

Travel Decisions and Behaviors of Chinese Families Who Visited Space Center Houston

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Abstract *This qualitative study was conducted to explore the pattern of travel decision-making and behaviors of Chinese scholars and students living in College Station who visited the Space Center Houston (SCH). There were 7 participants. Interviews and content analysis were used in this study. We designed 18-item questionnaire to allow for 45- to 60-minute interviews which permitted probes and follow-up questions raised by the respondents that the researchers did not think about when planning the study. It was found that generally Chinese families made their travel decision 3-4 days prior to the visit, their purpose of visiting the SCH was mostly for children to enhance their knowledge, often they prepared poorly for the visit, little purchase behavior was shown, and they were satisfied with the experience in the SCH. Implications were also provided concerning theoretical and practical contributions and future research.*

Keywords: *Travel Decisions and Behaviors, Chinese Families, Space Center Houston*

INTRODUCTION

Space Center Houston (SCH) is located at 1601 NASA Parkway Houston, TX. The famous attraction is the Official Visitors Center of NASA's Johnson Space Center. It is considered to be a place where people can experience space — from its past and present to its future. In addition, SCH is one of the places where visitors can see astronauts train for missions, touch a real moon rock, and take a behind-the-scenes tour of NASA. SCH features a multitude of permanent displays, attractions, and theaters, specializing in space exploration. These include Starship Gallery, Blast Off, Giant Screen Theater, The Feel of Space, NASA Tram Tour, Astronaut Gallery, The Martian Matrix, Kids Space Place, and many others. Furthermore, a myriad of educational programs are provided for a variety of people, including local, national and international students, teachers, scouts, and day campers aging 4-14. For these reasons, SCH positioned itself as a destination for education and outreach initiatives. Its mission is to “serve as a world-class attraction dedicated

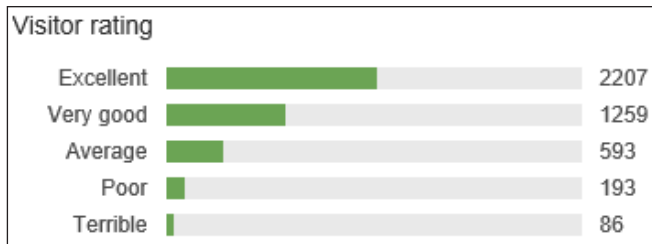
to inspiring, entertaining and educating every generation about space exploration and its benefits to humankind” (Response to SSP RFI, 2009).

Since its opening in 1992, SCH has invited the same professional third-party organization to conduct interviews and surveys to obtain customers' comments regarding their experience, feedback on its facility, and suggestions for improvement. Results constantly showed that all ranked items were above industry benchmarks, items ranked notably high included overall satisfaction, admission value, entertainment and educational experience, courtesy, and cleanliness (Response to SSP RFI, 2009).

Comments and reviews posted on Tripadvisor.com, a populous travel website, seem to support SCH's ranking. On it, there are 5,295 reviews from customers going to SCH up to now, and their rating of SCH is provided (Figure 1). It is indicated that most of the visitors were satisfied with their experience. Only a small number of people did not like SCH (Reviews, 2016).

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Source: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g56003-d669494-Reviews-Space_Center_Houston-Houston_Texas.html.

Fig. 1: Rating of SCH from visitors

However, of all types of reviews or surveys, it seems to be lacking Chinese visitors' participation. There are many visitors from the US and other foreign countries posting their ratings on the website. But no evidence is shown to have reviewers from China. The likely reason for this would be due to language barrier which discourages Chinese tourists from posting their opinions on SCH. But what is interesting is that even in the Chinese travel website, few postings on SCH were shown. Therefore, people would often reasonably doubt the validity of the above survey results, since they may think there were not enough Chinese participants to represent Chinese community.

