PERCEIVED IMAGE OF CHINESE TOURIST
ON MALACCA WORLD HERITAGE SITES

LIEW JAN FUI

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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I dedicated to my beloved parents

Mr. Liew Leong Fah & Mrs. Lee Nyep Khiun

AND

to my beloved sisters,

Ms. Liew Lih Fang & Ms. Liew Kui Fang

AND

to my beloved brother & family's

Mr. Liew Chee Thin

FOR

being so patient, supportive and be there for me

Thank You.

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ABSTRACT

Understanding of a destinations image is essentially important for destinations that wish to influence traveller's decision–making and choice. The perceived image is unique based on travellers own memories, associations or imaginations of a destination. As emphasized by numerous researcher that the tourist image is the factor that influence tourist behaviour. The purposes of this study were to identify the characteristic of the Chinese tourists and the attributes perceived image by this tourist group. Moreover, the study attempts to evaluate the overall perceived image of the Chinese tourists. The study area is Malacca World Heritage Sites. The questionnaire survey was conducted at three different sites in Malacca. The sample population for this study was composed of the Chinese tourists who visited Malacca World Heritage Sites. In this study, descriptive analysis method is used to analyse the data collected. The result reveals that Malacca is an attractive destination for Chinese tourists, with strengths in most of the important attributes, such as a great variety of heritage building, plentiful historical sites and unique architecture and townscape. Nevertheless, those who visit Malacca are likely to find Malacca not a good opportunity for wildlife observation. Moreover, in the point of view of Chinese tourists Malacca is not a place with good bargain and shopping heaven as well. The findings reflected the perceived image of Chinese tourists; consequently, it could contribute to the future tourism practitioners who aim to promote Malacca among the Chinese tourists to be a desirable international tourism destination.

ABSTRAK

Pada dasarnya, memahami imej destinasi penting untuk peneraju destinasi yang ingin mempengaruhi keputusan dan pilihan destinasi pengguna. Imej yang dilihat adalah unik berdasarkan memori atau imaginasi pelancong sendiri terhadap destinasi. Ramai penyelidik menekankan bahawa imej pelancongan merupakan faktor yang mempengaruhi tingkah laku pelancong. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti ciri-ciri pelancong China dan sifat-sifat imej yang dilihat oleh kumpulan pelancong ini. Selain itu, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk menilai imej keseluruhan daripada pelancong China. Kawasan kajian adalah Melaka Tapak Warisan Dunia. Kajian soal selidik telah dijalankan di tiga lokasi yang berbeza di Melaka dan populasi sampel kajian ini terdiri daripada pelancong China yang melawat Melaka Tapak Warisan Dunia. Dalam kajian ini, analisis deskriptif digunakan sebagai kaedah menganalisi data. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahawa Melaka adalah destinasi yang menarik bagi pelancong China, yang mempunyai kekuatan dalam kebanyakan sifat-sifat penting, seperti pelbagai jenis bangunan warisan, banyak tempat bersejarah dan seni bina yang unik dan bandar seni. Walaubagaimanapun, pelancong China yang melawat Melaka mendapati bahawa di Melaka mereka tidak berpeluang untuk memerhati hidupan liar. Dari sudut pandangan pelancong China, Melaka bukan tempat dengan membeli-belah dan tawar-menawar yang baik. Penemuan mengambarkan imej yang dilihat oleh pelancong China; ia boleh menyumbang kepada pihak pengurusan pelancongan yang ingin mempromosikan Melaka kepada pelancong China untuk menjadi destinasi pelancongan antarabangsa pilihan utama pelancong China.

TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of research

The growth in tourism industry around the globe brings a tremendous increase in the development of tourist destination. Hence, tourism industry still manages to expand and develop considerably worldwide despite of today's world downturn and economic crisis. Tourism industry had great contributions to the development of the countries as it helps to foster the local economy, generate employment opportunities in other sectors and increase the quality of life for local communities as well.

Therefore, the choices and variety of tourist destinations is expand year by year for the tourist. Hence, it creates a big challenge for the marketers to differentiate their destinations image with the destinations competitors. According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003), in order to be successfully promoted in the target markets, a destination must be favourably differentiate from its competitors, or positively position in the minds of the consumers. Furthermore, the perceptions held

by potential visitors about an area may have significant influences upon the possibility of that area as a tourist-recreation region (Hunt, 1975). Potential visitors' perception about the destination will influence their decision making and behaviour.

Within the tourism field, the research perform regards destination image is increasingly attract more attention. Despite, literature within the tourism discipline emphasized the importance of destination image due to its effect on both supply and demand sides of marketing. Therefore, the understanding of a destinations image is essentially important for destinations that wish to influence traveller's decision–making and choice. As emphasized by numerous researcher that the tourist image is the factor that influence tourist behaviour.

