics, and content of the reviewed studies (Paul & Rialp, 2020). A narrative review is developed, namely, a comprehensive synthesis of findings reported by prior research studies (Green et al., 2006). By carrying out such a narrative review, this study aims to identify and summarize what has been previously published, as well as discover under-addressed areas that require further attention within the research domain (Ferrari, 2015). Next, the process for selecting journals and articles is outlined.

**Journal selection and time frame**

All tourism-related journals listed in the 2019 Journal Citation Reports (JCR) within the category ‘Hospitality, leisure, sport & tourism’ were selected. After excluding those that do not focus on tourism, 29 journals were chosen. In addition, the Journal of China Tourism Research was included. Despite not being indexed in JCR, it is considered the publication with the highest impact among those specifically focusing on Chinese tourism. For that reason, it was included
in previous reviews of literature on Chinese outbound tourism (Jin & Wang, 2016; Jørgensen et al., 2017; Lojo et al., 2019; Tse, 2015). Therefore, this review comprises 30 journals.

The time frame covers the period 1995-2020. The main reason for starting the literature review in 1995 is the small number of articles on Chinese outbound tourism published prior to that date (Keating et al., 2015). Additionally, previous literature reviews on this topic including a large number of journals began their search for articles in 1995 (Cai et al., 2008; Tse, 2015). In-press articles, which had already been accepted, but had not yet been published in a regular issue until December 2020, were not considered in this review.

Article selection

First, all articles on outbound tourists from mainland China published in the 30 journals from 1995 to 2020 were initially searched. As a starting point, articles from those journals that had already been included in two prior literature reviews were identified: that of Cai et al. (2008), which covered the period 1995-2006, and that of Lojo et al. (2019), who analyzed the period 2006-2016. For those journals not considered in these past literature reviews or that, despite having been included, were not covered by the period analyzed in each of them, a direct search was carried out in the Web of Science (WoS). For doing so, the keywords ‘China’ or ‘Chinese’ within the ‘title’ and/or ‘abstract’ fields were used. For those articles in which there was any doubt, their content was checked accessing the respective journal’s website.

The next step was to select the articles that, instead of addressing Chinese outbound tourism from a generic perspective, either focused on a specific segment or established segments of Chinese outbound tourists. Both empirical and conceptual articles were considered, excluding book reviews. To carry out this exhaustive search, the content of all articles identified in the previous step was analyzed. Finally, 171 articles met the criteria, thus being the object of analysis in this literature review. Appendix 1 reports the full list of articles.

Distribution of articles

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The journal which published the largest number of articles was the Journal of China Tourism Research (23 articles), followed by International Journal of Tourism Research (17), Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research (16), Journal of Vacation Marketing (15), Tourism Management (15), Journal of Travel Research (13), and Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing (10). It is worth noting that four journals did not publish any article meeting the criteria during the period analyzed: Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology; Journal of Leisure Research; Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism; and Tourism Review. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of articles by journal.

Insert Figure 1 about here

As shown in Figure 2, most articles were published during recent years. More precisely, 127 articles were published between 2015 and 2020, accounting for 74 percent of the total.

Insert Figure 2 about here

As for tourist destinations, the largest proportion of articles focused on various destinations simultaneously (37 articles). Among those articles focusing on a single destination, Australia leads the ranking (24 articles), followed by Macao (22), Hong Kong (19), and Taiwan (11). Figure 3 reports the number of articles by destination.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Regarding article type, empirical papers clearly prevail (165) over conceptual ones (6). Quantitative methodology dominates (94) over qualitative (47) and mixed (24). As for specific research methods, most articles are based on surveys (87), followed by those based on in-depth interviews (31) and those adopting a mixed qual-quan approach based on a combination of both methodologies (24). Figure 4 illustrates article distribution by research methods.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Finally, with regard to segments—the core topic of this literature review—the largest number of articles focused on shoppers and students (22 articles each), followed by those
analyzing package tour/independent travelers (18), gamblers (14), foodies (11), and millennials (9). Figure 5 shows the distribution of articles by segment.

Insert Figure 5 about here

THEMATIC FINDINGS BY SEGMENT

Due to the wide variability among the reviewed articles, a narrative review was carried out. Next, the research design is explained, following the guidelines provided by past studies addressing the methodology of narrative reviews (Ferrari, 2015; Green et al., 2006). As reported in Figure 5, there is great heterogeneity among the reviewed articles, and the number of articles falling into certain categories is low. Thus, to facilitate comparison and provide more meaningful insights, the analysis centers on the six most frequent segments listed above. Besides, articles included within each segment are very heterogeneous, especially in the case of shoppers, students, package tour/independent travelers, gamblers, and foodies. For that reason, the focus is on the main findings reported by each article grouping them into specific tourist destinations. As for the millennial category, the diversity of destinations analyzed prevented the use of that procedure, hence the results are summarized by focusing on the research topic addressed.