College Station is only about 100 miles northwest of Houston. It was reported that as of 2018, there were 3,252 Chinese speakers living there, most of which are students and visiting scholars in a large public university in town (DATAUSA, n.d.). Most of Chinese students and scholars know SCH even before they came to the US at schools back in China. It is plausible that after coming to College Station, they have an interest in visiting SCH. But what factors motivate them to visit SCH? How do they make the decision about going there? After visiting SCH, are Chinese people satisfied with their experience? What attitudes do they hold towards their travel? Is it different than American visitors or people from other countries? These sorts of questions have rarely been investigated in the literature.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on what has discussed above, it seems obvious that the purpose of this study is to explore the pattern of travel decision-making and behaviors of Chinese living in College Station, TX, who visited SCH. The research questions consist of the following:

- How do Chinese scholars or students make their decision to visit SCH?
- How do the internal and external influences affect the framing of visiting choice?
- What are the family activities and consumption patterns when visiting Space Center Houston? And

- Are Chinese scholars and students satisfied with their visits to Space Center Houston?

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to explore the pattern of travel decision-making and behaviors of Chinese scholars and students living in College Station who visited SCH. It is suggested that the study of this kind be best informed by the theory of purchase consumption systems (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002). According to Woodside and Dubelaar (2002), purchase consumption system is "the set of related travel thoughts, decisions, and behaviors by a discretionary traveler prior to, during, and following a trip" (p. 120). Becker (1998) recommended that qualitative comparative analysis could be used in visitors' decision and behavior research to create possible typologies and then to compare these typologies to empirical realities. This study adopts qualitative research methods, the goal of which, as Merriam (1998) argued, is to elicit "understanding and meaning, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of field work, and inductive orientation to analysis, and the findings that are richly descriptive" (p. 11).

This qualitative study was conducted in the spring semester. Interviews and content analysis were used to examine and explore travel decision-making and behaviors of Chinese visitors to SCH. The study was designed to allow for 45- to 60-minute interviews using an 18-item questionnaire that permitted probes and follow-up questions raised by the respondents that the researcher did not think about when planning the study.

The participants for the study were 7 Chinese students and scholars living in College Station who visited SCH before this study. Some of these participants were friends or acquaintances of the researchers, while others were approached by respondent-driven sampling by which respondents are selected from the friendship network of existing participants. Although it was unlikely to make unbiased estimates from respondent-driven samples, this sampling method is cheap, quick, and easy technique, which allows the researchers to make asymptotically unbiased estimates (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004).

All the data were collected during the 45-60-minute interview. The participants were asked to select where an interview should take place. The language for all the 7 interviews was Chinese. The data collection locations included participants' home, participants' laboratory, and seminar room in a library. The data were collected right after the spring break till the middle of April. Most often, to qualify for the study, a participant had to have visited SCH no more than two years, because it was assumed that people visiting SCH more than two years ago may forget their experience or their memories have been faded. The questionnaire used included

two parts. The first part was intended to ask for demographic information of the participants, while the second was made up of 18 questions concerning participants' decision-making and travel behaviors of SCH.

The questions were asked by an interviewer with the interviewer writing down the answers to the questions and some answers were recorded. After transcription of the interviews, participants were sent a copy and were asked to check if there were any alterations or additions of the documents. After that, the transcriptions were unitized and then printed out on cards for further content analysis. The content analysis allows the researchers to sift through a large amount of data obtained from the interview in a systematic fashion (GAO, 1996). This research technique analyzed data by dividing the data into small units, and then coding and categorizing of the data to derive some hidden themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned previously, there were 7 participants being interviewed by the researchers. In this section, the results of interviews of participants were presented to reveal a rich and insightful description of their pattern of decision-making and behaviors. It was arranged according to the order of the interview. The names in this study were all pseudonyms.

A FAMILY OF VISITING SCHOLAR IN COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE & BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

This report provides a descriptive analysis of a family of visiting scholar in College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences who visited SCH in January. The family had originally planned a two-day trip to SCH for pleasure, but visited there for only one day because other people in tour group did not want to stay in Houston. The primary motive of the family's visit to SCH was to relax and learning experience for their child. Expenditures for the family's one day visit amounted to \$150.

