

Beyond the stereotypes

Opportunities in China inbound tourism for second-tier European destinations

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4

5 **Beyond the stereotypes: opportunities in China inbound tourism for second-tier European**
6 **destinations**

7

8 *Abstract*

9 The existing literature has often represented Chinese tourists in broad and stereotypical ways, as
10 a new generation of bumbling camera-waving tourists showing minimal regard for the local
11 environments that they encounter. However, as Chinese have become more experienced
12 travellers, they have diversified and changed their behaviours. Amongst these various changes,
13 an increasing number of Chinese tourists have begun exploring second-tier destinations. By
14 focussing on Chinese travellers to less visited second-tier destinations, this paper goes beyond
15 the stereotypical representations of this fast-maturing market. It illustrates the heterogeneity of
16 Chinese tourism, and its advantages for second-tier European destinations.

17

18 Keywords:

19 Second-tier destinations, China, stereotypes, opportunities

20

21

22 **Introduction**

23 China's opening up to the world, developing economy and progressive government easing of
24 travel restrictions have prompted an expanding flow of outbound tourists that is disseminating
25 across the globe (Cai, Li, & Knutson, 2008). This growth has made China a highly targeted
26 market for tourist destinations including in Europe. "Approved Destination Status" (ADS) was
27 given collectively to all EU member states and members of the Schengen agreement in 2004
28 (except for the United Kingdom, which was a recipient in 2005). This had the effect of
29 transforming China into Europe's fastest growing inbound travel market, as the number of
30 Chinese travellers to European countries increased nine-fold compared to the year before (Du &
31 Dai, 2005). The growth continued as Chinese visitation to Europe rose from approximately 1
32 million in 2000 to approximately 12.5 million in 2016 (ETC & UNWTO, 2013; European Travel
33 Commission, 2016). In Europe, Chinese tourists have traditionally focussed on first-tier
34 destinations and made frequent use of well-trodden routes through the continent. However, as
35 Chinese become more experienced travellers, they are increasingly visiting second-tier
36 destinations in their continuing search for new and different experiences and social capital. This
37 surge is also evident in Scandinavia where the number of incoming tourists from China has risen
38 by approximately 20% year on year from 2010 to 2016 ("Statistics Denmark," n.d., "Statistics
39 Finland," n.d., "Statistics Norway," n.d., "Statistics Sweden," n.d.). This study uses Scandinavia
40 as a case to investigate Chinese tourism to second-tier destinations in Europe. The focus of the
41 paper is on the differences observed between Chinese tourism to first and second-tier

42 destinations, and on the opportunities that inbound Chinese tourism offers to second-tier
43 destinations in Europe in particular.

44 **The scholarly stereotypes of Chinese tourists**

45 With its rise onto the world stage, China outbound tourism has received increasing scholarly
46 attention. The growing literature has recently been reviewed by various researchers (Andreu,
47 Claver, & Quer, 2010; Cai et al., 2008; S. Huang & Hsu, 2005, 2008; S. Huang, Keating, Kriz, &
48 Heung, 2015; Jin & Wang, 2015; Jørgensen, Law, & King, 2016; Keating, Huang, Kriz, & Heung,
49 2015; Keating & Kriz, 2008; Leung, Li, Fong, Law, & Lo, 2014; Tsang & Hsu, 2011; Tse, 2015).
50 As observed by Jørgensen, Law, and King (2016), these reviews illustrate that the existing research
51 on China outbound tourism has been limited in breadth and depth. Many studies have deployed
52 similar (often quantitative) methods to investigate familiar issues such as motivations and image.
53 Likewise, many prior studies have adopted macro approaches in attempting to understand China
54 outbound tourists, thereby leading to homogeneous representations. Finally, many studies have
55 not taken account of the interconnectedness between the cultural, political, social and legislative
56 dimensions of China outbound tourism (Jørgensen et al., 2016; Tse, 2015). This treatment may
57 explain why Chinese tourists are often described in broad and stereotypical ways, with most
58 behaviours being attributed to a simplistic “motivations plus culture” equation. In such cases the
59 ‘Chinese tourist’ is characterized as a: young/middle aged, urban, (upper) middle class, group
60 traveller, with language difficulties and a need for familiar food, who travels to well-known
61 destinations in near markets, Europe and the USA (Andreu, Claver, & Quer, 2013; Becken, 2003;
62 Corigliano, 2011; Guo, Seongseop Kim, & Timothy, 2007; Kim, Guo, & Agrusa, 2005; Latham,

