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In Pursuit of Happiness: Impact of the Happiness Level of a Destination Country on Chinese Tourists' Outbound Travel Choices

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Summary

This study examines the impact of the national happiness level of a country on Chinese tourists' travel choices using panel data of 113 countries from 2012 to 2017, controlling for other factors that contribute to Chinese outbound tourism. The results show that the happiness level of a destination country is positively and significantly associated with Chinese tourist arrivals in that country. Examination of the moderation effect reveals cultural distance plays an important role in the impact a destination's happiness level has on Chinese outbound tourism. The influence of a destination's happiness level decreases when the cultural distance increases.

Keywords: Happiness; Chinese outbound tourism; outbound travel choices; cultural distance

Introduction

The Chinese outbound travel market has grown tremendously over the past decade. From 2008 to 2018, the number of Chinese outbound tourists increased from 45.84 million to 149.72 million, representing a growth rate of 227% (CNTA[1], 2018). Since 2016, China has remained the largest tourist source country in the world for four consecutive years. As per the outbound tourism data released by the China Tourism Academy in 2019, the size of China's outbound tourism market increased to 149 million in 2018, and outbound tourists' overseas consumption exceeded US $130 billion (Yang, Liu, & Li, 2019), making China one of the highest contributors to the development of world tourism (Andreu, Claver, & Quer, 2014). Expansion of the Chinese outbound travel market has drawn attention in international tourism research. Previous studies indicate that the main factors attracting Chinese tourists to destination countries are natural scenery; world heritage sites; unique foreign cultures (Manosuthi, Lee, & Han, 2020; Tse, 2015); the aim of increasing knowledge (Hanqin & Lam, 1999); and the desire to visit different countries (Zhang, Fang, & Sirirassamee, 2004). Over the past decade, China's rapid economic growth has resulted in citizens' enhanced living standards and disposable incomes, leading them to pay more attention to their spiritual life (Keating, Huang, Kriz & Heung, 2015). Therefore, for Chinese tourists, the happiness level of a destination country may be an important attracting factor.

Previous studies have shown that there is a close relationship between happiness and tourism (Liu, 2013; McCabe & Johnson, 2013), but mainly focuses on the happiness enhancing effect of tourism (Chen & Li, 2018; Rivera, Croes, & Lee, 2016).

[1] CNTA or China National Tourism Administration is an organization directly under the State Council in charge of tourism.

However, the national happiness level of a destination country may be an important pull factor attracting Chinese tourist from the perspective of push-pull theory. Meanwhile, the demand-generating effect of happiness level is possibly heterogeneous among different destination countries (Andreu et al., 2014). For example, culture is a crucial concept applied by scholars to investigate the intercountry heterogeneity in the field of international tourism research. Therefore, cultural distance may moderate the demand-generating effect of happiness level of a destination country on Chinese outbound travel, which has not been identified so far.

The present study explores whether the happiness level of destination countries serves as an attracting factor to Chinese outbound tourists and then examines the potential moderating effect of cultural distance. This study makes the following contributions. First, it adds to the literature by examining noneconomic determinants of Chinese outbound tourism, providing evidence that the happiness level of a destination country is a positive and significant attracting factor for Chinese tourists. Moreover, this result supports the reverse relation between happiness and Chinese outbound travel. Contrary to the conclusion of Lee, Lee, Chung, and Koo (2018) that travel experience can enhance tourists' happiness, the happiness level of destination countries will also attract Chinese outbound tourists, which enhances understanding about the demand-generating effect of the happiness level of a destination country. Third, this study advances knowledge about the effect of cultural distance in international tourism by demonstrating its moderating role in altering the relation between happiness level and Chinese outbound travel.

Literature Review and Hypothesis

Factors influencing Chinese Outbound Tourists

Tourists' travel choices are influenced by an elaborate and complex combination of consumer needs and destination perceptions (Crompton, 1979), which can be characterized as push-pull theory. Dann (1977) first introduced push-pull theory into the tourism field. He noted that tourism push motivation refers to tourists' travel needs caused by inner tension, which has intrinsic and non-selective characteristics, while pull motivation refers to the characteristics related to destination attraction, with externality and selection attributes. Push factors are individual-specific and include factors such as values, motivations, personality, and demographic characteristics (Keating & Kriz, 2008). Pull factors are categorized as tangible and intangible factors. Tangible pull factors include the following. (1) Natural resources (e.g., beaches, the countryside, and varieties of flora and fauna): The "natural beauty" of a destination is an important attribute for Chinese tourists while travelling overseas (Kim, Guo, & Agrusa, 2005). (2) Heritage: Taking the number of world heritage sites into consideration as attracting factors, Andreu et al. (2014) showed that this is the most important factor for Chinese tourists when choosing European destinations. (3) Tourist infrastructure (e.g., hotels, restaurants, bars, nightlife, easy access, excursions, and tourist information/services): Kim et al. (2005) stress the importance of well-equipped tourism facilities for Chinese tourists. Further, Sparks and Pan (2009) conclude that the quality of infrastructure is the second most valuable destination attribute among Chinese long-distance tourists, following beautiful landscapes. (4) Leisure and recreation (e.g., theme parks, sports and entertainment activities, and casinos): Yang, Reeh, and Kreisel (2011) investigated Chinese outbound tourists' motivations for and perceptions related to attending the Munich Oktoberfest. Shi, Liu, and Li (2018) found

that Macau, which is the world's largest casino hub, attracts high Chinese outbound tourist volume each year because of its gambling industry.