Demographics of the Family

The travel party that was interviewed consisted of Sun and Zhou, while their child was in the bedroom playing. Both actively participated in the interview and answered all directed questions. They are in their late 30s, their child is only five years old. Sun was visiting scholar holding Ph.D specialized in vet science. The family's annual income before taxes ranges between 180000 and 300000 RMB (\$30,000 to \$50,000). The interview was conducted in their home. The time of the interview was at 7:30 p.m. and lasted until 8:30.

The Decision for the Trip

They only stayed in the Houston area for one day. In addition to SCH, they also went to the Chinese supermarket for shopping. The family started planning one week prior to the visit. As they have never been to Houston area before, early planning was considered to be good for them. The reason to go to SCH was the opportunity to escape and relax, but more importantly, "to give our daughter an opportunity to learning space knowledge, and nurture her interest in space science". The couple had planned to stay in the SCH area for two days. However, they compromised and followed other members of the group who didn't want to stay there for another day and returned to College Station at night.

Planning Decisions

Both their daughter and Zhou actively involved in the visit decision to visit, but Sun was the person who initiated the visit to SCH. He came to College Station earlier than Zhou and the girl. Therefore, Sun believed that he knew more about the surrounding area. He obtained some knowledge of SCH from a geography textbook when he was a high school student. No one recommended this visit.

SCH Visit Questions

The primary motive to visit SCH was to cultivate their daughter's interest in space science and at the same time for the family to retreat and relax. To go to Houston to buy grocery was also a motive, but it was not the main one. The family chose to drive there with other families, as it only took one hour and a half to get there. Driving also enabled them to see the outside scenery along the highway. They did not book accommodation in the surrounding area and stayed in SCH only for 3-4 hours. Thereafter, they went to the Chinese supermarket to buy grocery.

Attractions and Experiences

There are many attractions in Houston that the family was interested. Yet there was no time left for them to visit. They watched the film about astronauts and saw the space clothes, and Apollo project. Most of the time, they watched the daughter playing on slides inside SCH. Because they only spent 3-4 hours there, they did not take the tram train to go to Johnson Space Center. The expenditure of their visit was estimated to be 150 dollars, including entrance tickets, food they bought inside the SCH, and the gas. They were planning to buy some gifts for their daughter, but when they went to the shopping area, they thought all gifts were expensive. When asked about their perceived satisfaction of

their experience, they responded with satisfaction, and after home, they shared with their friends and recommended them to visit.

A FAMILY OF PH.D STUDENT IN BUSINESS

Demographic Information

Kai was a third year Ph.D student in the Business School. Both he and his wife were in their late thirties. They had one boy, a twelve-year boy attending 6th grade in College Station. The wife had a decent job in China. They could be categorized in the upper- income bracket earning 300000-400000 RMB (50000-70000 US dollars) annually. The interview was completed at participants home. An appointment was set up with husband, Kai. They were enthusiastic about the interview and asked if the researcher could interview their son. They thought it was a good opportunity for the boy to learn some knowledge and also test his memory.

Planning Decisions for the Trip

The planning process for this trip began before the wife came to College Station in June one year before. Kai collected much information about SCH. But it was not until at the end of July, they went to visit SCH. The reason for that was before going there, they went to many other places in Texas. And they searched the internet for the accommodations and attractions that appealed to their taste. Finally, they booked a hotel near SCH for one night, and another hotel in Galveston, because they also wanted to go to Galveston the next day to go swimming on the beach. For attractions and activities inside SCH, they navigated the website of SCH, bought three tickets online, which are cheaper than tickets bought at the gate. They knew many activities which could play inside for the 12-year-old boy.

Planning Issues

Kai was the main decision maker and planner of this trip, although it was a joint decision among three family members. Being in College Station for two years, Kai and his son knew much about the surrounding cities like Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, and Houston. Like other Chinese students, Kai had some knowledge of SCH. The boy also learned SCH in school and got recommendations from his schoolmates and friends to visit there. Other destination for the trip under consideration included Galveston, a seaside town in South Houston. They planned to be this trip for three days.