Potential customers will consider destination chosen based on their favourable image in their mind after searching for information. It is arguably that what these potential customers think about the natural environment, climate, and people of a region may shape perceptions or images and detract from or contribute to successful development (Hunt, 1975). In fact, the tourist information is a valuable concept in understanding destination image and the destination choice process of tourists (Molina, Gómez, and Martín-consuegra, 2010). Therefore, as mentioned by Ispas, Constantin, and Candrea (2010) in their research that there are getting more specialist have paid attention on analysing the importance of a tourist destination image in planning and strategic development of a certain tourist region.

According to Jenkins (1999), the perceived image is unique based on travellers own memories, associations or imaginations of a destination. Despite the merits mentioned the demand-side and supply-side image studies, some researchers (Andreu, Bigné, and Cooper, 2001); claim that it is not enough to understand destination image emphasizing either side alone. It should be taken into consideration of both sides concurrently. However, due to the methodological difficulties of comparing projected and perceived images, which usually are measured by qualitative and quantitative approaches, respectively, the number of such studies has been limited. Moreover, the existing studies is more focus on testing whether a projected image is coherent with the perceived image, and identifying the gaps that exist between these two types of images.

1.2   Research Statement

Developing countries including Malaysia, tourism industry had considered as the primary source of income for the country and one of the key factors for the sustainable socio-economic development. Today, Malaysia has a strong global tourism position. Malaysia was the 9th most visited country in the world and we receive RM1 billion receipts per week from foreign visitors. So, the Government is committed to further develop this sector together with the private sector for the benefit of the Malaysia citizen when realising the advantage and strong position we possess in the tourism industry globally (RMKe-10 , 2010). The industry is already large with RM53 billion in receipts in 2009; it has been consistently fast growing and has a strong global competitive position.

Generally, there are several megatrends that affect the tourism industry. In the next five to ten years, the megatrends represent unchangeable growth, split industries and are physical shifts that will be relevant to the business world. There are four megatrends that are both relevant and important for the future of our tourism industry. The megatrends are trading up and trading down, creation of global elite, faster pace of life and the rise of China, India and new markets leaders.

The rise of China, India and new markets leaders must be emphasizes. The increasing economic importance among the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and Middle East (ME) countries are expected by the global economist. These countries are currently represented in global tourism departures and expenditures, both in proportion to population and economic contribution. However, as these economies continue to grow, consumer disposable income will increase, which will lead to more people who can afford to travel. Despite Malaysia has already entered well into the Middle East segment, but can look into increasing its penetration into other growth markets specifically from China and India.

China is a huge country with rich tourism resources of all kinds. Historic and brilliant Chinese civilizations endow the country with numerous historical and cultural relics. Vast areas give birth to a lot of beautiful mountains and rivers. This was an ancient and rich country sending a mysterious atmosphere. China has 47

World Heritage Sites destination consists of 33 cultural sites, 10 natural sites and 4 mixed sites of mainly mountains destinations (World Heritage Centre, 2014). With the rise of personal incomes and living standards, the outbound tourism market is leaps and bounds. Chinese people are eager to go sightseeing overseas which creates an immense market for some nearby countries. The popular outbound destinations include USA, Russia, France, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Maldives (China National Tourism Administrations, 2014).

To compete with others Asian countries to attract more Chinese tourists visiting Malaysia destination, it is recommended that the tourism players should put t more attention and understanding towards the preference of the Chinese tourists. The increase number of international tourists indicates that the development chances for Malaysia tourism in next coming years. Among other Asian countries, China stands out to be the new potential tourist market for Malaysia as it had a remarkable increase in the number of Chinese tourists to Malaysia for the past few years. According to the Tourism and Culture Ministry's secretary-general Datuk Dr. Ong Hong Peng, for April 2014, China ranked third with 132,158 arrivals in the Malaysia Tourist Arrivals by country statistics, after Singapore in first place and Indonesia in second.

However, unforeseen incident could discourage the performance of travel and tourism in Malaysia over the forecast period. Datuk Dr. Ong also mentioned that, there is 1.7 million of China tourists travelled to Malaysia for holiday and this number had drop 19% in April 2014 due to the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 incident. The disappearance of MH370 is likely to have a negative impact on travel and tourism in Malaysia over the forecast period due to a drop in consumer confidence levels in travelling by Malaysia Airlines. In spite, the tourist arrivals from overseas could be affected negatively as well.

Thus, the study of destination image is crucial to the field of tourism development research. Image plays an important role for destination marketers so as to differentiate their destination in this highly competitive market (Yilmaz, 2009). According to World Tourism Cities Federation (2014), unique local cultures are what Chinese tourists want most on newly developed special tourism routes. Based on

this result, Malacca is very appropriate destination that provides multicultural and experience to the Chines tourists. Furthermore, the cultural and heritage niche markets rapidly growth after the recognition from World Heritage Sites.

As the image projected by Malacca Tourism through all different types of promotional channel must eventually meet the Chinese tourist's perceived image that form their expectation before the visit. The image that tourist perceived before visiting the attractions through several information sources are different compared to the actual attraction during their visit. A study is needed to uncover the image of Malacca that Chinese tourist perceived before and after visiting the attractions.