63 2011; M. Li & Cai, 2009, 2009; Ryan & Mo, 2002). With their tendency to generalize, though
64 such descriptions are not necessarily incorrect, they ignore the complexity and heterogeneity of
65 the Chinese travel market (Jørgensen et al., 2016). Some researchers have addressed this limitation
66 by adopting a more differentiated approach. According to Fugmann and Aceves (2013), this is
67 done as a direct response to the “stereotypical reporting and the disparagement of Chinese group
68 tourists as a ‘new generation of ugly camera waving tourists’, ‘grasshoppers’ or ‘duckling tourists’
69 (Chan, 2008)” (p. 166). These researchers have argued that the motivations, behaviours and
70 destination choices of Chinese travellers are experiencing constant diversification (e.g. Arlt, 2013;
71 Jin, Lin, & Hung, 2014; King & Gardiner, 2015; Prayag, Cohen, & Yan, 2015). According to Arlt
72 (2013), “the second wave of Chinese outbound tourism offers increased opportunities for
73 destinations and tourism service providers in off the beaten track destinations to get a share of the
74 Chinese outbound source market.” (p. 132).

75 In terms of geographical coverage, the recent exponential growth of Chinese tourism to
76 Europe (ETC & UNWTO, 2013; European Travel Commission, 2016; Xie & Li, 2009), has not
77 (yet) spurred a corresponding rise in research. Studies that investigate Chinese tourists to European
78 destinations remain relatively scarce (Jørgensen et al., 2016). The geographical coverage of the
79 few existing studies has been confined to broad perspectives on Chinese tourism to Europe
80 generally (Andreu et al., 2013; Xiang, 2013) and to the most frequented destinations such as Spain
81 (Lojo, 2016), Germany (Fugmann & Aceves, 2013; Xiaoyang, Tobias, & Werner, 2011), Great
82 Britain (de Sausmarez, Tao, & McGrath, 2012) and Italy (Corigliano, 2011). This means an almost

83 complete absence of studies on Chinese tourism to second-tier destinations. Only a single paper
84 has been identified on this topic (Cavlek, 2016).

85

86 This study aims to diversify the research base by investigating China outbound tourism to
87 less frequented (second-tier) destinations, in this case to Scandinavia. Secondly, the researchers
88 approach the investigation by using a holistic networked approach that does not assume for
89 example motivations or culture as being more influential than other factors.