Motivational Drivers

Being aware of many cities in Texas, this family came to learn about another culture, art, history, and cultural events in Houston. The primary motive for visiting SCH was to give an opportunity for the wife to see the SCH, and more importantly to allow the boy to learn more knowledge of the space, open his eye, and widen his view on science.

Attractions, Activities, and Expenditure

Due to their preparation for the trip, they knew many attractions and activities in SCH, therefore, they went to visit almost all parts of the SCH. They stayed there for 6 hours and took tram-train to Johnson Space Center, which they thought was an awesome experience, especially for the boy. The boy also liked the movies and simulations, the moon, and the universe. The total expenditure was about \$ 250. They did not buy any gifts inside except for the 30-dollar pictures taken at the beginning of their tour to Johnson Space Center.

ANOTHER VISITING SCHOLAR FAMILY

This interview report included responses by a visiting scholar mother and her son visiting SCH for knowledge and pleasure for one day in January 2014. An opportunity to learn the knowledge and relax was the principal motive of the trip, with additional motives being a chance to go to Houston. When first contacted by the researcher, they were on a trip to New York and DC. So we made an appointment on the next Thursday after they came back.

Demographics

Participants who were interviewed consisted of a middle-aged mother, JM, and her 9- year-old son, WH. Her husband is still in China working as a University professor. The interview was conducted at participants' home beginning at about 7:30. JM answered almost all the questions while WH was in the bedroom playing a computer game. Only when JM could not be sure, she asked her son for confirmation. The family's annual income before taxes is between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

SCH Planning Questions

JM did not recall when and how she learned of SCH and reported that "in Geography class long ago, I guess." However, this was not a factor in their decision making to go to SCH. The primary motive to go to SCH was "for my son to learn

space knowledge". JM reported that someone recommended SCH as a visiting destination. When WH played with other Chinese children, he learned that it would be interesting to visit someday. And some friends of hers also asked them to go together. They had never been there before and felt it was an economical choice for a visiting destination if many people went there pooling cars. They did not go on SCH website, and their friends bought two entrance tickets for them. As JM stated "I spent almost no time on planning this trip, my friends did all things for me. I just followed them." And her son was very happy because quite a few children would be going there with him.

SCH Visit Questions

Originally, this family wanted to visit other places in Houston, such as museums, zoos, and parks. But, their friends did not want to stay in Houston. So, they only visit SCH and stayed there for about 4 hours. In their group, there were four families sharing two cars. JM, WH, and their friends only stayed in Houston for one day, and most of the time they stayed in SCH. They did not know other attractions and activities there. What they were involved was space simulation, space film, astronaut clothes, children slide. They did not go to Johnson Space Center because they did not know it. When mentioned Johnson Space Center by the researcher, JM felt a little bit sad. "We should have visited there if we did more preparation and gone to the website to see what attractions they have prior to visiting. That was exactly what my son wanted to visit". They did not buy any gifts, despite WH wanted to buy because gifts there are expensive. The expenditure they spent was approximately 60 dollars. Although back home, they did share their experience with friends and recommended them to visit, they were not satisfied with their experience in SCH. The reasons included a limited choice of food inside.

A FAMILY OF POSTDOC IN BIOLOGY

This report offers a descriptive account of a family of middle-aged postdoc ZhL's learning and pleasure trip to SCH for one day on May 5, 2013. The family had originally planned a three day to visit Houston, including Galveston. But, they chose to visit only SCH, and came back to College Station the same day.

Demographics of the Family and Interview Venue

The interview was conducted in ZhL's lab. He was very glad that the researcher wanted to interview him. But he also stated that he was very busy at the time he was first contacted and asked if the interview time could be set up a

few days later when there was little work to do. He was in his late 30s and got his Ph.D. in China. He came to the US for a few years. But he worked at the University for only two years. His annual income before taxes is almost \$50,000. The time of the interview at 2:30 p.m. and lasted until 3:45 p.m. Initially, the interview site was arranged in a small lab, but there were no desks for the researcher to put a laptop and take note. So, we went to another lab which was much bigger and we felt very comfortable.