Intangible pull factors include the following aspects. (1) Art, history, and cultural aspects (e.g., folklore, religion, and customs): Kim et al. (2005) indicated that Chinese tourists prefer visiting countries that have different cultures but similar histories as China. Cultural experiences are the most important attractions for Chinese tourists in seven long-haul destinations (Yun & Joppe, 2011). (2) Atmosphere: Chinese tourists are attracted locations that are luxurious, fashionable, exclusive, family-oriented, exotic, mystic, relaxing, fun, and interesting. For example, Hong Kong is a shopping paradise for visitors seeking a luxurious atmosphere (Hanqin & Lam, 1999). (3) Political and economic factors (e.g., stability, economic development, safety, and affordability): The existing literature on Chinese outbound tourism to the United States focuses on leading, highly urban cities with advanced economic and technological development (Wei, Meng, & Zhang, 2016). Andreu et al. (2014) state that the level of security in a destination country has a positive influence on the number of Chinese tourists visiting that country. (4) Social factors (e.g., the friendliness of locals, visible poverty, quality of life, and language barriers): Skivalou and Filippidi (2015) found that Chinese tourists appreciate Greek hospitality, and Pencea and Bulin (2015) found that the overarching cordial hospitality of the Romanians attract Chinese tourists. We review previous studies on Chinese outbound tourism and summarize the influencing factors in Table 1.

With the boom of Chinese outbound tourism over the past two decades, new trends have emerged regarding outbound tourists that will produce some potential market segments. Based on the classification of long-haul and short-haul travelers, Li,

McCabe, and Chen (2017) divide the Chinese long-haul outbound market into three subgroups: “Journey Beginner,” “Conspicuous Consumer,” and “Prestige Pursuer.” Lojo and Li (2018) attempt to segment the outbound tourists from China to Spain through the familiarity with the destination and types of travel teams, analyzing the differences in travel motivation and satisfaction among different market segments. Xie and Li (2009) identified outbound destinations preferred by long-haul and short-haul travelers. They stated that Japan and South Korea are the two most important short-distance destination countries, and the United States and Australia are the two most popular long-haul destination countries. Besides, Formica and Uysal (2006) stated that the pull factors can be conceptualized through the perceived ability of destinations to satisfy the tourists’ individual needs. Moreover, it could be viewed as a mental construct that exists only in the mind of potential and actual tourists. Happiness is one of the most important factors relating to human daily life and activities (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). The development of human society can historically be seen as relating to the pursuit of a happier life (TianWen & MingYuan, 2014). Therefore, it may be assumed that seeking happiness is a part of human nature (Bertrand, 2016). With economic development and rising living standards, happiness has become a popular topic in China (Liu, 2013). There are several Chinese terms, notions, folk sayings, and practices that relate explicitly to happiness in one form or another, and people are highly motivated to pursue happiness (Stafford, 2015). Moreover, Chinese people place their pursuit of happiness in the tourism industry because of improved social economy and service facilities. Therefore, happiness found in destination countries may be an important pull factor that will form a new kind of market segment. However, the pull effect of the happiness level of origin countries remains unexplored,

forming a research gap.

Happiness and Tourism

As an important intentional activity, travel is widely accepted as a factor promoting happiness. The tourism industry is instrumental in increasing quality of life (Hobson & Dietrich, 1995). Therefore, most previous studies focus mainly on the promoting effect of tourism on perceived happiness. Lee et al. (2018) indicate that destination travel experience can enhance tourists' overall happiness. Rivera et al. (2016) found that tourism development and happiness are positively correlated. Based on the analysis of 385 tourists visiting Naples, Italy, Buonincontri, Morvillo, Okumus, and van Niekerk (2017) found that some interactive behaviors between tourists and tourism service providers can have a positive impact on tourists' happiness level. However, happiness level may fluctuate over time in relation to different travel phases and activities. Although most extant studies suggest that travel experiences enhance tourists' happiness, their positive effects may not last long after the trip (Nawijn, 2010). Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai (2015) found that many tourists experience lower levels of happiness after returning from a trip than before the trip. Filep and Deery (2010) indicate that the positive effect of a holiday on happiness diminishes as tourist activities come to an end. De Bloom, Geurts, and Kompier (2013) showed that pre-trip workload and responsibilities at home may negatively impact tourists' health and well-being prior to vacations. They noted that this is especially true for women, who also experience a quicker fade-out of the positive effects of vacations than men.

In addition, Huang and Wei (2018) found a negative effect of Chinese tourists' perceived happiness on outbound travel intention to a foreign country. They showed that a one-unit increase in the perceived happiness level of Chinese tourists reduced the

probability of their traveling to a foreign country by 5.2%, which suggests that unhappy individuals tend to have a stronger intention to travel to a foreign country. In the field of inbound tourism, Gholipour, Tajaddini, and Al-mulali (2014) note that the relation between happiness and tourist behavior may be reciprocal. Further, Gholipour, Tajaddini, and Nguyen (2016) suggest directly that higher happiness level attract greater international inbound tourists and tourism revenues. To sum up, while tourism is an important promoter of tourists' perceived happiness, the happiness level of destination countries may also attract Chinese tourists with respect to China's unique culture; this aspect has been ignored in the research field of Chinese outbound tourism.