In addition, when presenting the findings, only the outstanding results reported by each article are highlighted with the aim of synthesizing all the relevant information into comprehensive paragraphs (Green et al., 2006). In doing so, articles are first analyzed one at a time following the above-mentioned structure to show the connections among articles within each segment category. Later, the synthesis is completed with a more meaningful integration by means of concept maps that show connections among segments as well. The thematic findings by segment reported in this section were obtained after a manual inductive thematic
analysis where the authors undertook a detailed and critical reading and analysis of each article (Jørgensen et al., 2017).

**Shoppers**

Twenty-two articles analyze shoppers. Seven of them focus on Hong Kong, a pilgrimage destination for shopping lovers, particularly of luxury products. Hung et al. (2020) identify two types of shoppers: socially oriented (who engage in luxury consumption to impress others) and individually oriented (motivated by satisfying personal needs). Correia et al. (2018, 2019) confirm that materialism has a positive impact on intention to buy luxury goods. Tsang et al. (2014) report that experienced shoppers are motivated by personal development, self-esteem, and prestige. As for perceived value, Sharma et al. (2018) show that it is influenced by product quality, risk, and value for money. From a different approach, Tse and Tse (2015) analyze legal issues of zero-fare tours (cheap packaged tours with a specific shopping itinerary), while Yan (2020) examines responses to a tragic event caused by forced shopping associated with them.

Three articles center on Macao. Findings reveal that mainland Chinese tourists’ environmental concern moderates post-purchase evaluations (Chang et al., 2017). Regarding shopping satisfaction, it is affected by perceptions of shopping service quality, environment, and convenience (Wong, 2013); and it involves four dimensions: product and environment, merchandise value, staff service quality, and service differentiation (Wong & Wan, 2013).

Taiwan has been also analyzed as a destination. Findings indicate that mainland shoppers emphasize authenticity, traditionality, and craftsmanship when buying food souvenirs (Lin, 2017). Furthermore, providing home delivery service is the shopping attribute leading to higher satisfaction (Lin & Lin, 2006). Two other studies investigate shopping in Australia, suggesting that cultural values and social relations in China, especially self-face, have an influence on shoppers’ behavior (Gao et al., 2017). Besides, maintaining *guanxi* or interpersonal connections is a unique characteristic of their shopping practices (Jin et al., 2020).
Other articles focused on a single destination. They report that shopping experience is determined by several attributes: sales staff, service quality, and variety, quality and cultural representation of products in Thailand (Parasakul, 2020); store staff and shop environment in South Korea (Lee & Choi, 2020); and stores, payment methods, tour guides, and souvenir sellers in North Korea (Li & Ryan, 2018). Moreover, tourists’ satisfaction has an impact on the post-visit attitude toward Britain (Xu et al., 2018). As for the US, Chinese tourists have an overall positive image of American products, perceiving their quality as consistent with lower prices than similar products in China (Xu & McGehee, 2012).

The rest of articles dealing with shoppers did not focus on a single country. Zhu et al. (2016) find that functional/adornment goods and social gifts are the most popular among Chinese tourists in Europe. Hung et al. (2019) show that luxury shoppers appreciate three main destination attributes: local citizens’ hospitality, product quality, and service quality. Finally, Meng et al. (2019) identify some precursors of impulsive shopping behavior: consumer impulsiveness and materialism, social influence of relatives and friends, and product brand variety. Figure 6 maps out the main relationships between findings within the shopper segment.

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The shopping behavior of Chinese outbound tourists is shaped by both cultural values (to maintain interpersonal relationships linked to *guanxi*, a distinguishing feature of Chinese culture) and the desire to satisfy personal needs (like self-esteem and prestige). Their shopping satisfaction is determined by both product attributes (quality, brand, cultural value, etc.) and service quality (store staff, shop environment, payment methods, etc.). Furthermore, shopping satisfaction contributes to generate a positive attitude toward the destination.