The Decision for the Trip

ZhL's family started planning the visit to SCH a week before the visit in May 2013 when it was warm. As they never went to SCH before and had been in College Station for less than 1 year, they thought it would be better if they prepared ahead of time. The primary reason was the opportunity to relax for the whole family and especially provide a learning experience for the 6-year-old daughter. ZhL stated that the reason was "for my daughter to learn science. She loves science and likes to explore. This is an excellent opportunity for her to learn more about space science." Another reason was to go to Houston China Town to enjoy Chinese delicacies.

Planning Decisions

When asked who had the initial suggestion and who made the final decision, ZhL responded that "We all listened to what the wife had said, and always." Both the females were interested in going there. But ZhL's wife was the person who initiated the trip suggestion. He had no recollection of anyone actually recommending this visit.

Attractions and Activities

It took altogether almost two hours to drive there. First, they went to Houston China Town to eat Chinese style lunch. Then at about 2:00 pm continued to hit the road for SCH. They bought the tickets at booking booths because they did not know that buying ticket on-line was 5 dollars cheaper. Although they made preparation one week before, they did not know John Space Center. So they did not take tram-train to go inside, which ZhL said was a great pity. The attractions and activities they visited were space film, hi-fi simulation, children's slide, and Apollo project.

Expenditures

They did not stay in the Houston area and returned home the same day. Neither did they eat inside SCH, because ZhL stated that there was always western food like potato chips and sandwiches. They did not like these junk foods. If they

stayed in Houston for one or two nights, they would like to choose middle-level hotels. AhL said he had a Holiday Inn's reward card. And also, they did not buy anything at the SCH gift shop. Total expenditures came to \$ 80, including tickets, gas, and some miscellaneous expenses.

Overall SCH Vacation

After returning home, they talked about their SCH experience to their friends and recommended them to visit. Overall impression for ZhL was satisfied. And if possible, the family would return to visit there for a second time the year after.

A FAMILY OF UNIVERSITY STAFF IN A SUPPORTING DEPARTMENT

This interview was with a family of University employee in his late 30s. They visited SCH during the Christmas season the year before. This family had originally planned to stay in the SCH area for one night, but due to the unwillingness of their friends, they came back home the same day.

Demographics of the Family/Interview Place

The family was interviewed at their home 7:30 pm, and last about 90 minutes. Till 9:00pm. There are 4 people in this family, father, mother (a household wife), 4-year-old boy and 2-year-old girl. It was the father, Yang, who was interviewed by the researcher. He was awarded Ph.D. in China, and liked to talk and actively participated in the interview and answered all directed questions. Since he works in the University supporting department, he is paid relatively decent salary. The family's annual income before taxes is about \$60000. When first contacted, he accepted happily and considered the interview an opportunity to talk to people their SCH experience. The interview was carried out in a bedroom while the children were playing in the living room and watching TV.

The Decision for the Trip

Yang started planning the visit to SCH during Thanks giving one year before, almost a month before the visit. "We planned to go there during the Thanks giving season, but delayed until Christmas time, because there were 10 days off, plenty of time for both children and me." The primary reason to visit SCH was "for the children to broaden their horizon and learn the space knowledge. The boy is very interested in space." Actually, he was curious about and interested in space, too. This was also an opportunity for Yang and his wife to go SCH to see something new, as they never been there. For his wife, the trip to SCH could be an escape from

the household chore and relax in a scientific atmosphere in Houston.

Planning Decisions

All of the family was actively involved in the decision to visit SCH, but the boy was the person who initiated the trip to SCH. He was four years old, in the early learning center where he was told SCH was a good place to visit. And the boy also knew SCH from TV and his playmates. When he first proposed to go there, the family agreed. So they decided to visit SCH.