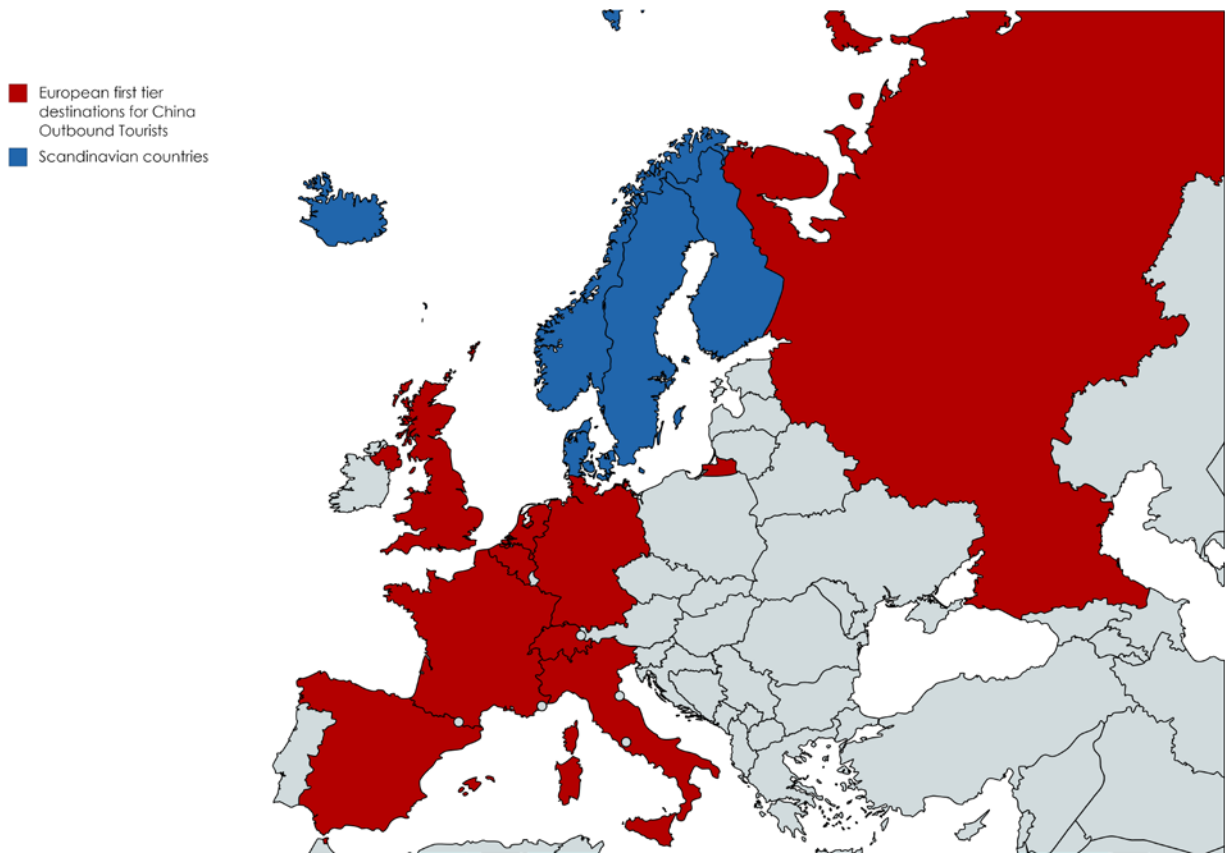
90 **Second-tier destinations**

91 There is no instrumental definition of what constitutes a second-tier destination. This may be
92 because it is a relative term that depends on contextual factors and the perspective that is brought
93 by users. Some researchers have used transportation links to define first and second tier
94 destinations (King & Choi, 1997), whereas others have referred to the degree of inclusion in tour
95 packages as a significant causal factor (Lojo, 2016). This paper adopts a looser definition, which
96 recognizes the relativity of the concept, is limited to the European context and based on the current
97 travel patterns of Chinese tourists to Europe. In this paper, a second tier destination is thus viewed
98 as a place that is not a traditional first-tier destination for Chinese tourism to Europe (see Figure
99 1), but somewhere that has shown the potential to attract Chinese tourists (Andreu et al., 2013;
100 ETC, 2011; EU SME Centre, 2015).

101

102

103 [Figure 1: European first-tier destinations for China outbound tourists and Scandinavian
104 destinations]



105

106

107 Figure 1 highlights first-tier destinations for China outbound tourists (red), as well as the countries
108 that are considered part of Scandinavia in this study (blue). The existence of first- and second-tier
109 destinations within nations should also be recognized, as some local or regional destinations within
110 the countries marked as first-tier in Figure 1 may have a greater resemblance to second-tier
111 destinations in terms of inbound Chinese tourism. This is for example the case in Spain, where
112 Lojo (2016) found that various cities could be categorised between major and minor destinations

113 for Chinese group travellers. “Barcelona and Madrid are the protagonist cities of Spain (...) other
114 main destinations are the cities of Seville, Granada, Mijas, Ronda and Cordoba. (...) part of the
115 principal destinations are also the cities of Toledo and Zaragoza. The cities that appear in less than
116 40% of the tour packages have been considered as minor destinations.” (p. 515). As was mentioned
117 previously, this paper applies a loose definition of second-tier destinations, and the authors will
118 leave it to the readers to decide if the findings of this study apply to their specific destinations.

119 **Method**

120 As mentioned previously, reviews of the existing literature on China outbound tourism have
121 suggested that the literature has been focussed on linear and static representations and that
122 understandings of the interconnectedness of cultural, political, social and legislative aspects in
123 China outbound tourism have been neglected (Jørgensen et al., 2016; Tse, 2015). In addressing
124 this issue, the present paper applies a holistic networked approach to the study of Chinese
125 tourism to Scandinavia. A qualitative methodology was used. However, instead of choosing a big
126 sample within a narrow group, the researchers adopted the opposite approach. A wide group of
127 different actors was selected to comment on the same phenomenon from different angles. This
128 approach provided the researchers with insights into all aspects of the distribution system. The
129 data collection approach that was adopted means that the study does not offer grounds for
130 generalisability, but that it offers specific insights on Chinese tourism to Scandinavia and
131 indications that may be applicable to other second-tier destinations in Europe. These findings are
132 worthwhile for practitioners and researchers on their own terms, but also as a foundation for
133 other researchers who wish to build on them.

134

135 The study is based on 52 in-depth interviews with suppliers, intermediaries and tourists. Most
136 interviewees were recruited via purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2004; Patton, 2001) as the goal
137 of the data collection was to maximise the depth and richness of the data (Kuzel, 1992). Each of
138 the interviews lasted between 35 and 70 minutes.