The study explored the cultural/heritage tourists' demographic and characteristics of China tourist's in order to help tourism marketers better understand this group segmentation. Furthermore, the study also researched the perceived image of Chinese tourist and their different point of view between first time travellers and repeat travellers. In addition; this study investigates which attributes satisfy tourists who visit cultural/heritage destinations in order to help tourism planners develop strategies to attract customers.

1.3   Research Questions

Based on the problem statement highlighted, this study had identify three major research questions that need to be further explore and investigate for better understanding of the tourists group from China.

a. What is the attributes perceived by the tourist from China?
b. What are the perceived images after the visit?
c. What is the element associated with perceived image before and after the visit?

1.4   Research Objective

The study aims to the specific international tourist segmentation that visit Malacca every year which is the tourists from China or identify in this research as Chinese tourist. A Chinese tourist is define as a group of tourist from China or officially called People's Republic of China (PRC) states which is the world most populated country with a population of over 1.35 million people. The research will focused to explore the perceived image of this travel group towards Malacca as a World Heritage Sites.

Cultural/heritage tourism is a rapidly growing niche market at Malacca. This market is fuelled by an increasing number of domestic and international tourists, and at the same time by the increasing availability of global communication in tourism industry. Therefore, it is essential to understand the behaviour and characteristic of the specific target group of international tourist specifically Chinese tourist. Thus, these study three specific objectives in order to understand more about the Chinese tourist in terms of destination image. Meanwhile, it is more focus on the perceived image of Chinese tourist towards Malacca and the overall image of the destinations.

The study was conducted with the following objectives:-

a. To identify the characteristic of the Chinese tourist.
b. To identify the attributes that forms the perceived image of Chinese tourist.
c. To evaluate the perceived image of Malacca by Chinese tourist.

1.5   Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework involves concepts involved in a study and the hypothesised relationship between them (Veal, 2006). Miles and Huberman describe conceptual framework as follows:

> A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationships among them. Framework can be rudimentary or elaborate, theory-driven or commonsensical, descriptive or causal. (Miles and Huberman, 1994:18)

Table 1.1: Conceptual Framework

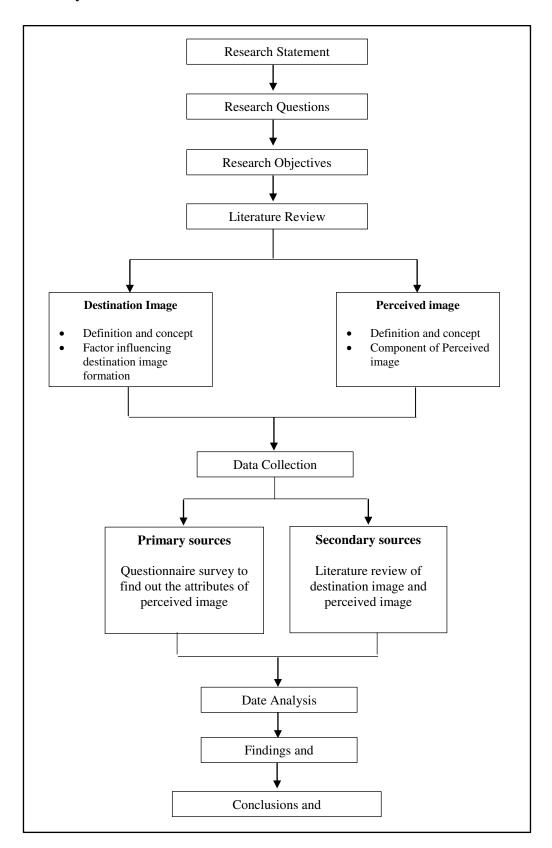| Independent Variables	Dependent Variables
Perceived image • Cognitive image • Affective image	Overall image of Malacca World Heritage Sites

1.6   Study Framework

Figure 1.1   Study framework

1.7   Significant of Research

This study has significance for both scholars in tourism studies and destination marketers. First, study introduces multiple dimensions of destination image. Majority of the previous destination image research has focused only on attribute-based images of destinations and excluded holistic impressions and unique features (Pike, 2002; Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2006). The exclusions were common due to the difficulty of measuring these dimensions using a simple survey. Quantitative approach is used as a method of study. This study captured a more complete picture of Malacca destination image as perceived by China traveller in terms of cognitive and affective image.

Furthermore, this study was planned to provide useful information to help develop an effective tourism-marketing plan for Malacca and lead the destination to be successfully promoted in the China market segment. Hence, destination marketers must access not only travellers' perceptions of destination image, but also the importance of different destination's attributes. This study of perceived image will help to determine the important of the image formation within the promotional stages. The images that need to be projected to tourist need to be identified the validity so that it will meet the satisfaction of tourist during real visit and experience. Furthermore, the studies also determine the effectiveness of the image hold by stakeholders that will led to the tourist perceived image. This is important for the stakeholders to understand that the perceived image by tourist meets the projected image done by the stakeholders.

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