**Students**

This category encompasses 22 articles. Six of them focus on Australia. Findings reveal that social media content is an influential factor in determining Australia’s attractiveness (Shu &
Scott, 2014), its most valued attributes being iconic attractions, nature, photography (Hughes et al., 2015), product quality, and destination image (Ma et al., 2018). Moreover, place attachment and satisfaction are the most important factors influencing Chinese students’ intention to promote Australia as a tourism destination (Chen et al., 2015). Chinese independent student travelers usually take day excursions close to their study’ locations, while backpackers prefer longer trips to multiple locations (King & Gardiner, 2015). In addition, Chinese students enrolled in Australia tourism and hospitality degrees appreciate communication, relationship, teamwork, and hotel management skills (Sonnenschein et al., 2017).

Four articles focus on the US. Results show that engaging in serious leisure is positively associated with gaining social support from friends this, in turn, facilitating school adaptation (Lee et al., 2018). Despite being an effective tool in combating acculturative stress, certain Chinese students consider that leisure activities may detract time from academic tasks (Zhou et al., 2018), as they have a strong desire to focus on their studies (Li & Stodolska, 2006). Furthermore, Ryan & Huimin (2007) report that Chinese students travel slightly less in the US.

Two articles analyze Chinese students in New Zealand. Findings suggest that they go on vacation within their country of studies mainly motivated by relaxation needs and search for study and career opportunities (Ryan & Zhang, 2007), and that they attract relatives and friends to visit the country (Liu & Ryan, 2011). Two other articles center on Chinese students enrolled in tourism related programs at UK universities. Their main motivations for studying abroad are to get a good quality education, to gain international experience to secure better job opportunities, and to better understand western culture (Huang, 2013). As for those undertaking dissertations, their positive experiences are related to access useful information and peer support, although cultural barriers affect relationships with supervisors (Huang, 2007).

Regarding other destinations, empirical evidence is diverse. Lifelong learning and dining experience of Chinese students during their stay in South Korea have a positive influence
on their adaptation and tourism experience (Kim & Kim, 2019). Passive tourism activities are the most popular among Chinese students in Norway, due to parental disapproval and fear of ‘losing face’ (Mei & Lantai, 2018). Attitude is the most significant driver of Chinese students’ intention to travel to Japan (Park et al., 2017). Mainland Chinese students’ motivations to revisit Hong Kong are linked to their life experiences while studying there (Xu & Huang, 2018).

The remaining articles within this category did not focus on a single destination. Zhu et al. (2017) find that self-development matters among Chinese students in Europe. Fu et al. (2018) explore overseas educational travel experiences of Chinese adolescents, identifying their perceived consequences (expand horizon, learn foreign school culture, and experience a different world). Li and Qi (2019) discover four Chinese tourism overseas doctoral students’ motivations: academic-, individual-, overseas experience-, and family/friends-related. Lastly, Xu et al. (2009) compare travel behaviors of undergraduate students from China and the UK, showing that the former place more importance on visiting famous sights and learning about other cultures. Figure 7 depicts a conceptual diagram summarizing the main findings regarding overseas Chinese students.

Insert Figure 7 about here

Their main motivations for studying abroad are self-development (both relational and individual), cross-cultural learning, access to high-quality education, and seek better job opportunities. Their leisure activities while staying abroad show some distinctive characteristics: relaxation needs act as a driver; leisure is sometimes perceived as taking time away from study tasks; serious leisure contributes to social support and school adaptation; and passive activities may be preferred because of cultural reasons associated with not ‘losing face’.

Package tour / Independent travelers

This category covers 18 articles. Eight of them focus on package tour travelers. Considering Australia, findings suggest that attractions, tour leader, food, and accommodation are the core
service components (Chen et al., 2018), natural scenery and agreeable environment are valued (Wang & Davidson, 2010), whereas dining/eating, sightseeing, and cultural heritage are the main preferences (Chow & Murphy, 2008). As for Hong Kong, leisure activities and tour guiding service have the greatest impact on satisfaction (Chan, Hsu, et al., 2015) and as Chinese tourists accumulate travel experience, package tours are substituted with independent tours (Chen et al., 2016). Regarding Taiwan, Huang et al. (2015) show that destination brand associations are favorably perceived. Centering on various destinations, Chen et al. (2019) suggest that mainland Chinese tourists prefer package tours with direct flights and fewer designated shops, while Pearce and Lu (2011) report that learning outcomes of group tourists are shaped by individual circumstances and travel experiences.