139 The interviewed intermediaries (n=22) (see Table 1) included China based outbound tour
140 operators who work with Scandinavia as a destination; online travel agents (OTAs) who send
141 Chinese tourists to Scandinavia; DMCs who work with incoming tourism from China; tour
142 leaders/guides who accompany Chinese tourists on their travels to/in Scandinavia; and finally,
143 national DMOs. An element of snowballing was evident, since some interviewees within China's
144 tourism industry helped the researchers to contact other relevant interviewees. The researchers
145 adopted this approach because it was difficult to access the top Chinese tourism industry leaders
146 without contacting other industry actors. All of these interviews, apart from two that were
147 conducted remotely via WeChat Call, were conducted face-to-face in Beijing at the offices of the
148 respective companies. The tour leader representatives have been anonymised based on their own
149 request.

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151

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Nr.	Type of company	Company Name	Representative Role	Interview Method
1	Tour Operator and Travel agent	Caissa Touristic, Hotel Management Dept.	Manager of Hotel Management Dept.	Face-to-face
2	Tour Operator and Travel agent	Caissa Touristic Beijing	Vice President for Beijing Branch	Face-to-face
3	Tour Operator and Travel agent	CITS (China International Travel Service)	Deputy General Manager	Face-to-face
4	Tour Operator and Travel agent	CYTS (China Youth Travel Service)	Product Expert, Europe Travel Center	Face-to-face
5	Tour Operator, Travel Agent, Wholesaler	Oriental Nordic OY (China Office: DFDS and Silja Line)	Owner	Face-to-face
6	Tour Operator and Travel Agent	New World Travel Agency	Manager of outbound business	Face-to-face
7	Wholesaler	Grand Vision International Travel Service	Europe Director	Face-to-face
8	Wholesaler	China Bamboo Garden International Travel Service	Product Operation Manager – North and East Europe, Russia	Face-to-face
9	Niche Wholesaler	Beijing Albatros Travel	Director	Face-to-face
10	OTA	Ctrip	International Market Manager, International Hotel Department	WeChat Call
11	DMC	NordEU	General Manager	Face-to-face
12	DMC	Tumlare	Destination Manager Finland	Face-to-face
13	Niche DMC	Stopover Finland	Project Manager	Face-to-face
14	DMC and Wholesaler	DMC Scandinavian Incentives	Inbound Tour Consultant	Face-to-face
15	Supranational DMO	Scandinavian Tourism Board	Chief Representative	Face-to-face
16	National DMO	Visit Sweden (China Office)	Travel Trade Manager	Face-to-face
17	Tour Leader	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Face-to-face
18	Tour Leader	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Face-to-face
19	Tour Leader	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Face-to-face
20	Tour Leader	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Face-to-face
21	Tour Leader	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Face-to-face
22	Scandinavia Based Tour Guide	Independent	Tour Guide	WeChat Call

156

157 The supplier interviewees (n=16) (see Table 2) included local and regional DMOs,
158 accommodation providers, attractions and transportation companies. Only companies that
159 expressed an interest in China inbound tourism were included. Aside from this, attempts were
160 made to provide a broad representation of different kinds of actors based on geography and type

161 of business. In terms of geography, six destinations in Scandinavia that are popular among
 162 Chinese tourists were selected. These were: Greater Copenhagen, Denmark; Funen, Denmark;
 163 Helsinki, Finland; Stockholm, Sweden; Oslo, Norway and Sognefjord, Norway. An effort was
 164 made to include representatives of DMOs, attractions, accommodation providers and
 165 transportation/infrastructure providers in all destinations. With two exceptions, all interviews
 166 were conducted face-to-face at the premises of the respective companies in the six destinations
 167 mentioned.

168

169 [Table 2: Supplier Interviewees]

Nr.	Type of company	Company Name	Representative Role	Interview Method
1	DMO	Wonderful Copenhagen/ Chinavia	Project Manager	Skype
2	DMO	Visit North Zealand	Marketing Director	Face-to-face
3	DMO	Developing Fyn	Marketing Manager	Skype
4	DMO	Visit Stockholm	Marketing Manager	Face-to-face
5	DMO	Visit Helsinki	Marketing Manager	Face-to-face
6	DMO/Attraction	Visit Flam/Flamsbana	Sales and Marketing Manager	Face-to-face
7	DMO	Innovation Norway	Director of Tourism	Face-to-face
8	Accommodation	Restel Hotels	Key Account Manager	Face-to-face
9	Accommodation	Thon Hotels	Director of International Sales	Face-to-face
10	Accommodation	Nordic Choice Hotels	Sales Manager	Face-to-face
11	Accommodation	Fretheim Hotel	Director	Face-to-face
12	Accommodation	First Grand Hotel	General Manager	Face-to-face
13	Attraction	Odense City Museums	Marketing Coordinator	Face-to-face
14	Attraction	Egeskov Castle	CEO	Face-to-face
15	Attraction	Vasa Museet	Head of Marketing	Face-to-face
16	Transport/Attraction	Tallink Silja Line	Sales Manager, International Sales	Face-to-face