Chinese GDP per capita stood at a new level of $10,000 US dollars for the first time in 2019 (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2019). According to a report by the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, "the major contradiction of Chinese society has been transformed into the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life" (China Daily, 2017). Economic development produces an explosion of experience demand, with the pursuit of a happiness becoming a daily need for Chinese people (Li & Yu, 2020). Thus, experiencing the happiness of destination countries is one of the travel motivations for Chinese outbound tourists. Happen to hold the same view, "feelings of happiness" is the selling point of tourist destinations (Echtermeyer, 2009).

The push-pull theory is frequently applied to understand travel behavior (Noela, Wien, & Reisinger, 2017; Suni & Pesonen, 2017; Wong, Musa, & Taha, 2017). Push factors are those related to a tourist's goals for a particular visit (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019). On the other hand, pull motivation represents the potential of a particular

attraction or destination to align with tourists' push motivation factors (Noela et al., 2017; Suni & Pesonen, 2017). The pull factors can be tangible aspects of an attraction, such as specific intrafraction, available services, convenient traffic and attractive scenery (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019). They can also conclude the intangible aspects such as unique atmosphere, perceived contrast from home in terms of culture, food, and surroundings (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Zhang, Li and Wu (2017) state directly that the cultural values of a destination may serve as pull factors. Therefore, similar to cultural values, the happiness level of the destination country may also be the pull factor to attract Chinese outbound tourists based on push-pull theory. Thus, we propose the first hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Chinese tourists travel more to destinations with a higher level of happiness.

Moderating Effect of Cultural Distance

Chinese culture exerts a strong influence on the outbound tourism behavior of Chinese tourists (Yang et al., 2011). On the basis of the cultural relevance of happiness (Veenhoven, 2012), the demand-generating effect of the happiness level of a destination country on Chinese outbound tourism may be moderated by the cultural distance between China and the destination country. Therefore, it is essential to introduce cultural distance to uncover the attraction effect of the happiness level of a destination country on Chinese outbound tourists.

Cultural distance refers to the extent to which any two countries have differences in cultural norms and practices (Kogut & Singh, 1988). In previous studies on outbound tourism, cultural distance has been considered an important factor (Yang et al., 2019) and has been associated with tourists' motivation (Manosuthi et al., 2020).

Chinese tourists are sensitive to cultural distance when they make outbound destination choices (Yang, Liu, & Li., 2016). Cultural distance relates to tourists' experiences while visiting international destinations because individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to have different attitudes and behaviors (Liu, Li, Cárdenas, & Yang, 2018).

The path-goal theory can be used to predict the moderating effect of cultural distance between happiness level of the destination country and Chinese outbound travel. This theory demonstrates that human behavior is determined by both the goals and expected probability, and the goal with lower achievable feasibility have weak behavior incentive effect (Belcher, 1962). In other words, the goal with the high expected feasibility is the more effective driver to behavior because people view it as a direct satisfaction source (Dirwan, 2019). Therefore, if Chinese tourists believe the happiness level that they will experience in the destination country is feasible in China in the future, the destination is more attractive to Chinese outbound tourists. Because their ultimate purpose is not just experiencing more happiness living environment in the destination country, but living a happier life in their daily life. That feasibility is closely related to cultural distance, because it influences the feeling of tourists when they visit a destination country (Yang et al. 2016). When the cultural distance is lower, the cultural similarities lead to the Chinese tourist's belief that the happiness level of destination countries can be realized within their country, satisfying their motivation for "pursuing pleasure" (Ma, Wang, & Hao, 2012). However, with increased cultural distance, that belief may be reduced because of the growing cultural differences between China and these destination countries. Moreover, the local residents are less tolerant and accepting of tourists who are physically or culturally different from

themselves (Thyne, Lawson, & Todd, 2006; Ye, Zhang, & Yuen, 2013). In this case, the feeling of happiness in destination countries has been weakened because the cultural differences will impede cross-cultural adjustment and communication (Liu et al., 2018). At this point, the pull effect of the destination countries' happiness level will gradually decrease. Therefore, we propose the following research hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Cultural distance negatively moderates the relationship between the happiness level of the destination and the number of Chinese tourists.

Hypothesis 2a: When the cultural distance is lower, the happiness level of a destination country has a greater impact on the number of Chinese outbound tourists.

Hypothesis 2b: With an increase in the cultural distance, the influence of happiness level gradually decreases.

The conceptual model is showed in Figure 1.

Data, Model, and Methodology

Data

Dependent Variables

We used the number of Chinese outbound tourists to a destination country as the dependent variable, *TourNum*. The relevant data were extracted from the *Yearbook of Tourism Statistics*, published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, which covers 113 countries from 2012 to 2017. The number of countries selected for the present study is based on the availability of data for most of the variables.