Five articles address independent travelers. Kimber et al. (2019) find that young Chinese independent travelers use digital cameras in Thailand to create online self-identities of prosperity, love and xiao qing xing or Chinese hipsterism. Lu and Chen (2014) reveal that Chinese independent travelers to Taiwan consider the internet as the most important information source, but they also resort to media advertisement. Mejia et al. (2018) report that Chinese independent tourism in the US is driven by diverse pull and push factors, and it is facilitated by improvements in air routes, technologies, and visa policies. Not focusing on a specific destination, Wu et al. (2018) show that scenery, road facilities, and available activities have a positive impact on the satisfaction of Chinese independent tourists. Wu and Pearce (2016) explore Chinese tourists’ motives to create little ‘Lonely Planets’ guides that provide independent travelers with useful information. Although their main motivations are like those of their Western counterparts, two Chinese cultural issues also matter in blogging behavior: to rely on others, and to respect many forms of artistic achievements.

The last group of articles within this category make a comparison between the two travel arrangement types (packaged and independent) based on several dimensions. Three of them are
centered on Taiwan. Findings reveal that Taiwan opening policy starting in 2008 had a greater positive impact on mainland Chinese package tour visitors than on independent tourists (Cang et al., 2017), the number of individual tourists showing a more symmetric volatility pattern since then (Chang et al., 2019). Besides, both organic information (mass media and interpersonal sources) and induced information (advertisement by travel agencies and destination organizations) are Taiwan’s image formation drivers for group tourists, but only organic information shapes that image in the case of independent tourists (Lin & Kuo, 2018). The remaining two articles make the comparison focusing on other destinations. Thus, Liu et al. (2015) show that the relationship between Macao’s destination image and tourists’ satisfaction is stronger for independent travelers. Lastly, Lojo and Li (2018) find that, when visiting Spain, independent travelers seem to be more satisfied with the trip and the destination, but less satisfied with Chinese language services. Figure 8 shows the main differences between the two market segments based on travel arrangement type.

Insert Figure 8 about here

While package tour travelers value sightseeing, cultural heritage, food, and guiding services, independent travelers place more importance on scenery, available activities, and transport convenience. Moreover, Chinese independent tourists rely more on mass media advertisement and interpersonal information sources, including travel blogs.

Gamblers

The vast majority of articles included in this category (13 out of 14) center on Macao, which is considered the ‘gambling capital’ or the ‘gaming mecca’ in Asia, thereby being a place of ‘pilgrimage’ for Chinese gambling tourists. Several studies investigate their motivations to visit Macao, reporting that: Chinese visitors are either freedom-, multipurpose- or entertainment and gambling-seekers (Li, Wong, et al., 2017); entertainment and novelty, escape from pressure, casino sightseeing, and socialization are their main drivers (Wong & Rosenbaum, 2012);
shopping is a secondary purpose (Chan, Wan, et al., 2015); and leisure and vacation also matter (Zeng et al., 2014).

As for travel satisfaction, empirical findings can be summarized as follows: spaciousness and openness, architectural style, and exterior design are the most appreciated casino design characteristics (Wan, 2013); travel experience is shaped by service attributes that go beyond gaming and entertainment facilities, thus including service environment, other entertainment options, and attractions (Wong & Li, 2015); first-time casino visitors to Macao perceive a higher level of service quality and satisfaction than repeat visitors (Ji et al., 2017); professionalism, variety, and fairness are the casinos’ service quality dimensions that contribute the most to revisit intentions (Lo et al., 2013); and gambling budget has a greater influence on such revisit intentions than customer satisfaction (Sun et al., 2018).

With regard to gambling behavior, Wan et al. (2013) report that Chinese gamblers are ‘sociable’, showing a greater preference for observing others play and play together. Analyzing a particular casino game, Fong et al. (2018) suggest that Chinese gamblers’ cultural norm of ‘bigger-is-better’ distorts their perception of likelihood of winning. Finally, two articles focusing on Macao address other topics. McCartney and Pinto (2014) show that using celebrity endorsement in destination promotional campaigns can influence certain Chinese casino visitors. O’Regan et al. (2019) find that Chinese gamblers’ practices in Macao are molded by material environment as well as by commercial, cultural, political, and spiritual factors.

The only article on Chinese gamblers not focusing on Macao, compares casino and non-casino visitors to South Korea, showing that the former are less-educated and have higher incomes and prior overseas travel experience (Kim et al., 2004). Figure 9 summarizes the key insights within the gambler segment.

*Insert Figure 9 about here*
Gamblers are mainly driven by leisure and entertainment, social relations, and casino sightseeing, although shopping is also a secondary motivation. Besides, the most appreciated attributes of a gambling destination are gaming facilities, service quality, and availability of other entertainment options beyond gambling.

