

Investigation and Analysis of Travel Characteristics of International Students in Henan Province

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Abstract: *With the continuous increase in China's international influence, the number of international students studying in China has continued to rise. International students have become an important part of the inbound tourist group in China. Through interviews, questionnaires, data analysis, and other methods, this research studies the travel behavior, intention of revisiting, and travel evaluation of international students studying in Henan Province. Among the surveyed international students, most have traveled in China and have a high intention of revisiting and recommending. Based on the survey results, it is proposed that the tourism potential of international students in China is great and should be given attention. Improvements should be made in relevant work based on the travel behavior characteristics and travel experience evaluation of international students to enhance the internationalization level of tourism destinations and visitor satisfaction.*

Keywords: *Travel; International students; Henan Province; Data analysis*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, China has become the largest study destination in Asia. In 2023, there will be over 500,000 foreign students from 197 countries and regions studying in China. Henan Province, with its long history and cultural heritage, is one of the important birthplaces of Chinese culture, with numerous famous historical sites and cultural heritage. The number of international students studying in Henan Province has reached nearly 30,000. Among them, undergraduate students are the majority, covering various disciplines such as arts, sciences, engineering, agriculture, medicine, economics, and management. Henan Province is a province with a large population and rapid economic development, and compared to other provinces, Henan has a considerable number of international students. Studying the travel behavior of international students in Henan can provide suggestions for expanding the international student tourism market, enriching the development of tourism products for international students, and improving the marketing strategies of tourism products. At the same time, there are similarities between the travel behaviors of international students in Henan and other inbound tourists, which can provide references for enriching research on inbound tourism market and enhancing the external communication of tourism destinations^{[1][2]}.

Before conducting research on tourist behavior, it is necessary to clarify the concepts of tourists and tourist behavior. The World Tourism Organization clarified at the International Conference on Travel and Tourism Statistics held in Ottawa, Canada in 1991 that tourists are individuals who leave their environment to other countries or places, with a maximum continuous stay of 12 months, and the main purpose of travel is not to obtain rewards from the destination through the activities they engage in.

The purpose of studying tourists' behavior is to analyze and predict it, covering various aspects such as travel motivation, travel decision-making, spatial behavior, travel mode, and travel evaluation. It involves disciplines such as communication, geography, psychology, and management. The research subjects are mainly college students, young people, citizens, and the elderly. Currently, there is limited research on the travel behavior of international students studying in China. This study focuses on undergraduate international students from various universities in Henan. Data was collected through interviews and questionnaires, with a total of 368 valid questionnaires collected. The data was analyzed and organized using SPSS software. Analysis was conducted on their travel behavior from various aspects such as travel attitude and motivation, factors influencing destination selection, travel preferences, gender differences, spatial behavior characteristics, intention of revisiting, and travel evaluation to explore influencing factors. Among the surveyed international students, 93.25% had traveled in China, making the surveyed sample of high research value. The Cronbach's alpha of the part concerning factors influencing travel behavior in the questionnaire was 0.876, indicating

data reliability^{[3][4]}.

2. Analysis of Travel Behavior of International Students in Henan

Henan Province, located in the central part of China, is an important agricultural and populous province with abundant tourism resources, including 15 5A-level scenic spots. Currently, the number of international students in Henan Province is approximately 30,000, with undergraduate students as the main group. The vast majority of them are distributed in universities in Zhengzhou, Kaifeng, Luoyang, and Xinxiang, such as Zhengzhou University, Henan University, and Henan Normal University. The sources of students are mainly from Asian countries, distributed in 120 countries and regions, among which Pakistan, India, Nepal, Vietnam, and Thailand have a large number of students.