Independent Variables

There are several different ways of defining and measuring national happiness, subjective well-being (SWB), and quality of life (QOL) (Gholipour, 2016; Keating et al., 2015; McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Veenhoven, 2012). SWB refers to aspects that

make people happy and content with life (Diener, 1984). It is widely agreed that SWB comprises multiple dimensions, including subjective assessments (OECD, 2012). Thus, following Keating et al. (2015) and McCabe and Johnson (2013), we used SWB as a measure of happiness.

For the purpose of this study, two sets of data measuring happiness were used. First, we utilized the national happiness indicators of 113 countries as the core independent variables, based on the World Happiness Report, published annually by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The United Nations released its first global happiness index, which compares the happiness of people in 156 countries and regions, in April 2012. The criteria covered nine broad areas: education, health, environment, management, time, cultural diversity and inclusion, community vitality, inner well-being, and living standards. Within each broad area, there are three or four subitems; there is a total of 33 subitems. Second, following Gholipour et al. (2016) and considering the data available, we used the data from the World Values Survey (WVS) responses to the question, “Suppose the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder the worst possible life. Where on this ladder do you feel you personally stand presently?” Responses were measured on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (bottom) to 10 (top). The mean reported ladder series in each country in the current year were calculated to measure happiness for that country.

Control Variables

The control variables are an important part of an organizational researcher’s methodological toolkit (Bernerth & Agunis, 2016). Further, they should logically be considered a part of the explanation of happiness influencing Chinese outbound

tourism. Two criteria exist for judging the extent to which we have included the "right" control factors. One is the *comprehensiveness,* which is whether all relevant factors are included. The other is *parsimony*, which includes some factors should be deleted because they add little additional value to our understanding (Whetten, 1989). In this situation, we mainly discuss the impact of happiness of destination countries on Chinese outbound tourists that should eliminate the interference of irrelevant variables to this relation. While reviewing previous studies on Chinese outbound tourism, we found that the attributions of destination countries would influence the choice of Chinese outbound tourists (Andreu et al., 2014). Therefore, to ensure that the model estimations are unbiased and reliable, based on the literature on factors influencing Chinese outbound travel, 10 variables were used as control variables. They are described below:

(1) *Year:* 2012–2017 was used as the control variable in the model to control the change in Chinese outbound tourists' numbers caused by China's economic growth every year.

(2) *GDP_D*: Apart from the GDP of China, the economic development of destination countries is also an important factor in attracting visitors (Beerli & Martin 2004). Therefore, we retrieved the GDP of the destination countries from the World Development Indicators database from 2012 to 2017, published by the World Bank ("WDI database"), to measure the degree of economic development in destination countries.

(3) *GD*: According to Yang et al. (2019), geographic distance is an essential factor in tourists' travel decision process; Nicolau and Más (2006) consider the distance when they explore the tourists' destination choice. Therefore, we included it in

our estimation model. The geographic distance between national capitals, in kilometers, was derived from the Centre d'Études Prospective et d'Information's Internationales (CEPII) database.

(4) *Price_D*: Huang and Wei (2018) showed that the annual household income is an important factor considered by Chinese tourists when traveling abroad. Therefore, it should be controlled. Because of the difficulty in acquiring data on tourism traffic costs, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of tourism destinations was used as a proxy for tourism prices of outbound tourism destinations, which is consistent with Liu, Li, and Li (2018). Considering the mutual offset between low exchange rates and high inflation rates in tourism destinations, the CPI revised via Equation (1) was used as the tourism price of outbound tourism destinations: $Price_{cnt}$

$$Price_{cnt}=\frac{CPI_i/ER_i}{CPI_{cn}/ER_{cn}} \quad (1),$$

where *cn* refers to China; $price_{cnt}$ refers to the cost that Chinese tourists pay at time *t* at destination *I*; *CPIi* refers to the CPI of destination *I*; *CPIcn* refers to the CPI of mainland China (2005 serves as the reference year); and *ERi* and *ERcn* refer to the annual average market exchange rates of destination *i* and China against the US dollar, respectively. The original data are available from the WDI database.

(5) *Int_D*: Proportion of Internet users in the total population in the destination countries in the current year from the WDI database. Countries with high Internet usage are more likely to have high happiness level, so it need to be controlled.

(6) *PS*: Andreu et al. (2014) showed that the destination country's security level will positively influence the number of Chinese tourists visiting that country. Further, following Gholipour et al. (2016), we used the World Bank's Political Stability and

Absence of Violence/Terrorism estimate ("PS") as a proxy for political stability in our estimation model. The PS is assessed on a scale of approximately −2.5 to 2.5, with higher values indicating greater political stability in a country.

(7) *Popularity*: In previous studies, the popularity of destination countries has often been overlooked. However, it is an important factor affecting tourists' choice of destinations (Gholipour et al., 2016). Therefore, the Baidu Search Index in the current year was used to indicate the popularity of destination countries. The variables are presented in Table 2.