**Foodies**

This category involves 11 articles addressing food that, as stated above, is a passion for Chinese people. Three of them analyze Hong Kong. Their findings suggest that mainland Chinese tourists appreciate local food experiences, emphasizing physical surroundings and prestige as their major concerns (Suntikul et al., 2020). Moreover, these local food experiences have an impact on perceptions and behavioral intentions toward Hong Kong as a tourist destination (Choe & Kim, 2018). As for restaurant selection, individual travelers value quality and presentation higher than their packaged group counterparts do (Law et al., 2008).

Two articles center on Australia. Chang et al. (2010) propose a typology of Chinese tourists in Australia: ‘observers’ (seeking familiar food and flavors), ‘browsers’ (non-fastidious about food selection), and ‘participators’ (who like new food experiences). In addition, Lai et al. (2020) find that cognitive food image (individual beliefs) has a more significant influence on prospective intention to visit Australia than affective food image (feelings and emotions).

Four articles focus on other single destinations. Lin and Chen (2014) find that mainland Chinese tourists showing a more positive attitude toward local food would like to revisit Taiwan and recommend others to visit it. Lin et al. (2019) identify two categories of Chinese tourists visiting Spain: ‘food snobs’ (who want to try exotic local food and undervalue the more familiar global fast-food) and ‘food omnivorous’ (who value both types of food). Promsivapallop and Kannaovakun (2019) investigate food image dimensions in Thailand, reporting that food preference is positively influenced by food taste. From a different point of view, Moufakkir
(2019) show that, despite cultural similarities, Chinese immigrant workers in London’s Chinatown restaurants have developed a negative gaze upon Chinese tourists.

Two articles do not analyze a single tourist destination. Jia (2020) reports that, because of cultural roots, Chinese tourists in France, Germany and Italy are more attracted by ‘what to eat’, namely by local food offer, and are less willing to give low overall ratings to restaurants. Lastly, by analyzing several host countries, Hoare et al. (2011) find that face, trustworthiness, and harmony are the three cultural values that determine overseas dining experience of Chinese tourists. Figure 10 reports the key findings regarding foodies.

*Insert Figure 10 about here*

Several sub-segments can be distinguished among foodies, depending on individual’s attitude toward the novelty of local food. For those who are eager to try local food, ‘what to eat’ is generally more important than ‘how to eat’, although individual travelers appreciate quality and presentation too. Additionally, a favorable dining experience in a tourist destination encourages revisit intentions as well as recommend it to others through word-of-mouth.

**Millennials**

There are nine articles addressing the so-called millennials or Generation Y. They represent a distinctive generation of Chinese, born from the 1980s onwards, namely, during the period when China sped up its modernization process, undertaking significant economic and social reforms, like the Open-Door Policy, the One-Child Policy, and the Educational Reform.

Cheng and Foley (2018) identify two groups of millennial outbound travelers: ‘Made in China Post-80s’ (who have little experience with other cultures); and ‘Transnational Chinese Post-80s’ (who studied or are studying abroad and are more willing to travel to less common destinations). Regarding specific topics addressed, there is a great heterogeneity. Hence, Gardiner and Kwek (2017) report that Chinese millennial travelers are motivated by self-development but, unlike their Western counterparts, their consumer behavior is shaped by
cultural beliefs and a sense of family obligation. Jin et al. (2014) find that group and independent millennial travelers show differences regarding service attribute preferences: while the former value restaurants’ hygiene, Chinese food offering, and the ability of tour leaders to handle emergency situations, the latter put more emphasis on park visits. Qiu et al. (2017) show that consumer products affect destination image of Japan by millennials.

Some articles look specifically at backpacking, a very popular type of tourism among millennials. Prayag, Disegna et al. (2015) report that Chinese backpackers can be distinguished on perceptions of destination travel infrastructures. Cai et al. (2019) find that Chinese backpackers traveling in small, self-organized groups apply cultural attributes of ‘respect for authority’ and keqi (humility and modesty) to maintain hierarchical group relations. Ong and du Cros (2012) show that backpackers’ willing to adventure has a gender bias, since it is more common among males. Prayag, Cohen et al. (2015) suggest an emerging sub-segment among Chinese backpackers called the ‘modified independent traveler’, characterized by flexibility, like Western backpackers, but showing a distinctive behavior such as traveling with friends or relatives and placing more importance on shopping.

Zhu et al. (2020) identify three factors affecting decision-making of young Chinese that become working holiday makers abroad: escapism (to make changes in their lives instead of satisfy their parents’ preferences); cost efficiency (to overcome restrictions of a traditional way of achieving personal goals); and timing (before establishing a long-term career or when finishing an employment contract). Figure 11 draws connections within the millennial segment.