170

171 The tourist interviewees (n=14) (see Table 3) included both group package and independent
 172 tourists. The study focusses exclusively on leisure tourists residing in China, who have recently
 173 visited Scandinavia. To ensure the exclusion of other types of tourist, only Mainland Chinese

174 (excluding Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan), who had lived in mainland China
 175 during the previous 5 years and who had visited Scandinavia within those years as leisure
 176 tourists, were recruited for the purposes of interview. These criteria mean that the results
 177 presented in this paper do not apply to other types of tourists e.g. Chinese permanently living
 178 abroad or business travellers. Most of the interviews were conducted via WeChat call, while
 179 others were undertaken face-to-face in Hong Kong and Beijing. The reason for the predominance
 180 of long distance interviews, was the challenge for the researchers of recruiting and organising
 181 face-to-face meetings with the prospective interviewees.

182

183 [Table 3: Tourist Interviewees]

Nr.	Type/length of trip	Origin	Countries visited	Interview Method
1	Group tour, 7 days	Beijing	All four countries	WeChat Call
2	Group tour, 7 days	Beijing	All four countries	WeChat Call
3	Group tour, 10 days	Nanjing	All four countries	WeChat Call
4	Group tour, 10 days	Shanghai	All four countries	WeChat Call
5	Group tour, 16 days	Shanghai	Finland and Sweden	WeChat Call
6	Independent, 3 days	Beijing	Sweden	WeChat Call
7	Independent, 5 days	Shanghai	Norway	Face-to-face
8	Independent, 8 days	Beijing	Denmark and Norway	WeChat Call
9	Independent, 8 days	Beijing	Finland, Denmark and Sweden	WeChat Call
10	Independent, 9 days	Beijing	Norway	Face-to-face
11	Independent, 10 days	Beijing	All four countries	Face-to-face
12	Independent + VFR, 4 days	Guangzhou	Denmark, Norway and Sweden	WeChat Call
13	Independent + Conference, 7 days	Beijing	Finland and Sweden	Face-to-face
14	Trip 1: Independent, 12 days Trip 2: VFR, 5 days	Shenzhen	Trip 1: Finland, Sweden, Norway Trip 2: Copenhagen	Face-to-face

184

185 Jørgensen's (2017) conceptual framework for analysis of tourism distribution was applied in the
 186 data analysis. The analysis was carried out by locating the particulars of each interviewee in
 187 accordance with Activity Theory, and then enrolling the actors as part of an interconnected

188 distribution network in accordance with Actor-Network Theory. This enables the researchers to
189 gain an overview of each individual actor and to analyse the interrelationships between the
190 various actors. The approach views tourism distribution as “an ongoing and dynamic process of
191 mediation, happening in a relational network of complex activity systems, rather than a linear,
192 static and context free process from production to consumption” (Jørgensen, 2017, p. 317).

193 **Findings and discussion**

194 *Chinese tourists as mature travellers*

195 The study findings suggest that Chinese tourists to second-tier destinations are often more
196 mature than those travelling to their first-tier equivalents. Previous research has demonstrated the
197 relationship between the travel experiences, market maturity and other aspects of China
198 outbound tourists such as behaviours and decision making (e.g. Agrusa et al., 2011; Chen & Lin,
199 2012; Huang & Tian, 2013; Zeng et al., 2014). Immaturity has long been acknowledged as an
200 important cause of many of the particularities of Chinese outbound tourists. For example, their
201 tendency to travel in groups, their exhibiting particular behaviours and highly specific
202 requirements in terms of language, food and other basic needs (Hoare, Butcher, & O’Brien,
203 2010; Kau & Lim, 2005; Li et al., 2011; Ooi, 2004; Ryan & Mo, 2002; Youcheng Wang, 2008;
204 Zhao, 2006). Similar issues were also reported as challenges by some suppliers in Scandinavia.
205 However, the findings have shown that these issues were not present to the same degree in
206 Scandinavia as in other destinations. One reason may be that Chinese tourists to Scandinavia are
207 generally experienced travellers and that Scandinavia is not considered to be

208 a first-tier destination:

209 “... European tourism has developed many years in China. A lot of people maybe have
210 already been to France, Italy, Switzerland. So, when they want to go again, they will
211 choose some different countries. Maybe Scandinavia will be their second or third try...”