Model

According to Preve and Medeiros (2011), simple regression analysis is appropriate to evaluate the relative impact of the predictor variable on the particular outcome. Wei et al. (2017) also used regression models to analyze the objective and subjective factors that influence Chinese citizens' choice of outbound destinations. In addition, cross-sectional data analysis has been used extensively to analyze international tourist behaviors (Manosuthi et al., 2020). In view of the main purpose of this study—to explore the effects of happiness on the number of Chinese outbound tourists—and the cross-sectional data that was used, the regression model is the best choice. In the first step, we examined the impact of happiness on outbound tourists through the following linear regression model:

$$Yi=\beta_0 + \beta_1 Xi + \beta_2 Z'i + \varepsilon i \qquad (2),$$

where Y is the number of outbound tourists; X is happiness; Z represents a set of control variables (*year, GDP_D, GD, Price_D, Int_D, PS, and Popularity*) discussed in the previous section; β_0 allows for different years intercept (year effects); εi is the error term; and i is country. The parameter β_1 is of interest because it measures the effect of

happiness on tourist numbers, holding *Z* fixed. We hypothesized that β_1 is positive; that is, a high level of happiness increases the number of outbound tourists arriving in a destination country.

Second, we examined the moderating effects of cultural distance on the relation between happiness and outbound tourist numbers. Following Yang et al. (2016), cultural distance was calculated from Markov's formula for "traditional-secular rational values" and "survival-self-expression values" provided by the WVS; it is hereafter referred to as *CD*. These two value dimensions reflect human values as outcomes of the socioeconomic development in each culture (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). We used Hofstede's five dimensions approach to calculate *CD*: *power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty*, and *long-term orientation*. There are 70 countries in Hofstede's five dimensions, whereas the Hofstede's six dimensions only include 51 countries. To cover more countries and expand the variance of cultural distance, we choose the Hofstede's five-dimension model for measuring cultural distance. The moderating effects of *CD* measure how *CD* works in shaping outbound tourism. Equation (3) incorporates the moderation effects in the base Equation (2):

$$Yi=\beta_0 + \beta_1 happiness_i + \beta_2 CD_i + \beta_3 happiness*CDi + \beta_4 Z'i + \varepsilon i \qquad (3).$$

Estimation Methodology

Linear regression was applied to estimate the relation between happiness and outbound tourist numbers, specified in Equations (2) and (3). The set of independent variables identified in the previous subsection covers important factors that can influence Chinese outbound tourists. However, for appropriate identification of the effects, the potential endogeneity that could arise because of simultaneity and omitted variables must be considered (Saha, Su, & Campbell, 2017). The results from linear

regression models may be biased and inconsistent. For example, we assumed that Chinese outbound tourists, as a whole, can be influenced by the happiness level in a destination country and other control variables. However, the happiness level of a destination country, as an exogenous variable, will not be influenced by Chinese outbound tourists. The potential endogeneity problem was solved by applying instrumental variable methods (Gholipour et al., 2014). Therefore, we chose the happiness indicator of a destination country in the next year, which is termed *happiness_future*, to verify the relation. Because life satisfaction measured by happiness level in the next year may be affected by happiness level in the present year, the number of Chinese outbound tourists is not influenced by happiness level in the next year. To keep the data dimensions consistent, we used a logarithmic transformation for the variables.

Empirical Results

Main Effect of Happiness on Chinese Outbound Tourists

First, we looked for model-free evidence (named model 1) in support of our prediction that the number of Chinese outbound tourists will be higher when national happiness is greater. The regression results are shown in column 2 of Table 3 The estimate coefficient of *happiness* is positive and significant, meaning that there is a positive relation between happiness and Chinese outbound tourists' numbers. The regression results are consistent with our prediction.

To examine the robustness of our results, we ran through the model specifications using another happiness measurement standard, *happiness_alt*. This indicator comes from WVS responses to the question "Suppose the top of the ladder represents the best

possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder the worst possible life, where on this ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?" The results are reported in column 3 of Table 3. The coefficient for happiness remains positive and significant; that is, a one-unit increase in happiness increases tourists by 3.858 units. This means that happiness in destination countries influences Chinese outbound tourists positively. The greater the happiness level of a destination country, the more Chinese outbound tourists will go there. Based on this, Hypothesis 1 has been verified.

In a base model without control variables, the effect of happiness on Chinese outbound tourists' numbers was positive and significant. Further, we included several control variables in the model specification (named model 2) and started the analysis with a variance inflation factor (VIF) check (see column 4 in Table 3). The VIF coefficients of all the variables are below 10; this means that there is no collinearity between these variables and that regression analysis can be carried out. Table 4 shows the correlations of the variables. Then, we performed the regression analysis using *TourNum* as the dependent variable, based on Equation (2). The regression results for *TourNum* are shown in column 5 of Table 3. The coefficient for *happiness* in column 5 of Table 3 is positive and significant at the 1% level, indicating that greater happiness in a country will encourage more people to travel to that country from China. Specifically, the regression results show that when *happiness* is up by one scale, holding other factors unchanged, tourist arrivals will increase significantly. At the same time, there are several variables influencing outbound tourists in a positive direction, such as the popularity and GDP of destination countries (*Popularity and GDP_D*). However, geographic distance between foreign countries and China (*GD*) negatively affects the volume of tourists, suggesting that greater geographic distance results in

fewer Chinese outbound tourists. It shows that Hypothesis 1 still holds after adding control variables, and the results are robust.