Insert Figure 11 about here

Chinese millennials travelling abroad are driven by self-development, like other young people from Western countries, but show a distinctive behavior: cultural beliefs and a family obligation sense matter, and they are prone to visit less common destinations if they have prior experience as international students. In addition, two sub-segments deserve special attention
among Chinese millennial outbound tourists: backpackers (open-minded travelers but, unlike their Western counterparts, they like shopping and not traveling alone) and working holiday makers (who want to achieve personal goals before reaching a stable job position, thus challenging the more traditional preferences of their parents).

**DISCUSSION**

The content overview reported in the previous section shows a great heterogeneity among the topics analyzed, even within each segment. As a result, it turns out to be evident that the Chinese outbound tourism market is becoming increasingly heterogeneous and sophisticated. Each segment has its own perceptions and preferences when traveling abroad (Li, Wong, et al., 2017). Accordingly, appropriate product development and experience design as well as more flexible marketing strategies built on a segmentation basis become necessary (Jin & Wang, 2016). More research efforts are needed to deepen the knowledge of each segment, discerning their distinctive behavior when traveling overseas. This may contribute to facilitate the development of tailored services to meet their specific requirements, thereby helping tourist companies and destinations to improve their targeting and positioning in China’s outbound tourism market (Bao et al., 2019).

Despite the above-mentioned heterogeneity, some key points can be highlighted from the empirical evidence that reveal connections among segments. They are mainly based on the underlying characteristics of Chinese culture. Next, those linkages are shown drawing upon the Hofstede’s model, consisting of six dimensions of national culture that distinguish countries: individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede et al., 2010).

China’s culture is characterized by a high collectivism, where people tend to act in the interests of the group. This is shared by all segments. The maintenance of social relations
(guanxi) is a driver of shoppers’ behavior. This social orientation is present when they buy luxury products to impress others. Personal relationships are linked to the concept of face (mianzi), another key feature of Chinese culture that refers to preserve individual’s self-image within a social network. This is also evidenced by Chinese overseas students, as they usually prefer passive tourism activities and serious leisure with the aim of not ‘losing face’. Mianzi matters in dining experience of Chinese foodies as well, since they appreciate social standing, image, and being paid compliments when visiting restaurants abroad. Collectivism underlies when analyzing the behavior of other segments. Independent travelers rely on interpersonal relationships when searching for information, gamblers are mainly driven by social relations, and even some millennial backpackers do not usually travel alone.

Chinese culture is also characterized by a high level of power distance, namely, by the acceptance of a hierarchical order in society and respect for the opinion of superiors. This distinguishing feature is shared by certain segments. Family obligation affects travel patterns of Chinese young people. Students are encouraged by their parents to get an overseas doctoral degree as a means of finding a better job position. Millennial backpackers who travel in self-organized groups show a respect for authority to maintain hierarchical group relations. Though, working holiday makers represents a new trend among Chinese youth who are challenging the tradition of following their parents’ wishes, as they want to achieve personal goals.

China’s culture is also characterized by a low uncertainty avoidance, since the Chinese are generally comfortable with ambiguity. This is illustrated by the growing importance of independent travelers as well as the positive attitude of some foodies toward trying exotic local food in other countries. With regard to the remaining dimensions of the Hofstede’s model, Chinese society is mainly driven by competition, achievement and success (masculinity), shows a strong perseverance in obtaining results (long-term orientation), and traditionally does not put much emphasis on leisure time (restraint). As for these dimensions, empirical evidence turns
out to be conclusive only within the student segment. Chinese overseas students show a strong desire to succeed in their academic career (competition or masculine values), they opt to study abroad to secure better job opportunities in the future (long-term orientation), and sometimes perceive leisure as taking time from study tasks (restraint).

Contributions
This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it complements previous literature reviews that had looked at China’s outbound tourism market as a whole one, without addressing the similarities and differences among market segments. By doing so, it provides a comprehensive synthesis of the main findings reported by past studies that have focused on specific market segments of Chinese outbound tourists, as well as identifies some research gaps that may serve as a future research agenda to deepen the understanding of this market.

Second, this literature review has some theoretical implications regarding market segmentation that go beyond the Chinese outbound tourism market. A thorough analysis of segments within this market adds new insights to the whole research on market segmentation. It offers meaningful results that may be useful in future efforts to analyze segments in other tourism markets. The Chinese outbound tourism market is evolving rapidly in recent years. As a result, the evolution of segments should be observed constantly, as some existing segments are reconfigured, while new ones emerge. This is the case of the sub-segments identified among foodies and millennials. Furthermore, as outlined above, the Chinese are online connected for everything, including payments through mobile phones. The independent traveler and millennial segments are outstanding examples. As this trend is spreading globally, any market segmentation effort should consider the impact of information and communication technologies (Pesonen, 2013). Moreover, some common characteristics among segments based on the underlying cultural background were identified. This suggests that beyond focusing on a deep
analysis of each market segment to look for a better targeting and positioning, it is advisable to explore the common ground to reach other benefits like those derived from economies of scale.