212 (Intermediary_4)

213 “Overall, I think that Scandinavia is usually never the first place where people go, so the
214 market needs to be somehow matured already, before the people start to go to
215 Scandinavia.” (Intermediary_12)

216 The fact that second-tier destinations like those in Scandinavia are more prone to receiving
217 experienced tourists means that some of the negative side effects and specific requirements of
218 inexperienced Chinese tourists as reported in the literature are less prevalent. This is an
219 advantage for DMOs and suppliers in such destinations, as more experienced tourists require less
220 specialized and customized treatments.

221 The maturation of the Chinese market also means that tourist preferences are developing.
222 This holds potential for second-tier destinations, as the Chinese tourists increasingly require
223 deeper and more special experiences, longer holidays, self-development, lifestyle-oriented travel,
224 and search for clean and unspoiled environments to contrast the current environmental situation
225 in China:

226 “Actually, you know, Chinese tourists, our Chinese clients, are much more experienced
227 travelling. They are looking for something special to experience. Not something to just

228 watch, look, they want something that is different from where they live, what they eat or
229 other scenic spots. Something special or something exciting.” (Intermediary_1)

230 It may be argued that many second-tier destinations offer opportunities for such experiences. The
231 maturation of the market reflects two types of Chinese tourism demand to Scandinavia. On the
232 one hand, there is a demand among Chinese tourists for new types of destinations and
233 experiences in lesser known (for Chinese tourists) parts of the world. On the other, there is
234 demand not only for more tourists, but also for different types of tourists amongst Scandinavian
235 destinations and suppliers. The following sections provides examples of these two types of
236 demand.

237 *Demand for second-tier destinations*

238 *Second-tier destinations as a stage for in-depth experiences*

239 Like most destinations (Fountain, Espiner, & Xie, 2010; Hua & Yoo, 2011; Li et al., 2011; Park
240 et al., 2014), traditional attractions such as heritage and cultural sights were important pull
241 factors for Chinese tourists travelling to Scandinavia. Natural attractions were a major draw:

242 “The most important thing for the Chinese tourist [travelling to Scandinavia] is the natural
243 landscape, both for older and younger people.”

244 (Intermediary_7)

245 Some natural sights were considered as being unique to the region:

246 “... the main thing I want to see in Europe is the Northern Lights, so I went to
247 Scandinavia and I chose one country, that’s Norway, because I heard it’s quite good. And
248 that there is a good chance to see the Northern lights in Tromsø.” (Tourist_07)

249 “... there is no night in Nordic countries in summer. (...) That is really fantastic and that
250 is really a unique experience I think.” (Tourist_05)

251 However, other attractions were found to be equally important. Several interviewees talked of
252 Scandinavia as a ‘special’ place, due to its unique blend of ‘environment’ and ‘lifestyle’. When
253 the interviewees spoke about the ‘environment’, they were referring to the cleanliness of the
254 natural environment, including the sea and sky, as well as to the quaint architecture and feelings
255 of safety:

256 “The advantage is the environment, because it is clean” (Intermediary_06)

257 “So, I think Nordic countries are pretty good, it’s safe. Most things are really safe, you
258 don’t worry.” (Tourist_11)

259 Among other things, ‘lifestyle’ referred to observations that tourists made about the locals. Some
260 respondents explained their perception that local people enjoy their lives, and are friendly.

261 Others commented on the feeling of being in a place with a good social system:

262 “... it’s a really different culture from other European countries. (...) You can experience
263 the lifestyle of the Scandinavians and the special views of the North. (...) I think the first
264 two important parts are the attitude and the lifestyle, and the other thing is the special
265 views. “ (Tourist_12)

266 “For me, what I remember most is the lifestyle and the local people of the Scandinavian
267 countries (...) the people they don’t have much social pressure. And they are enjoying
268 their life there. That is what I like the most. And also, the environment is very good.
269 Especially the air.” (Tourist_02)

270 The focus on more intangible attractions differ from findings from studies conducted in other
271 European destinations, where group tourists in particular have tended to focus more on
272 traditional sightseeing (Andreu et al., 2013; Corigliano, 2011). While these findings may be
273 more specific to Scandinavia, than to second-tier destinations in general, they indicate that
274 Chinese preferences for second-tier destinations may depend on the type of destination that they
275 are visiting. This indicates that second-tier destinations may have freedom and opportunities to
276 market themselves and be appreciated on their own merits, as they do not have to live up to pre-
277 set expectations like more famous and traditional destinations.