This can be explained by the theory of distance decay; thus, geographic distance is negatively associated with tourism demand, and tourists are less likely to visit a destination far from their point of origin because of high transportation costs (Nicolau & Más, 2006; Yang, Fik, & Zhang, 2013). The variable *happiness*, plus the control factors, explains more than 70% of the variations in Chinese outbound tourism across countries. However, the Equation (2) setting was unable to incorporate the moderation effect.

Alternative Estimations

For the endogeneity problem, instrumental variables can be applied to handle potential omitted variable bias (Gholipour et al., 2014). A valid instrument should correlate with happiness in the current year but be uncorrelated with the omitted variables that influence Chinese outbound tourists. A suitable candidate is national happiness in the next year. To test whether happiness in the next year is an effective instrumental variable of happiness, we used happiness to conduct an ordinary least square regression (OLS) of instrumental variables and other control variables in the first stage (see Table 5). The regression coefficient of *happiness_future* passes the significance test of 5%, and the F statistics of the OLS regression are 114.8, indicating that *happiness_future* is not a weak instrumental variable of happiness. In the second stage, we constructed a 2-stage least square regression (2SLS) among the dependent variables, the instrumental variable, and other control variables. From the results, the estimated coefficient of the instrumental variable was still positive and notable after the instrumental variable was used to replace the independent variable in Equation (2).

This confirms that the happiness of a destination country affects the number of Chinese outbound tourists and that there is no reverse causal relation between them. The fitting results are shown in Table 5.

Robustness test

To test the robustness of the results, we use the differences in the level of happiness among countries with respect to China as the explanatory variable. The results of the model verification are showed in column 6 of Table 3. It shows that the differences in the level of happiness between China and other countries will influence the Chinese outbound tourists in the positive direction. It means that the greater the happiness differences between the two countries, the more Chinese outbound tourists will be attracted to travel to the destination countries. Moreover, the *GD, Price_D*, and *Int_D* will influence the Chinese outbound tourists negatively. Further, the *year*, *PS*, *GDP_D*, and *popularity* will positively impact the Chinese outbound tourists. It suggests that the conclusion is robust because the results are consistent with the main effects.

Moderation Effects of Cultural Distance (CD) on Chinese Outbound Tourism

The moderation estimation results are indicated in column 7 of Table 3. The cultural distance is calculated from Markov's formula of Hofstede's five dimensions. After the interaction item was added, the influence of happiness on outbound tourists was still positive and significant (at the 1% level), proving again that happiness in a destination country is an important factor in attracting Chinese outbound tourists. The estimation results show that the coefficient of the interaction term is negative and significant (at the 5% level). Specifically, a negative interaction effect of *happiness* and *CD* implies that the effect of *happiness* (*CD*) is lower as *CD* (*happiness*) increases.

When *CD* was measured using Hofstede's five dimensions, the model specifications were the same as the results when *CDs* were measured using the WVS. Hypothesis 2 has been verified. Column 7 of table 3 presents the results for the moderation effect. We used the plug-in in SPSS named "process" to test the moderation effect by bootstrap. There are 420 bootstrap samples, and model 1 was used. According to the results of the chart, we divided cultural distance into three levels: long (CD_{far} = 2.9393), middle (CD_{middle} = 2.0372), and low (CD_{low} = 1.1351) distances. The moderation effect between *happiness* and *CD* is significant (p = 0.0167). Specifically, when the *CD* is relatively low or at the middle level, the *CD* has the most significant moderating effect (P_1 = 0.0000; P_2 = 0.0000), and the hypothesis 2a has been verified. With the increase in *CD*, the moderating effect is gradually weakened (P_3 = 0.1114). So far, hypothesis 2b has been verified. To show the moderating effect of cultural distance more intuitively, we used a bar chart to show the interaction between *happiness* and *CD*. See figure 2 for details. The lower the *CD*, the greater the impact of happiness on the number of outbound tourists. Moreover, the effect of other control factors is the same as in model 2. The estimation coefficients of *GD, Price_D*, and *Int_D* are significantly negative, and the estimation coefficient of *Popularity*, *GDP_D*, and *PS* are positive. All the variables explain more than 60% of the variations in the numbers of Chinese outbound tourists.

Discussion and Conclusion

As one of the highest contributors to the development of world tourism, the Chinese outbound demand is changing as rapid economic growth for recent forty years. The major contradiction of Chinese society has been transformed into the contradiction

between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life (China Daily, 2017). Thus, some factors have being emerging as the pull force to Chinese outbound travel, such as happiness. From the perspective of push-pull theory, many factors have been identified as the push or pull factor to attract Chinese tourists, whether the happiness level of the destination country is the pull factor for Chinese tourists has not been demonstrated. Meanwhile, the happiness enhancing effect of tourism is the consensus in the field of tourism research (Chen & Li, 2018; Rivera et al., 2016), but the demand-generating effect of happiness and its heterogeneity has not been investigated. In reality, the pursuit of a happy life has become the daily need of the Chinese people (Liu & Yu, 2020), thus happiness level in the destination country may the emerging pull factor for Chinese outbound tourists based on push-pull theory. In this paper, we examined the influence of the happiness level of destination countries on Chinese outbound tourism for more than 110 countries during 2012–2017, using liner regression estimation techniques. In addition, we took the interaction effect of cultural distance into consideration to test whether cultural distance moderated the effect of destination country's national happiness level on Chinese outbound tourists' travel choices. The results mainly focus on the following two aspects:

