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# **The Comparison of Travel Behaviors between Domestic Students and Students from China in a Midwestern university of the U.S.**

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## **Abstract**

With the increase of students from China to study in the U.S., these Chinese students become an important tourist sources for the tourism destinations in the U.S. The purpose of this study is to understand the differences of travel behaviors between the Chinese students studying in the U.S. and domestic students. The questionnaire will be sent to 1000 domestic students and 1000 Chinese students in a university of Midwestern U.S., and data will be analyzed by SPSS. The results will be beneficial for travel agencies to implement their market strategic plans and better target their customers.

Key words: domestic students, Chinese students, travel behavior, travel attributes

## **Introduction**

United States have attracted students from all around the world due to its reputation for excellence in teaching and research. Especially, the number of Chinese students has increased dramatically in the past 10 years and taken a great proportion among the international students in the U.S. universities. According to Lewin (2009), China sent 98,510 students to the United States in the year 2008 with 21% increase compared to the number in 2007 and the number is expected to continue to increase. Also, it is found that Chinese students had a high propensity to travel during the holidays (Field, 1999; Xu, Morgan and Song, 2009). Therefore, understanding their travel behaviors is helpful for tourism market segmentation and it can be a considerable benefit for marketers to precisely target their customers. What's more, there exists a large number of literature proving that in many tourism destinations, different traits have been found to differentiate tourists by nationality. For instance, Japanese travelers were described as "always traveling in groups and marching off in steps, reminiscent of primary school students...they bow to everybody they meet, are indefatigable photographers and usually spend heavily"(Cho 1991). Also, American tourists were thought as love of newness; desire to be near nature; freedom to move; individualism and social acceptance. Therefore, different nationality may influence tourist behavior. In addition, several studies showed that culture impacted consumer behavior in a certain way (Mayo and Jarvis, 1981; Schmoll, 1977). Culture distance refers to how disparate one nation is from another in terms of their core societal values (CSV) (Babin and Harris, 2009). Table 1 shows China's CSV scores relative to American consumers (Babin and Harris, 2009).

Table 1 shows China's Core societal Value compared to the U.S.

	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long-Term Orientation	Total Distance Score
China	40	-71	4	-6	89	121.8

Source: Babin and Harris, 2009

Compared to other countries, China and U.S. share the vast differences, so it can be assumed the tourist behaviors between those two countries differ dramatically from each other. Taking those into considerations, the purpose of this study is to determine the differences of travel behaviors between Chinese students and domestic students who both study in the U.S.

## **Literature Review**

### *Market Segmentation*

Segmentation, which means the process of dividing a market into distinct and homogeneous groups of people with similar needs and wants who will respond to unique product offering and marketing mixes, has been widely discussed in the tourism literature (Weber 1995). Being measurable, accessible, substantial, and sufficiently different is indispensable qualities for segments in terms of strategic value (Ahmed, Barber, and d'Astous 1998; Kotler 1989). Generally speaking, the sectors for segmentation include demographic, geographic, behavioral, life style, personality, and benefits sought type variables. Marketers are suggested to understand the influence of nationality, age, culture, gender, background and other classifications of the customers in the certain segment (Sussmann and Rashcovsky 1997; Oppermann 1993). The great benefit of market segmentation is that it is helpful for market planners to earn a competitive advantage and wisely allocate sources and information to attract and maintain highly profitable tourist segments. Therefore, as the researchers and practitioners, in order to achieve the sophisticated travel marketplace, they are more realizing the strategic importance by offering customized products to unique segments (Mudambi and Baum 1997). In terms of students market, regarded as an emerging marketing segment, college students have sparked the interests of market researchers. Some researchers delved into the travel characteristics of U.S. college students during their breaks. According to Epperson (1977) and Bywater (1993), U.S. college students prefer to travel during the spring and summer breaks. So students can be regarded as a potential segmentation for tourism marketers. Moreover, Hsu and Sung (1996) look ED into the travel behaviors of international students. They stated that international students planned their trips in advance, and the most often used travel information sources were maps, family/friends, and past experiences. Also, a study conducted by Wang and Davidson (2008) identified the Chinese students travel market to Australia in the perspective of destination image. Another study tried to investigate the differences of travel preferences between New Zealand students and Chinese students by letting them to draw maps of potential trips to

the southwest of the USA (Chris and Gu, 2007). In addition, Xu, Morgan and Song (2009) compared the travel behavior of students from UK and China. The results showed that both groups enjoyed beach holidays, and live to have fun and relax after their studies. However, there is no literature related with differences of travel behaviors between the domestic college students and students from China in the U.S. The acquisition of this is crucial for travel agencies and package sellers to better target their customers.

### *Determinant of Attributes*

Xu, Morgan and Song (2009) stated that it is essential to understand the decision-making process when determining the students' travel behavior. Meanwhile, consumer decision-making process is motivated by needs and desires that lead to different consumer behaviors (Mouthino, 1987). Therefore, in terms of tourism industry, the behaviors of tourists may include choosing different attractions, activities, accommodation, information and transport (Xu, Morgan and Song, 2009). Also, according to Iso-Ahola (1982), tourism motivation can be viewed as escaping or seeking for either personal or interpersonal reasons. Beard and Ragheb (1983) pointed out that there are four elements of leisure motivation scale, which include intellectual motivation, social motivation, the desire for fulfilling skills and stimulus-avoidance motivations. Based on the discussions in previous studies, this study investigates the difference on seven main attributes that indicate the travel behavior between the domestic students and students from China. The hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H1: There are significant differences between domestic students and students from China on travel motivations.

H2: There are significant differences between domestic students and students from China on travel activities.

H3: There are significant differences between domestic students and students from China on travel attitudes.

H4: There are significant differences between domestic students and students from China on sources of funding.

H5: There are significant differences between domestic students and students from China on sources of information.

H6: There are significant differences between domestic students and students from China on planning in advance.

H7: There are significant differences between domestic students and students from China on travel accommodation and transport.

## **Methodology**

## **Survey Instrument.**

Generally, the questionnaire will be designed based on the former research (Capella and Creco 1987; Etzel and Wahlers 1985; Hsu and Sung 1997; Xu, Morgan and Song 2009). The questionnaire consists of seven sections related to their travel motivations (discover new places; see famous sights; learn other culture; etc), activities (nature and scenery; cultural and history; nightlife; outdoor; shopping; etc), and attitudes (try new things, travel with others, etc), sources of funding (parents, part-time job etc), sources of information (travel agencies, friends, internet etc), planning in advance and accommodation and transport, and the questions will be asked in general, not mentioning specific country or region. 5-point likert scales will be applied to measure the attributes.

## **Data Collection**

This study will use a web-based survey created in FrontPage. E-mail messages will be sent along with the survey's website address (URL) to 1000 randomly chosen U.S. students and 1000 Chinese students in a university of Midwestern U.S. Respondents will be asked to fill out and submit the questionnaire online. It is expected to collect about 400 completed questionnaires. The data will be collected in November 2010. The results of the data analysis are expected to be available by the end of 2010 and shared at the conference. The data will be statistically analyzed by frequencies and chi-square tests with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 12.0.

## **Implication**

Understanding the differences of travel behavior between U.S. students and Chinese students will be beneficial for marketing practitioners to precisely implement their marketing strategic plans and target the customers within the students' segmentation. Also, academically, the methods used in this research can be applied to future studies related with travel behavior of students from other nationalities. It is believed that the research of this field will be helpful and significant to tourism segmentation and marketing.

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