2.1 Demographic Characteristics

The surveyed international students come from 15 countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, South Korea, the Netherlands, etc. Their sources are mainly concentrated in Asia and Africa. The distribution of countries among the surveyed students is basically consistent with the characteristics of the source countries of international students in Henan Province, indicating that the selected sample is representative. Among the surveyed students, there are 132 males, accounting for 53.52%, and 152 females, accounting for 46.48%. In terms of sources, there are 145 students from Asia, accounting for 51.06%, 138 students from Africa, accounting for 48.59%, and 1 student from Europe, accounting for 0.35%.^[5]

2.2 Analysis of international students' attitude and motivation to travel

In the survey of tourism attitude, the majority of international students hold a positive attitude towards traveling in China, with a total of 226 students, accounting for 78.88%. A total of 54 people, or 19.01 percent, were indifferent. Fewer people held negative attitudes, with a total of 6 people, accounting for 2.12%. In the interview, it was learned that the main reason for the negative attitude was the lack of travel expenses, and students with high monthly living expenses showed more enthusiasm for travel.

Tourism motivation is often described as an individual's willingness and internal demand for tourism behavior, which is a psychological factor that stimulates tourists to make travel decisions and influences travel behavior. The motivation of tourists is closely related to their cultural level, occupation, age, economic conditions and other background conditions, and the motivation of different types of tourists is quite different. In the survey of travel motivation, 174 people chose "leisure and relaxation", accounting for 61.27%. In recent years, with kinds of requirements for the international students improved, scholarships from many universities are closely linked with academic performance (GPA) and HSK scores so that international students academic and mental pressure has become greater. In such a case, travel can release pressure and adjust the pace of their learning life. A total of 150 people (52 percent) chose "Understand China". 82%. The number of people who choose "social activities" is close to the number of people who choose "self-improvement", accounting for 102 people respectively. 92%, 98 people accounted for 34.51%. Some students said that through tourism, they can not only make Chinese and foreign friends, but also experience and understand Chinese history and development, and better integrate into Chinese culture.

2.3 Analysis of influencing factors for the choice of tourist destinations for international students

Based on the interviews with overseas students and previous research results, nine factors affecting the choice of tourist destinations are set up: travel price, transportation conditions, free time, destination safety, destination popularity, destination construction level, accommodation conditions, shopping environment and catering conditions. A five-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the influencing factors from very unimportant (1 point) to very important (5 points).

The three factors that have the greatest impact are destination safety, accommodation conditions and traffic conditions, respectively, with 4.5 points, 4.2 points and 4.1 points. The second most influential factors are travel price, free time and catering conditions, all of which are 4 points. The less influential factors are 3.9 points for shopping environment, 3.8 points for destination construction level and 3.8 points for destination visibility^[6].

China's tourist destination is a strange environment for international students. When choosing a tourist destination, international students first pay attention to safety. If there are hidden dangers in safety, they are less likely to travel there. International students' demand for accommodation and transportation is increasingly diversified, and its comfort and service quality have a great impact on travel experience. International students spend less on each travel activity and belong to the price-sensitive group. The main purpose of international students coming to China is to study, the distance of the travel destination is closely related to the time required, and the travel arrangement is generally based on the premise that it does not affect the study examination.

Overseas students' travel consumption is changing from the traditional tourist attractions to experience and leisure. In the traditional classic visiting-type tourism activities, the popularity of the tourist destination occupies an important position, which is one of the primary considerations for tourists to choose the tourist destination. However, in the survey of international students, they think that the most important thing is the popularity of the tourist destination, and pay more attention to the factors that have a greater impact on the travel experience, such as accommodation, catering, transportation and free time.

2.4 Preference for the travel of international students

2.4.1 Travel Frequency

International students have limited continuous free time during the semester, and their travel time is concentrated during winter and summer vacations and other public holidays. The majority of people choose to travel once or twice a year, with 111 people accounting for 39.08% and 91 people accounting for 32.04%, respectively. The number of people choosing to travel three times or more is relatively small, and the number of trips gradually decreases with the increase in frequency. To test the influence of grade level on travel frequency, linear regression analysis was conducted with grade level as the independent variable and travel frequency as the dependent variable. The R-squared value of the model is 0.021. The model passed the F-test ($F=6.004$, $p<0.05$), and the model equation is: Travel frequency = $1.026 + 0.2^{***}$ grade level. The regression coefficient is 0.2^{**} ($p=0.015 < 0.05$), indicating that grade level has a significant positive impact on travel frequency, i.e., the higher the grade level, the more frequent the annual travel^[7].