Initially, we found a positive relation between the happiness level of destination countries and the number of Chinese outbound tourists in the destination; further, both of the two happiness measures used in the study show a consistent and significant positive impact on the number of Chinese tourists. After using several control variables, this effect was shown to be robust. Thus, the results enrich the push-pull theory in the field of Chinese outbound tourism research by identifying happiness level of the

destination country as the new emerging important pull factor attract Chinese outbound tourists. In addition, this study confirms the results found by Huang and Wei (2018), who concluded that unhappy individuals may be motivated more than others to travel to foreign countries to escape their daily environment and seek psychological rewards in the destination environment. Our research provides another theoretical explanation for Huang and Wei's (2018) conclusion that an important reason for Chinese citizens' outbound tourism is to pursue happiness. This is also consistent with Beerli and Martin's (2004) finding that quality of life (QOL) in the destination country is a pull factor for outbound travel.

The moderation effects of cultural distance could be predicted by path-goal theory, because cultural distance may be influenced the belief whether the happiness level in the destination country can be realized in China. The positive effect of happiness level of the destination country on Chinese outbound tourism decrease when there is a higher degree of cultural distance because of low expected probability of the happiness level in China. The opposite is also true. This interaction effects of cultural distance are consistent with the findings in related studies. When the cultural distance is lower, the cultural similarities tend the Chinese tourists to satisfy their motivation of "pursuing pleasure" (Ma et al., 2012). On the contrary, with the increase of cultural distance, the feeling of happiness in destination countries has weakened because the cultural differences will impede cross-cultural adjustment and communication (Liu et al., 2018).

The key contribution of this paper is that it empirically verifies the significant role of happiness level of the destination country in Chinese outbound tourism. This is different from previous studies which usually only identify the economic factors that

attract Chinese tourists. Secondly, while anecdotal evidence has been reported, previous studies have focused on the happiness enhancing effect of tourism. However, this research demonstrated the reverse relation between happiness and Chinese outbound tourism through the analysis of over 110 countries for the period of 2012–2017. This is one of the few studies to examine the relation between happiness and outbound tourism using a large, multi-country dataset and also the demand-generating effect of happiness level of the destination country. The result advances push-pull theory in the field of Chinese outbound tourism by identifying happiness level of the destination country as the emerging import pull factor to attract Chinese outbound tourist.

The other contribution of this paper is that moderation effect of cultural distance was demonstrated in the process by which national happiness influences Chinese outbound tourists. This is different from previous studies that regard cultural distance as an important independent variable that affects international tourism (Yang et al., 2019). The present study finds that cultural distance is also an important moderation variable that influences Chinese outbound tourism. This advances the knowledge regarding the effect of cultural distance in international tourism by demonstrating its moderating role in altering the relation between happiness level and Chinese outbound travel. Therefore, cultural distance between countries may lead to the heterogeneity of the findings in international research, and the application of these findings should consider the cultural context. This not only enriches the connotation of path-goal theory, but also provides new ideas for the application of path-goal theory in tourism. Besides, this study provides a theoretical basis for travel agencies to use target positioning and employ advertising and slogans aimed at the booming and changing

development of Chinese outbound tourism. Over the past decade, Chinese citizens' demand for outbound travel has been heavily promoted. In the future, the Chinese outbound tourism market will grow bigger and bigger. The conclusions of this study provide several practical insights for marketing. For example, when designing marketing plans for Chinese citizens, the tourism industry and travel agencies of destination countries can emphasize the happiness quotient of destinations in addition to traditional selling points. In addition, it provides a new direction for China's outward foreign direct investment (Li, Huang, & Song, 2017). Furthermore, countries that target Chinese outbound tourists need to evaluate the effectiveness of selling point happiness based cultural distance, because the strategy may be more attractive for countries with lower cultural distance than the countries with higher cultural distance.

Limitations and Future Research

This study mainly uses secondary data to discuss the relation between happiness and outbound tourism and does not explore the psychological mechanisms of tourists. Future research could involve identifying factors that influence tourists' perceptions of the happiness level of a potential destination country. Additionally, we take the Chinese tourists as a whole group to analyze the perception of happiness, ignoring the heterogeneity of Chinese outbound tourists. In the future, it would be interesting to differentiate the Chinese tourists by sex, age, education level and so on, analyzing the demographic differences and highlighting the differences in the motivations to travel among Chinese tourists. Finally, in view of China's national conditions and the experience pursuit of Chinese tourists, we focus on the motivation of Chinese outbound tourists and verify that happiness of destination countries will be an

attractive factor for them. However, it is unclear as to know whether tourists from other regions, such as western developed countries, still pursue happiness during their outbound travel.

