

## Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia – Understanding Tourism Distribution

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Received: 11/12/2017

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*Date of defence:* 10/08/ 2017

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**Citation:** Jørgensen, M. (2018) Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia – Understanding Tourism Distribution. Doctoral Dissertation Summary. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 19, pp. 132-135

### **Goal and objectives of the dissertation**

#### *Goal*

The goal of this dissertation is twofold. First, it aims to supplement and deepen the current understanding of tourism distribution, by introducing a new way to understand and interpret the phenomenon. This is achieved through development of a conceptual framework which enables understandings of tourism distribution that go beyond the dominant managerial epistemology and 'channel perspective'. Second, it aims to deepen the existing knowledge on tourism distribution from China to Scandinavia specifically. This is achieved through in-depth investigation of the actors involved in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia, their relations to the other actors in the distribution network(s) and the factors that affect their practices.

#### *Objectives:*

Based on these goals, the objective of the dissertation is to answer the following

research questions: (1) What is tourism distribution and how may we better understand it? (2) Who and what are the important actors, relations and factors affecting distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia?

### **Methodology**

The dissertation adopts a novel qualitative approach that provides a deeper understanding of the tourism distribution phenomenon and of China outbound tourism to Scandinavia. Gaps in existing knowledge are revealed through an extensive review of the literature on tourism distribution and on China outbound tourism. The reviews show that there has been little research, which provides deep understandings of the distribution process for China outbound tourists. Most studies of China outbound tourism have focused on tourists in isolation and deployed quantitative methods to understand discrete elements such as

motivations or image. These studies often ignore actors other than the tourists themselves and do not consider other influencing relationships and factors. This dissertation questions such approaches and proposes that tourism distribution is also affected by enactments, relations and factors, which have little to do with what the individual tourist wants or thinks (s)he wants.

Most of the research on tourism distribution has approached the subject through the concept of distribution channels. This perspective has important implications and limitations. This dissertation suggests that the 'channel approach' represents one enactment of tourism distribution, which is inadequate when considered in isolation, if the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It is argued here that such approaches interpret tourism distribution as a static and linear process, often ignoring important contextual aspects and lacking a clear object of analysis.

This dissertation presents an alternative enactment of tourism distribution as a supplement to current understandings, and develops an applicable approach and framework for analysis. The approach and framework are developed through a (critical) pragmatic integration of elements that have been drawn from Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory. The tourism distribution phenomenon is interpreted as a dynamic relational process of mediation, which occurs in networks of activity systems, rather than as a linear process of economic exchange.

The proposed approach and framework are used to analyse 52 in-depth interviews with respondents who include Chinese tourists, Chinese intermediaries and Scandinavian suppliers.

**Results**

The dissertation findings are summarised in Figure 1.

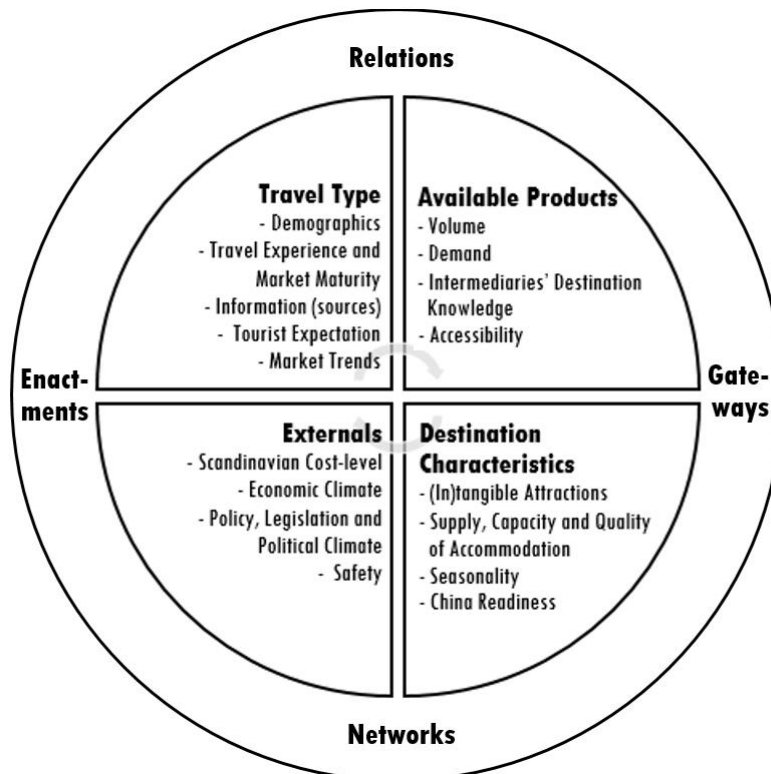


Figure 1

The figure provides an overview of the four interrelated main factors and corresponding sub-factors that affect Chinese tourism to Scandinavia. It illustrates how these factors are dependent on the actor-network(s) that they exist within, the relations and gateways that shape these networks, and the different ways that Chinese tourism to Scandinavia is enacted by various network actors.

### **Theoretical conclusions**

This dissertation contributes to (tourism) scholarship by introducing the concept of Activity Theory to the tourism context, and by combining this approach with Actor-Network Theory, which is still a relatively new approach in tourism studies. Tourism scholars have attempted neither previously. The application and integration of these concepts offer the potential of new and deeper insights on tourism distribution and potentially on other issues in tourism research. The novel ontological, epistemological and methodological approach may also inspire other scholars to approach tourism distribution, or other aspects of (tourism) research, from alternative angles, which may help develop, deepen and strengthen (tourism) scholarship in the future. More specifically, this dissertation has highlighted an alternative understanding (enactment) of tourism distribution and developed an approach and framework, that may help researchers and practitioners to engage with it. This approach allows for deeper understanding(s) of the processes, relations and factors involved in tourism distribution, as it takes a more open approach to tourism distribution that is not limited by a managerial epistemology. The biggest difference lies in the enactment of tourism distribution as a process of mediation, happening in dynamic relational networks of complex activity systems, rather than as a linear process of economic exchange. By introducing this approach, the dissertation adds to current knowledge about tourism distribution, as well as to knowledge about how tourism distribution may be understood.