278 *Second-tier destinations as the (safe) ‘unknown’*

279 Most literature on China outbound tourism agrees that safety is amongst the most important
280 factors for Chinese tourists when selecting destinations (e.g. Becken, 2003; Kim et al., 2005; M.
281 Li et al., 2011; Sparks & Pan, 2009; Yu & Weiler, 2001). This was also the case for Chinese
282 travellers to Scandinavia, who perceived the destination to be safe relative to other European
283 destinations:

284 “... generally speaking Scandinavia is much safer than Paris or Italy...” (TourLeader_04)

285 “They perceive Scandinavia to be very safe. That means for example South Africa has
286 difficulties because they think it is unsafe, Africa is unsafe in general, the middle-east is

287 unsafe, also India to some degree, southern Europe also a bit, France a bit. But Denmark,
288 Sweden, Norway seem like a safe place to be” (Intermediary_9)

289 Information (sources) and expectations were also found to be important factors in Chinese
290 tourism to Scandinavia. The initial findings coincided with the literature on China outbound
291 tourism generally, as it was shown that on- and/or offline word of mouth were of considerable
292 importance as information sources for Chinese tourists to Scandinavia (N. Chen, Dwyer, & Firth,
293 2015; P. Wang, 2014; Yang, Jing, & Nguyen, 2016). However, the findings showed that unlike
294 China outbound tourists generally, those to Scandinavia knew little about the destination(s) to
295 which they were travelling:

296 “Most of the places in Scandinavia, actually we are not so familiar with (...) I mean, I am
297 not familiar with most of the scenic spots there. For example, I am familiar with scenic
298 spots in France, in Swiss, but we are not familiar with scenic spots in Scandinavia.”
299 (Tourist_03)

300 “Maybe they will say. ‘I want to go to Scandinavia’. But I don’t think they will know
301 much more than just the four countries.” (Intermediary_04)

302 A negative consequence of the lack of knowledge is that some tourists might not choose
303 Scandinavia or other second-tier destinations for their travels, because they do not want to go to
304 a place about which they know little. For those who chose Scandinavia, however, the lack of
305 knowledge meant that they either had moderate expectations, (which it was relatively easy to
306 fulfil) or were more open to whatever experiences they might encounter during their trip:

307 “I didn’t know a lot about the countries in North Europe. So, in fact, I didn’t expect very
308 much before I travelled there. But when I really arrived there, I just think there is a lot of
309 attractive and interesting things there...” (Tourist_04)

310 This openness that is attributable to a lack of knowledge, reinforces the previous point that
311 second-tier destinations are less bound by expectations, because Chinese tourists to these
312 destinations are more open to new and unexpected experiences.

313 *Demand for Chinese tourists*

314 The analysis found that there is a demand for Chinese tourists amongst Scandinavian suppliers.
315 Two advantages of China outbound tourism have been the primary focus in research and
316 discussion of China outbound tourism - the numbers and the spending (e.g. China Daily, 2016;
317 Chinese Tourists Agency, 2017; UNTWO, 2016). These advantages were also recognised by
318 Scandinavian suppliers but more specific advantages of Chinese incoming tourism compared to
319 other markets also emerged from the analysis. Three such advantages were: (1) that they had a
320 unique perspective on tourism products: (2) that they visited at times when it was difficult to sell
321 products to traditional costumers and: (3) that their consumption patterns differed from
322 traditional consumer groups.

323 It has already been elaborated how the Chinese tourists valued intangibles such as the
324 environment and lifestyle when travelling to Scandinavia. This reflects a perspective that differs
325 from other tourist groups, especially in the case of those coming from near-markets. Another
326 example of this perspective was that specific places or products could be sold to Chinese
327 consumers in new ways:

328 “... the ideas from the office in China are ideas that I would never come up with, some
329 combinations (...) that is interesting with the market, that you really have to understand
330 how to make a nice offer for the Chinese visitors. (...) You can sell Stockholm as a
331 nature, hiking product.” (Supplier_04)

332 The preceding quote reflects how Scandinavian cities might be sold as nature destinations to
333 Chinese consumers. The fact that Chinese consumers have an interest and bring a perspective
334 that differs vastly from typical consumers can be beneficial for second-tier destinations, since
335 they may define or redefine not only their products, but their destinations when marketing to the
336 Chinese market.

337 Lack of capacity was a challenge for Scandinavian destinations and may also be a
338 deficiency for other second-tier destinations:

339 “it is not easy to get some resources, I mean accommodation, overnight cruise or
340 something like that, you have to pay more for it.” (Intermediary_03)

341 A major reason for the capacity issue is seasonality in the Scandinavian tourism sector. This
342 means that attractions and accommodation are at capacity during Summer, but lack guests during
343 other times of the year. This is a broader issue that the Scandinavian destinations were working
344 to alleviate. Some suppliers saw China outbound tourism as part of the solution to this problem,
345 because many Chinese tourists travel throughout the year:

346 “when we suddenly have guests who come in droves in the low season, in busses. They
347 are low paying guests, but they are paying guests. For us, that is very, very interesting. It
348 fills out blanks that we have not been able to fill previously...”