SCH Visit Questions

The family drove to SCH with another family, as it was easier and occupied less leisure time. This would enable them to spend more time on SCH enjoying the attractions and relaxing. Some of the attractions that the Yang's family was interested in visiting included watching the film about astronauts landing on the moon, children slide, and some interactive projects. "Children liked to be involved in interactive activities, loved to watch rockets, they did not take much interest in the structures of scientific things. But I wanted to look at the structures." They did not buy anything in the SCH. But they had intended to purchase some gifts for their children to return home with. Due to the time, they did not go to the shopping area, though. The breakdown of their expenditure was simple: four tickets \$50, fast food snacks inside \$30, and gas \$30. The total amounted to \$110. If next time going there, they would stay there for two days and would choose LaQuinta suite hotel, the cost of staying for one night would be more expensive than economical hotels. "We have LaQuinta's card, which will give us 10% discount. We do not like to live in friends' home because that will bother them."

Satisfaction

They were satisfied with their visit to SCH. The boy learned a lot. And in the near future, they will revisit SCH. After they got home, they talked about their experience in SCH. The children shared their visit with their friends.

A FAMILY OF YOUNG PREGNANT LADY

This interview reports the response of a young pregnant lady, YQ, who went to SCH for the first time. The family chose SCH because "two days before the visit, my friends at the church invited us to go there". Though they had no expectations for SCH, they described the trip as impressive. The total expenditure was \$ 50. When asked their intention

to return to SCH in the near future, they reported that it was very unlikely to return because “we have already been there, so it was not new to us any longer. We do not want to visit the same place”.

Demographics

YQ is in her late 20s. Her husband is a Ph.D. student. Their child is only one-year-old, and they sent their children to China took care of by their parents. So she has time to pursue her master’s degree. She has no income, but his husband has a TA, which for them is enough to live in College Station.

Interview Site/Day

The interview was conducted at Evan library right after her seminar. She and the other two students in her group booked a room for their discussion purpose. It was a Friday and the interview started at 12:10 pm until 1:00 pm.

Trip Decision and Planning

This trip for the couple was accompanied by 6 friends, including a postdoc couple and their son, another Ph.D. student family. They only stayed SCH 6 hours, returned home the same day. They drove two cars there. YQ reported that only one of her friends involved in the trip plan two and three days before they made the trip. “My friends got coupons, and she went to the SCH website to buy the tickets for all of us. I did nothing, just went there.” YQ said. Long before going to SCH, YQ reported that she knew it by reading a newspaper and watching a TV play which featured a woman working at NASA. There were also some friends who visited there to recommend. The primary motive was to “go there to relax and to satisfy my curiosity of SCH, and I really wanted to know how astronaut worked in space”.

SCH Visit

YQ reported that the motive of her visit to SCH was for relaxation and pleasure; however, she had no idea about what attractions and activities they could visit inside SCH. In addition, since the trip occurred one year and a half, she did not clearly recall what she played and watched. But there were many things she could remember. The most impressive one was taking tram-train to the John Space Center. As she stated “it is real rocket I ever saw. I was shocked when I first saw it”. The other things interesting were astronauts’ life in space, a video clip showing how they talked in space and how they recycled water, which on earth was impossible. She did not participate in many activities because she was pregnant for 7 months then. But her friends played more. They did not eat the lunch inside because there were not

many foods to choose from. Instead, they went out to eat at a MacDonald. The total expenditure was \$50 for the husband and wife, including entrance tickets and gas.

Overall Impression of SCH

Overall, her impression of SCH was good. However, for her, it was very unlikely to return because once they went there, it was not new. They did not want to visit the same place, except that their friends visiting them would want to go there. She was satisfied with their experience in SCH. Although there were quite a few things that she did not like. For example, the staff was not humane, they separated their friends into different compartments of the tram-train. And what’s more, it was not good that they needed to pay their parking fee.