### **Practical application of the dissertation**

This thesis found that traditional operators and online intermediaries are crucial in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia. The importance of these intermediaries means that many aspects of the tourist decision making process, which are often ascribed to the needs or motivations of the

tourist, are not actually decided by them or their motivations. Instead, they are affected by the profit driven motivations of various intermediaries. This is important because it indicates that tourism distribution cannot be understood exclusively through an isolated investigation of, for example, tourist motivations or decision making. The thesis suggests that practitioners must look to a much wider range of explanatory factors, if they wish to understand tourism distribution, at least when dealing with China outbound tourism. This thesis takes such a holistic look at Chinese tourism to Scandinavia, and provides deep insights into the actors, enactments, relations, practices and specific factors that shape the distribution network. In addition to an overview of the distribution network, the thesis also comments on the importance of actors within this network, and lays out the specific factors and sub-factors that affect the distribution process. These insights are relevant to practitioners in Scandinavia, as well as to other similar destinations with interest in the Chinese market. Similarly, they are relevant to practitioners in the Chinese tourism industry with interest in Scandinavian and/or comparable destinations. When viewed alongside the existing literature, the results contribute to the collective knowledge on China outbound tourism generally. These additional perspectives are relevant to academics and practitioners who are seeking an enhanced understanding of China outbound tourism.

### **Content of the dissertation**

#### *Abstract of Chapter 1*

Chapter 1: Introduction presents the study background, the scope of the study and the research questions that are addressed in the dissertation. It also reflects on the research objectives and contributions.

#### *Abstract of Chapter 2*

Chapter 2: China Outbound Tourism presents the existing knowledge about China Outbound Tourism, necessary to conduct the study. This includes discussion of the history and politics of China outbound tourism, its current state, and the existing academic literature covering the subject.

#### *Abstract of Chapter 3*

Chapter 3: Understanding Tourism Distribution discusses the current knowledge on tourism

distribution. It reviews the existing literature and presents arguments that a new approach is needed to analyse tourism distribution. It then presents such an approach, by introducing its components one by one. Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory as well as their specific application are presented, followed by the conceptual framework for the dissertation.

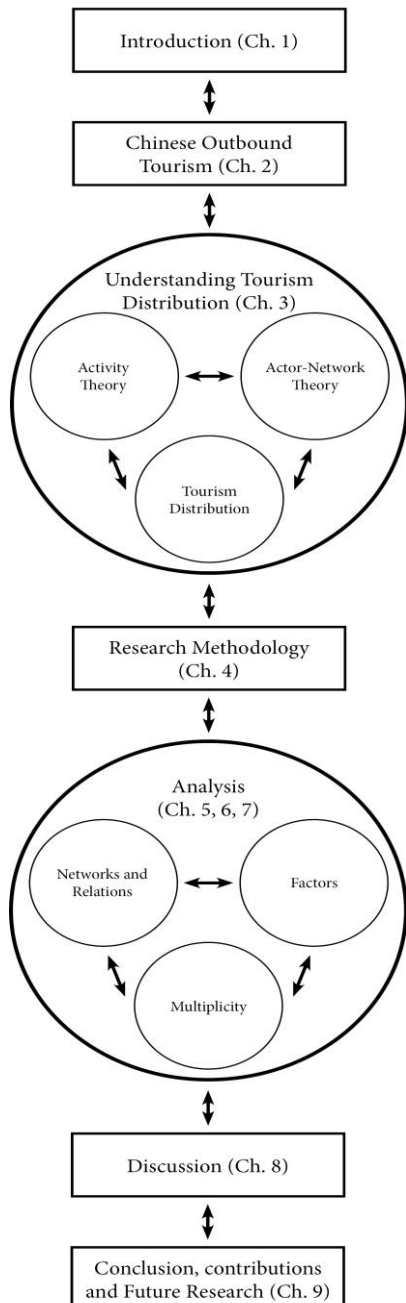


Figure 2

*Abstract of Chapter 4*

Chapter 4: Research Methodology outlines the methodology for the dissertation. This includes presentation of the ontological and epistemological approach, explanations of the limitations to the study and details on data collection, processing and analysis.

*Abstract of Chapter 5*

Chapter 5: Multiplicity is the first of three analysis chapters. It demonstrates how Actor-Network Theory's idea of multiplicity is present in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', through the different ways that the various actors enact the phenomenon. Based on this, the two subsequent chapters use these enactments as the outset for the investigation.

*Abstract of Chapter 6*

Chapter 6: Networks and Relations analyses the actor-network that constitutes 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. It presents the network clusters that the interviewees enact, the relations within these clusters and the gateways between them. It then discusses the implications of these enactments, relations and gateways.

*Abstract of Chapter 7*

Chapter 7: Factors presents the various factors and sub-factors that were found to be important to 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. This chapter also presents four analysis tools that were developed based on the analyses.

*Abstract of Chapter 8*

Chapter 8: Discussion discusses the results of the three previous analysis chapters against the existing literature on China outbound tourism. It draws on the dissertation data to underpin new findings that emerge as the findings of the previous chapters are discussed against the literature.

*Abstract of Chapter 9*

Chapter 9: Conclusion, Contributions and Future Research summarises the findings of the dissertation, as well as the tools derived from the dissertation findings. It also discusses the practical/managerial and theoretical implications of the dissertation. Suggestions for future research are also presented.