349 (Supplier_12)

350 The influx of Chinese tourists outside the main season has advantages. The summer products and
351 tourists were generally more generic and covered a larger geographical area during their visit,
352 while the tourists visiting in other parts of the year, came for deeper experiences and typically
353 stayed in the same destinations for longer:

354 “Summer products are somehow different needs, different segments as well. Then the
355 winter is Northern lights, its experience. (...) Scandinavian summer as one destination
356 somehow, and then winter is totally different” (Intermediary_12)

357 A challenge that relates to Chinese inbound tourists was that both visitors and Chinese tour
358 operators placed high demands in terms of hotel standards. These demands do not always align
359 with their price expectations: “That is a peculiar thing about the Chinese, they want four star, but
360 they want to pay two or one star price.” (Supplier_10). Although this was seen as a challenge for
361 some, others also argued that it had positive side effects, because tour operators and tourists
362 willingly book hotels outside city centres to reach a balance between hotel price and quality.
363 Some hoteliers thus explained that they benefitted from the Chinese tourists because they were
364 filling rooms that would be otherwise hard to occupy at certain times of the year:

365 “It’s getting more and more important, because they also use the outside city center
366 hotels, and a lot of markets like Europeans, Americans and others like Taiwanese, they
367 want to stay in the city centres (...) They [the Chinese tourists] using other hotels than
368 other markets are...” (Supplier_09)

369 These findings exemplify some of the particularities that make Chinese tourists attractive to
370 destinations, compared with other markets where the tourists may be less flexible about for
371 example their accommodation choices. They add to existing knowledge by pointing to
372 advantages of China outbound tourism, other than sheer numbers and spending, which are often
373 reported as the only appealing aspects (e.g. China Daily, 2016; Chinese Tourists Agency, 2017).
374 The findings suggest that the uniqueness of Chinese tourists not only brings challenges, but also
375 opportunities for practitioners in second-tier destinations, if they accumulate and take advantage
376 of specified knowledge about the market.

377 **Conclusions**

378 By adopting an in-depth focus on a set of second-tier European destinations, this paper goes
379 beyond the broad and stereotypical representations of Chinese tourists that have often been
380 presented in the literature. It illustrates the heterogeneity of Chinese tourism to European
381 destinations and points to specific advantages that the Chinese market offers to European second-
382 tier destinations.

383 The study found that Chinese tourists to second-tier destinations are more mature than
384 those travelling to their first-tier equivalents. This means that some of the negative side effects and
385 specific requirements of inexperienced Chinese tourists are less present in second-tier destinations,
386 than is the case for first-tier destinations. The increasing experience also means that the tourists
387 have developing needs and preferences. This holds potential for second-tier destinations, because
388 these may be better equipped to cater for such newer needs than their better-trodden counterparts.
389 Such leanings include a preference for deeper and more special experiences, for intangible lifestyle

390 related attractions and for clean and unspoiled environments that contrast with the current
391 environmental situation in China.

392 Another advantage for second-tier destinations was that these are judged differently from
393 their more famous equivalents. Chinese tourists have little knowledge about Scandinavia. This
394 translated into a more open-minded approach to the destinations, which were judged on their own
395 merits, rather than on their ability to live up to pre-set expectations. Such advantages were
396 compounded by specific advantages of Chinese tourists compared with other tourist groups that
397 were mentioned by the suppliers in the Scandinavian destinations. Firstly, the Chinese tourists had
398 a unique perspective on tourism products, which meant that they could be reinvented and
399 rebranded when sold to Chinese consumers. Second, the Chinese tourists visited European
400 destinations at times when other tourists did not. Third, the consumption patterns of Chinese
401 tourists differed from those of traditional customer groups, meaning, for example that hotels with
402 a traditional focus on business customers could also sell rooms to Chinese leisure consumers. Such
403 advantages add to existing knowledge on China outbound tourism, by highlighting advantages of
404 the market other than numbers and spending.

405
406 The findings of this study relate to the Scandinavian context and there is a chance that they are
407 only true for this particular setting. The researchers have however argued that some of the broader
408 observations may also apply to second-tier destinations in similar developed western tourism
409 markets. There is a need to conduct further research in such markets in order to confirm this belief
410 and to deepen and develop existing knowledge about Chinese tourism to second tier destinations.

411 Further insights are also needed about other types of secondary destinations, notably in less
412 developed parts of the world. This work would allow for a separation of the advantages that apply
413 to second-tier destinations generally from those that apply to destinations with specific
414 characteristics.

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