Likewise, the results have implications for managers of tourism companies, policymakers, and authorities in charge of managing flows of Chinese tourists to overseas tourist destinations. Tourism practitioners should meet the specific requirements of Chinese travelers in pre-, during-, and post-trip stages (Law et al., 2016). To customize strategies, they should first identify what are the idiosyncratic needs of each target segment and their evolution over time. Tailor-made tourist services can only be developed through a deep knowledge of the behavioral patterns and detailed preferences of particular targets, as has been done for more traditional tourism markets for years (Li, Wong, et al., 2017). It is only by doing this that all potential opportunities of China’s outbound tourism market can be grasped.

**Limitations and future research directions**

As with all literature reviews, this one is not without limitations. First, some articles could have been included in an alternative segment category. The final decision to consider them as belonging to a particular segment was made with the aim of homogenizing the results and facilitating further analysis. Among others, this is the case of the following articles. That of Kimber et al. (2019), considered as part of the ‘package tour/independent travelers’ segment, might also be considered under the ‘millennials’ category, as it focuses on young Chinese tourists. That of Law et al. (2008), included within the ‘foodies’ segment, might also be included within the ‘package tour/independent travelers’ category, as it compares both travel arrangement types. Similarly, that of Gardiner and Kwek (2017), considered as dealing with ‘millennials’, might also belong to the ‘students’ category.

Second, the results obtained by the reviewed articles in some segments may be biased, since they refer to specific tourist destinations. Future research on Chinese tourist segments focused on other destinations can help to discern whether the results found in this literature
review can be extrapolated to other contexts or depend on idiosyncratic characteristics of the tourist destination. A third limitation of this study is that the scope of analysis was limited to only top-tier tourism journals. This prevented the inclusion of articles published in other outlets with a more general thematic content as well as in Chinese-language journals. Future literature reviews could overcome this limitation by expanding their scope to these outlets.

Furthermore, while this literature review has revealed what is already known about Chinese outbound tourism segmentation, it also shows other issues that still require further research. Thus, only two articles focusing on the ‘cultural tourists’ segment were identified (Chen & Huang, 2018; Huang & Chu, 2020). As stated above, visiting historical and cultural sites is one of the travel motivations of many Chinese tourists. Moreover, this review did not find any article addressing the so-called ‘dark tourism’, a term coined by Foley and Lennon (1996) to describe the phenomenon of visiting sites associated with death and disaster. In China, there are several dark tourism destinations that have become popular among domestic visitors like the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre during the Second Sino-Japanese War (Cui et al., 2020) and Beichuan County, one of the most severely hit areas of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (Wang & Luo, 2018).

Additionally, the review did not identify any article dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for China’s outbound tourism’ segments either. Obviously, the fact that only articles published in journals’ issues until December 2020 were reviewed has conditioned this result. Future studies will surely address this issue. Beyond analyzing the impact of travel restrictions and security concerns on Chinese tourists flows to specific destinations, it will be necessary to discern whether the pandemic will have long-term effects on Chinese tourists’ behavior, either driving the trend for independent travel or generating new ones, like slow tourism and self-drive holidays (Wen et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2018). Hence, certain segments that have been under-represented in this literature review might be further
researched in the future. This could be the case of the ‘recreational vehicle tourists’ segment, which has only been addressed by three of the reviewed articles (Wu, 2015; Wu, & Pearce, 2014, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study has carried out a systematic review of articles published during 1995-2020 that either addressed a specific segment or distinguished several segments of Chinese outbound tourists. As a result of a natural evolution, China’s outbound tourism market is becoming increasingly diverse and sophisticated. Therefore, it should no longer be considered as a homogenous market. The insights provided by this literature review may encourage future research efforts to investigate the distinctive features of Chinese outbound tourism segments that may facilitate customization strategies to seize the full potential of this huge market.