FAMILY OF A PH.D. IN ENGINEERING

This case reports responses by Dr. Bai in engineering who just graduated from the Texas A&M University visiting SCH for pleasure in the late July. The family has four people, including husband, wife, and parents. The husband, DR. BAI was interviewed by the researcher. They bought no gifts, and their expenditure was about \$100. Dr. Bai reported that it was very unlikely to return to SCH.

Demographics

The travel party included DR. BAI, his wife (BJ), and parents-in-law. Dr. Bai just graduated from University with Ph.D. in engineering. And BJ got her bachelor degree in Music in China. He and his wife were both in their 30s, while their parents were over 60. Their daughter was one-year old then. When they went to SCH, BJ had just been pregnant. The participant was met in the church, and he was very enthusiastic about the interview. He got an RA when he was pursuing his Ph.D.

Trip Planning

The participant had been in College Station for a few years and was very familiar with Houston area. Therefore, he did not use any information, just went to the website and bought four tickets, since buying tickets on-line was less expensive than at the gate. Two days later, the family drove to SCH. The motive for the trip was that the parents went to the US to visit them. The couple thought they needed to take their parents to go out for pleasure and for fun. The first attraction Dr. Bai thought was SCH. It was also him who made the final decision. Although the family did not visit SCH before, they knew it very well. And they always wanted to go there someday.

SCH Visit Issues

Although Dr. Bai could not remember exactly the names of the places, they had a vivid memory of what it looked like. He took much interest in saying visiting experience. Their friends had recommended because of its fame. They visited SCH for about 4 hours. Dr. Bai reported that he was not very interested in Space. He would like to stay somewhere during the visit and waited for their parents. But some attractions and activities also impressed him: “the verisimilitude of the film describing the life of astronauts in space, landing on the moon, and space suits of astronauts”. Their parents took much interest and took a long time enjoying. After entering into the SCH hall, they took tram-train to John Center to see rocket model. As Dr. Bai stated that there were not many people visiting. So there was no need for them to queue a long line waiting.

They thought the ticket was reasonably priced. The total expenditure was about \$ 100 for the family of four people including gas, tickets. They did not eat inside. Instead, they went to the Chinese town to enjoy Chinese food. Inside SCH, “there were limited varieties of food to choose from, most of them are junk food, and we did not want it.”

Satisfaction

Dr. Bai’s impression of SCH was positive and he was satisfied with their experience because the family had a good time enjoying themselves. It was unlikely for them to go there another time. His interest was not in space. When asked if a few years later when his daughter turned older, and she wanted to go, Dr. Bai said that everything would change. He could not predict that long, wait until then.

FINDINGS

After the raw data on decision and behavior of SCH Chinese tourists were transcribed, they were systematically transformed and aggregated into meaningful units. And the next step was to compare these units and group them together into categories. Categories can then be compared to other categories to establish relationships among them. A number of important findings emerged.

DECISION MADE 3-4 DAYS PRIOR TO THE VISIT

Most of the participants made their travel decision about 3 to 4 days prior to visiting SCH. Although there were variations depending on different visitors, many participants thought the time of 3-4 days worked for them during which they could prepare themselves physically and psychologically. They could navigate the website of SCH and buy tickets. As social events are socially constructed, they also could tell their

friends where they wanted to go the next few days. Although there were people who made a very short time decision, according to the data, these visitors were dependent on their friends in terms of ticket purchase, activity to be played, and other things. There were participants who also wanted to go long before the visit. However, these people only had the intention and motivation, the intention was not yet turned into action. Only if there was some kind of activator, then they would make a travel decision.

VISIT FOR THE PURPOSE OF CHILDREN

Most of the participants went to SCH with their families. Usually, the primary motive for the family trip was for the benefit of their children, although there were other motivations such as relaxation and pleasure for the family. One child policy has been adopted in China for decades. A vast majority of scholars coming to the US have only one child by Chinese law. Otherwise, they will be fined and punished by the government. Therefore, it is not surprising that people usually say that kids these days are spoiled rotten. Parents and grandparents are willing to do everything they can satisfy kids’ need, sending kids to good schools, paying money to have kids learn English, music, and other activities. They hope these will help the kids learn more in order not to let their children fall behind. Still, traditionally, Chinese culture emphasizes caring about the development of kids and helps to build them morally, intellectually and physically (Shek & Chen, 1999). These would be the possible reason why a lot of participants in the study reported that they visited SCH for the benefit of their children and help to cultivate kids’ interest in space science.