2.4.2 Travel Duration

In terms of travel duration, the majority of people choose to travel for 2-3 days, with 114 people accounting for 40.14%, followed by 4-5 days, with 63 people accounting for 22.18%. Fewer people choose to travel for 1 day, 6-7 days, or more than 7 days, with 56 people accounting for 19.72%, 30 people accounting for 10.56%, and 21 people accounting for 7.39%, respectively. The choice of travel duration is consistent with the purpose of short-term leisure and sightseeing.

2.4.3 Preferred Transportation Modes

In terms of intercity transportation, high-speed rail is favored by international students due to its convenience, comfort, speed, and relatively reasonable prices. A total of 197 people, accounting for 69.37%, choose to travel by high-speed rail, while the number of people choosing to travel by plane and regular train is the same, with 114 people each, accounting for 40.14%. Fewer people choose to travel by car or ship, with 56 people accounting for 19.72% and 20 people accounting for 7.04%, respectively. In terms of intra-city transportation, the subway is most favored by international students, with 248 people accounting for 87.32%. Some students mentioned that they prefer the subway because of its speed, punctuality, and affordability. Taxis are chosen by 122 people (42.96%), buses by 113 people (39.79%), and walking by 44 people (15.49%).

2.4.4 Preference for Travel Products

In terms of preferences for travel products, luggage, clothing, and jewelry are the most popular choices, with 149 people, accounting for 52.46% of international students, choosing to purchase these goods. A total of 125 people, accounting for 44.01%, choose to buy specialty food, while 68 people, accounting for 23.94%, choose to buy souvenir products with distinct local characteristics, such as shadow puppetry, embroidery, and paper cutting. The least preferred category is health and wellness products, with 58 people accounting for 20.42%, as this type of travel product does not align with the age characteristics of international students. A total of 104 people, accounting for 36.62%, choose to buy other travel products.^[8]

2.4.5 Preferred Channels for Obtaining Travel Information

In terms of preferred channels for obtaining travel information, 198 people, accounting for 69.72%, choose the internet and new media.^[9] A total of 167 people, accounting for 58.8%, rely on recommendations from friends and teachers. The least chosen channels are obtaining information from travel agencies or traditional media such as posters, newspapers, and magazines, with 39 people accounting for 13.73% and 34 people accounting for 11.97%, respectively. Some students mentioned that traditional media only provide one-sided promotion, while new media platforms allow them to refer to other travelers' evaluations of tourist destinations. Compared to promotional posters from travel agencies, recommendations from teachers and friends are considered more trustworthy.

2.4.6 Preferences for Types of Tourist Destinations

In terms of preferences for types of tourist destinations, the majority of people choose natural scenery, with 225 people accounting for 29.23%. International students, who have been studying and living in a single environment at school for a long time, are curious about the external world and hope to personally explore and expand their horizons. A total of 149 people, accounting for 52.46%, choose modern urban landscapes. In recent years, with the rapid economic development of China, cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen have become first-tier cities in the world, and the attractiveness of modern urban landscapes to international students has been increasing. The least preferred categories are traditional festivals and celebrations, and religion and art, with 88 people accounting for 30.99% and 84 people accounting for 29.58%, respectively. Ethnic traditions and religious art are the crystallization of specific regions and ethnic groups in a long history, with rich connotations and unique cultural values. Although international students have a certain foundation in Chinese language, they still face significant obstacles in understanding Chinese ethnic traditions and religions.

2.4.7 Spatial Behavior Characteristics of International Students' Travel

After visualizing the data on the spatial behavior characteristics of international students' travel, a map of their travel distribution was compiled, with Henan Province as the starting point and various destinations represented by different line segments to show proportional differences. The top 5 cities with high travel intentions among international students are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xi'an, and Hangzhou. These cities were among the first batch of China's excellent tourist cities in 1998. In addition, they have obvious advantages in terms of the quantity and quality of historical and cultural or natural tourism resources, tourism development, urban modernization, city image promotion, and transportation location^[10].