REFERENCES


### Appendix 1 List of reviewed articles by segment

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<th>Articles</th>
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| **Shoppers** | Chang, Kong and Chen (2017, JCTR)  
Correia, Kozak and Kim (2018, TE)  
Correia, Kozak and Kim (2019, JTR)  
Gao, Huang and Brown (2017, TM)  
Hung, Guillet and Zhang (2019, JTR)  
Hung, Zhang, Guillet and Wang (2020, JT&TM)  
Jin, Moscardo and Murphy (2020, JTR)  
Lee and Choi (2020, JTR)  
Li and Ryan (2018, TM)  
Lin (2017, JT&CC)  
Lin and Lin (2006, APJTR)  
Meng, Zhang, Li and So (2019, IJTR)  
Parasakul (2020, JCTR)  
Sharma, Chen and Luk (2018, JH&TR)  
Tsang, Lee and Liu (2014, JCTR)  
Tse and Tse (2015, JCTR)  
Wong (2013, JVM)  
Wong and Wan (2013, JTR)  
Xu and McGehee (2012, TM)  
Xu, Jin and Lin (2018, JDM&M)  
Yan (2020, JH&TM)  
Zhu, Xu and Jiang (2016, APJTR) |
| **Students** | Chen, Dwyer and Firth (2015, JT&TM)  
Fu, Huang, Li and Kirillova (2018, CIT)  
Huang (2007, JHLS&TE)  
Huang, (2013, JHLS&TE)  
Hughes, Wang and Shu (2015, JHTM)  
Kim and Kim (2019, APJTR)  
King and Gardiner (2015, IJTR) |
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Lee, Sung, Zhou and Lee (2018, LSt)  
Li and Qi (2019, JHLS&TE)  
Li and Stodolska (2006, LSc)  
Liu and Ryan (2011, APJTR)  
Ma, Hsiao and Gao (2018, APJTR)  
Park, Hsieh and Lee (2017, JT&TM)  
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<td>Volunteering tourists</td>
<td>Qi, Smith and Yeoman (2018, TM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelers to second-tier destinations</td>
<td>Jørgensen, Law and King (2018, IJTR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-haul outbound tourists</td>
<td>Li, McCabe and Li (2017, JDM&amp;M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various segments (by destination familiarity)</td>
<td>Chen and Lin (2012, IJTR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature tourists</td>
<td>Chan, Chiu and Marafa (2017, TG)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes:

APJTR (Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research)
ATR (Annals of Tourism Research)
CHQ (Cornell Hospitality Quarterly)
CIT (Current Issues in Tourism)
IJCHM (International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management)
IJHM (International Journal of Hospitality Management)
IJTR (International Journal of Tourism Research)
JCTR (Journal of China Tourism Research)
JDM&M (Journal of Destination Marketing & Management)
JH&LM (Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing)
JH&TM (Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management)
JH&TR (Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research)
JHLS&TE (Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education)
JHM&M (Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management)
JST (Journal of Sustainable Tourism)
JT&CC (Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change)
JT&TM (Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing)
JTR (Journal of Travel Research)
JVM (Journal of Vacation Marketing)
LSc (Leisure Sciences)
LSt (Leisure Studies)
SJH&T (Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism)
TE (Tourism Economics)
TG (Tourism Geographies)
TM (Tourism Management)
TMP (Tourism Management Perspectives)
TS (Tourist Studies)
Figure 1 Articles by journal

Note: Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management and Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing are the same journal, the latter being the name of this journal until 2008.
Figure 2 Articles by publication year
Figure 3 Articles by destination
Figure 4 Articles by research method
Figure 5: Articles by segment
Figure 6 Concept map about shoppers

Shopping behavior is shaped by
- Cultural values
- Personal needs

Shopping satisfaction is affected by
- Product attributes
- Service quality

has a positive impact on Attitude toward destination
Figure 7: Concept map about students

Main drivers
- Self-development
- International experience
- Good quality education
- Career opportunities

Leisure activities
- Perceived as:
  - Relax and adaptation tools
  - Taking time away from academic activities
- Preference for:
  - Serious leisure
  - Passive activities
Figure 8 Concept map about package tour / independent travelers
Figure 9 Concept map about gamblers
Figure 10 Concept map about foodies

Positive local food experience is determined by

- Local food offer (what to eat)
- Quality and presentation (individual travelers)

affects

Intention to visit a destination (and recommend it)
Figure 11 Concept map about millennials

- Travel patterns
  - broadly characterized by
    - Self-development
    - Cultural beliefs and family obligation
      - Choosing less common destinations (contingent on prior cross-cultural experience)
        - Backpackers
          - characterized by
            - Open mind
            - Travel with friends or relatives
            - Appreciate shopping
        - Working holiday makers
          - characterized by
            - Pursuing personal goals
  - depend on certain sub-segments like