POOR PREPARATION FOR A VISIT

The result of the categorization of units showed the most attractions and activities were space film, astronauts landing on the moon, space simulation, and space life. Most of the participants did not know John Space Center. There were many possible reasons. First, although Chinese scholars and students made their trip decisions 3-4 days prior to the visit, they were not careful about what SCH has to offer, they used the website primarily for the purchase of tickets. Additionally, time limit also contributed to their focus on limited activities. But this argument could be debatable. People might conclude that it was the perceived limited activities that contributed to them failing to take part in the activities SCH has to offer. Whether it was true or not, lack of other sources would be another contributor to lack of knowledge of SCH. The third possible reason may be culture barrier. Many scholars and students visited SCH shortly after they came to the US, therefore they had little chance to immerse themselves to know enough American culture, thus showing no interest in culture-related activities.

LITTLE PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

Among the participants interviewed, only quite a few visitors bought gifts in SCH's shopping area. Most of them either had no intention to buy or had no purchasing behaviors. Possible reasons, as some participants reported, were that gifts there were too expensive than they expected. For ordinary Chinese visitors, they were not rich enough to buy or buy more gifts.

SATISFACTION WITH SCH

Despite limited activities were taken part in by the participants, most of them were satisfied with their experience in SCH. This might be hard to understand. Nevertheless, unlike many other attractions and activities, the most important aspect of SCH is its educational value. As long as participants can learn space knowledge and have fun, they would be happy about their experience. In addition, most of the participants visited with their family. Even though parents were tired or disappointed, when their kids were happy playing inside, parents were satisfied with their experience. This finding dovetailed with the results of the survey mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

LIMITATIONS

This short case study examined travel decision processes and consumption behaviors of Chinese students and scholars in College Station, TX visiting SCH. While it provided data useful for what and why is happening in the thinking and making processes of Chinese customers to SCH, certainly large-scale surveys are necessary to generalize the resulting findings to Chinese populations. Additionally, the snowball sampling method was used in this study. While this sampling method possessed an advantage in locating Chinese population, it still had a number of intrinsic drawbacks of community bias such as wrong anchoring, which would affect the random selection and representativeness (Rowland & John, 2004).

IMPLICATION

Collecting and mapping Chinese SCH visitors' emic views of their travel decision and consumption behavior help to revise and deepen the etic views of reality. The main contribution of this case study is the observation that no single dependent variable alone is both necessary and sufficient in influencing SCH visitors' thoughts or behaviors. Even when a participant reported that they thought the food inside SCH was bad, that alone is not sufficient to cause the entire trip to be assessed as not satisfied with their trips. There were several factors affecting visitors' perceptions and behaviors.

Practically, the findings of this case study would be used for SCH marketers to design their market promotion initiatives

to attract more Chinese visitors particularly. For instance, the majority of Chinese visitors do not search useful information on the website. Is there any effective way to reach Chinese people and let them know more about SCH? Can the use of email be better than promotion materials or combination method? SCH should make sure the marketing strategies designed are effective enough to draw visitors, not only Chinese but globally. And what is more, Chinese visitors tended not to buy gifts when visiting SCH, is there other strategies to induce them to have purchasing behaviors? Can it add more children's activities to trigger more consumption behaviors? These kinds of questions may raise interesting marketing strategy issues.

Most likely, there are many unique and valuable visitor segments which exist within the markets of SCH. Certainly, not all SCH Chinese visitors in College Station are families of students and scholars. More in-depth case studies using more samples from each of Chinese customer segments will certainly provide both confirmatory evidence and additional nuances about Chinese visitors' decision-making and consumption behaviors. This is also useful to study other customer segments to SCH.

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