2.4.8 International Students' Intention to Revisit and Evaluation of Travel Experiences

The intention to revisit and recommend, as well as satisfaction, are closely related. International students show a high intention to revisit China, with 241 people, accounting for 84.86%, choosing to continue traveling in China in the future, 39 people, accounting for 13.73%, being uncertain, and only 4 people, accounting for 1.41%, choosing not to continue traveling in China. To fully understand the evaluation characteristics of international students' travel experiences, two open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. The question "What aspects of travel in China are you satisfied with?" received a total of 226 valid responses. After categorizing and organizing the answers, the main satisfaction aspects were: beautiful scenery (22.18%), warm hospitality of Chinese people (13.71%), liking Chinese history and culture (13.30%), convenient transportation (10.08%), safety (9.68%), and fun (6.85%). Other representative evaluations include: unique cuisine, reasonable prices, convenience of travel, tourism facilities, and urban development level. The question "What aspects of travel in China are you dissatisfied with?" received a total of 217 valid responses. The main dissatisfaction aspects were: difficulty in obtaining English travel information and inadequate English proficiency of service personnel (25.81%); lack of diversity in dining options (14.29%); overcrowding of tourists (11.98%); inconvenient transportation (8.76%); excessive attention from tourists (8.29%); poor service attitude and refusal to provide assistance by service providers (6.45%). Other representative negative evaluations include: high prices, discomfort with the climate, being photographed without consent, and smoking or spitting in public places.

3. Discussion and Recommendations

Most international students have positive evaluations of tourism in China. They have a positive attitude towards tourism, with high intentions for revisiting and recommending. The international

student tourism market has great potential. Developing this market is of certain value in increasing tourism revenue and enhancing the international reputation of tourist destinations. It should be given attention.

According to the characteristics of destination selection by international students, tourist destinations should strengthen the development of safety, catering, accommodation, transportation, and other aspects. The design of tourist products for international students should be in line with their behavioral characteristics, such as 2-3 day group tours, high-speed rail transportation between cities, destinations in economically developed and highly internationalized areas, scenic types including natural landscapes, modern cities, history, etc. Shopping recommendations should include luggage, clothing, and specialty foods. Accommodation should provide cost-effective products in economy hotels.

The main channels through which international students obtain tourism information are WeChat, Douyin, and recommendations from teachers and friends. Tourism companies can establish official WeChat public accounts, official Douyin accounts, and other means to enhance promotion and public opinion management through new media channels, thereby improving online visibility and reputation.

In response to the negative evaluations of international students regarding their tourism experiences in China, relevant departments and tourism companies should provide more English translations of tourism information, signs, etc., while also improving the basic English proficiency and service level of practitioners. Efforts should be made in promoting civilized tourism, enforcing no smoking in public places, diversifying food options, and controlling the flow of visitors in scenic areas.

Here are some recommendations: (1) Please plan your trip carefully before you leave, including booking flights, hotels and attraction tickets. This will ensure that you make the best use of your time and avoid unnecessary trouble. (2) No matter where you are, always be alert and take necessary safety measures. Take care to protect personal belongings and avoid going out alone at night, especially in unfamiliar places. (3) Try new experiences: Travel is a great opportunity to broaden your horizons and experience. Try activities you wouldn't be able to do back home, such as skydiving, surfing, or taking traditional local dance classes. (4) Respect local etiquette and regulations: Follow local etiquette and regulations. Respect the local culture and customs and do not offend others.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzes the tourism psychology and behavioral characteristics of international students in universities in Henan Province through a questionnaire survey and interviews. It has been found that international students have a relatively high satisfaction and strong demand for domestic tourism generally. They mainly obtain tourism information through travel agencies and introductions from friends, and are eager to grasp various aspects of the tourism destination before traveling. Their tourism decisions and preferences vary depending on gender. Relevant departments should improve their work based on the tourism behavior characteristics and feedback of international students, in order to enhance the international image of Henan Province.

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