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Table 1

Influence factors of Chinese outbound tourists

Author (Year)	**Research context**	**Research method**	**Influence factors**
Jiang, Scott, and Ding (2015)	Examining the travel motivations of Chinese outbound tourists at the levels of attributes, consequences, and values	interview	Natural scenery; History; Culture; Art
Andreu et al. (2014)	Understanding how Chinese outbound tourists choose European destinations from a sample of 47 European countries	data modeling	Number of World Heritage Sites; Large ethnic Chinese population; Large number of flight connections to China
Pung and Del Chiappa (2018)	Understanding Chinese travelers' motivations to visit Europe using a qualitative	focus group interview	European landmarks and sceneries; Relaxation; Novelty; Learning and interest in culture and history; Shopping

	approach		
Skivalou and Filippidi (2015)	Determining the destination attributes of Greece that attract Chinese tourists	semi-structured, in-depth interviews	Cultural exchange; Greek civilization; History of Greece; Blue and white color of the Cyclades islands; Beautiful scenery; Hospitality; Archeological sites; Quality of hotel services; Event organization
Pencea and Bulin (2015)	Identifying ways by which Romania could seize the opportunity of becoming a significant destination for Chinese tourists	review	Tourism attractions such as culture, spa and health, rural and eco-tourism, etc.; Quality of services; Transport
Hemström, Luu, and Unenge (2006)	Investigating how Sweden can increase its share of the Chinese outbound tourism through nation branding and	interview	Nature experiences; Good shopping opportunities; Strong ethnical values; Equality; Environmental responsibility and human rights;

	marketing		
Liu and Ko (2011)	Exploring the key factors of Taiwan as a tourism attraction for outbound Chinese tourists	questionnaire	Natural scenery; Geographical landscape; Art and shows; Local snacks and specialties
Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline, and Wang (2011)	Examining Chinese tourists' expectations of outbound travel products	focus group	Hotel/accommodations; Food and restaurants; Tour guides/itineraries; Entertainment/activities; Transportation

Table 2

Variable Definition and Source

Variable name	**Definition**	**Source**
Dependent variable		
TourNum	Chinese outbound tourists	*Yearbook of Tourism Statistics*
Independent variable		
Happiness	Happiness indicator of destination countries The answer to the question "Suppose the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder the worst possible life. Where on this ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?"	United Nations global happiness report World Values Survey
Moderator		
Cultural Distance	Hofstede's five dimensions including *power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty*, and *long-term orientation*	Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010)
Control variable		
Year	2012–2017	/
GDP_D	Gross domestic product of the destination countries	World Development Indicator database (WDI)

GD	Geographic distance	Centre d'Études Prospective et d'Information's Internationales (CEPII)
Price_D	Tourism prices of outbound tourism destinations	World Economic Forum
Int_D	Proportion of Internet users in the total population in destination countries	WDI
PS	Political stability	World Bank
Popularity	Popularity of destination countries	Baidu Search Index database

Table 3

Results of Model Specification

	Model 1 (happiness)	**Model 1 (happiness_alt)**	**VIF Check**	**Model 2**	**Model 2 (Robustness check)**	**Model 3**
	TourNum	**TourNum**		**TourNum**	**TourNum**	**TourNum**
Independent variable						
Happiness	4.1289**	3.858**	3.28	1.05524***	0.92438*	2.513***
Control variable						
Year	/	/	1.29	0.18663***	0.20943***	0.1744***
GDP_D	/	/	2.13	0.58716***	0.5864***	0.5345***
GD	/	/	1.33	−1.64891***	−1.69992***	−1.898***
Price_D	/	/	2.81	−0.96025***	−0.75433***	−0.006636
Int_D	/	/	3.43	−0.60579***	−0.62089***	−0.3807*
PS	/	/	1.64	1.42401***	1.38899***	1.588
Populatiry	/	/	2.15	0.43098***	0.42641***	0.3425***
Moderator						
CD	/	/	/	/		1.62*
Interaction						
Happiness*CD	/	/	/	/		−0.7639*
F	114.8	11.29		225.3	227.9	88.83
R2	0.1441	0.02779		0.7276	0.7298	0.6847

Note: *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

Table 4

The correlation among variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Tourist	1								
2. Happiness	.180**	1							
3.Year	0.102**	−0.011	1						
3. GDP_D	0.408**	0.333**	−0.015	1					
4. GD	−0.339**	0.092*	0.000	−0.095*	1				
5. Price_D	0.132**	0.723**	−0.161**	0.417**	0.084*	1			
6. Int_D	0.195**	0.762**	0.184**	0.335**	−0.128**	0.649**	1		
7. PS	0.104**	0.545**	0.005	0.161**	−0.027	0.544**	0.565**	1	
8. Popularity	0.663**	0.217**	0.121**	0.673**	−0.31**	0.26**	0.273**	0.125**	1

Note: **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Table 5

Results of Instrumental Variable

	Step 1	**Step 2**
happiness_future	4.1289***	4.0637*
F	114.8	71.34
R^2	0.1441	0.1438

Note: *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01

Table 6

Results of Moderation Effect

Predictor	**B**	**SE**	**t**	**p**
Cultural distance				
1.1351 (low distance)	531170.918	121404.856	4.3752	0.0000
2.0372 (middle distance)	326724.189	70062.5362	4.6633	0.0000
2.9393 (long distance)	122277.460	76641.1568	1.5955	0.1114
F	7.7437			
P	0.0056			