



Cultural proximity, destination familiarity and tourists' sense of away-from-home (SAFH)

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ABSTRACT

Travel is about leaving home. Immersing in a non-daily environment spontaneously gives people a sense of away-from-home (SAFH) - a concept natively related to travel, but rarely discussed in prior studies. This study proposes this novel concept of SAFH building on the dualistic context of home and away to describe the emotive states people develop at a tourist destination, relative to their home environment. The components of SAFH, and the influences of cultural proximity, destination familiarity, and geographic distance on these senses, are investigated. A set of data (498 samples) was collected from domestic tourists from other regions of China visiting the city of Hangzhou. The findings indicate that tourists' SAFH comprises of five senses: Novelty, uncomfortableness, insecurity, situational uncontrollability, and emotional isolation. Tourists' destination familiarity significantly influences their SAFH. The direct and indirect impacts of cultural proximity on the SAFH mainly exist in the long-haul travelling group. In conclusion, when travelling in a particular destination, tourists generate a sense of away-from-home which varies due to their different origins and familiarities with the destination.

1. Introduction

Tourism is defined as when “people seek psychological benefits that arise from experiencing new places, and new situations that are of a temporary duration, whilst free from the constraints of work, or normal patterns of daily life at home”, (Ryan, 1991, p. 6).

While travelling from home to a destination and then returning, tourists transfer themselves from one environment to another (Guan, Dong, & Bao, 2018; Guan, Bi, & Dong, 2021). Some unique psychological reactions arise when tourists interact with the new but temporary environment at the destination while being away from home and the usual routine of daily life. In the past several years, the concept of being “at-homeness” has gained some traction in hospitality management and marketing literature (e.g. Cai, Liu, & Su, 2019; Seamon, 2015; Wu, Hannam, & Xu, 2018). Yet, this and other similar “home” concepts (e.g. Wang, 2017; Wildish, Kearns, & Collins, 2016) are used rather limitedly to describe and ascertain the importance of generating home-like experiences for tourists by hotel and lodging suppliers. The concept of

being “at-homeness” and “away from home” is worth to be noted and investigated in the context of destination perception, as travel is a dualistic context of home and away.

The role of home/their origins on these perceptions remain unclear, although numerous studies in tourism literature discussed tourists' psychological phenomena and on-site perceptions of destinations (Zhong, Wu, Xu, & Xu, 2013). The perception of an environment away-from-home is not an identical concept to the perception of a destination. The former highlights the essentiality of dualistic conceptualization (i.e. home in relative to away) in tourism research (Pocock & McIntosh, 2013), while the latter is more related to tourists' on-site feeling. Hence, this article proposes a novel concept of sense of away-from-home (SAFH) building on this dualistic perspective of home and away.

“Home” culture, as a reference point, has a strong influence on tourists' perception of the destination (Jafari, 1987). The investigation of SAFH offers a new angle to understand the tourists-destination relationship by defining the destination as the environment out of usual

; SAFH, Sense of away-from-home.

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place of residence – the home. This SAFH concept, building on the literature of “home” and travel experience, incorporates five senses, i.e. novelty, uncomfortableness, insecurity, situational uncontrollability, and emotional isolation. The understanding of this concept would help hospitality and destination establishment managers to better master the arts of understanding the affective factors of their customers.

Further, to investigate the antecedents of SAFH, this study takes account of the importance of the differences between tourists’ origins and the destination by incorporating the theory of cultural proximity and destination familiarity. First, despite being an important variable in understanding cross-culture interaction, there is a handful of studies investigating tourists’ perception from the perspective of cultural proximity or cultural distance (e.g. Liu, Chen, & Wei, 2014). Specifically, cultural proximity is a measurement of differences in tourists’ home culture in relation to the culture at the destination (Kastenholz, 2010). At a specific destination, this variable indicates, as visitors coming from different “home” places, the varying degrees of cultural similarities and differences between the tourists’ home and the destination environment. The scale of cultural proximity is specifically developed by this study to reflect the context of home and away, i.e. taking the differences between home/origin and destination environmental attributes into consideration. Second, tourists have different levels of internalized knowledge about and affection for a given destination, rooted in individuals’ prior experience and information sources. This phenomenon is described as destination familiarity (Artigas, Vilches-Montero, & Yrigoyen, 2015). Destination familiarity/strangeness is used to explain tourists’ personal relationships with a destination.

Having developed this novel SAFH conceptual model, this study aims to test it empirically. Seventeen hypotheses were developed to test the model using the Structural Equation Modelling approach. Using a questionnaire to measure seven constructs of the model, 460 responses were collected from Chinese domestic tourists visiting the city of Hangzhou. Chinese tourists, who were selected to participate in this study, usually have their own personal notion of ancestry and original place. Despite in the backdrop of globalization when “home” becomes increasingly mobile and a non-place specific concept (Lam & Yeoh, 2004), the concept of home and attachment to home remains very strongly held by many Chinese. In Chinese values, familism is particularly important (Ting & Chiu, 2002) and “home” to Chinese associates with a specific place, namely a hometown (Li & Chan, 2018). Chinese tourists are deemed to be very suitable subjects in this investigation. Despite the above assertion, the concept of and attachment to “home” may also be equally applicable in many other cultural settings, and thereby could increase the potential for generalization of the model developed and findings of this study.

2. Literature review: conceptual framework and hypotheses generation

2.1. Conceptualization of SAFH

Being away from home is the native backdrop of travel, as departing from home is normally the first step of tourists’ travelling to a destination (Case, 1996). “Home” could be the default reference point for many tourists. In a journey, people would experience a gradual deviation away from their own cultural background, stepping into a “tourist state” of mind, but the residual “home” culture may still have some important influence (Jafari, 1987). Hence, the investigation of tourists’ feelings at a destination needs to consider the context of them leaving home.

The “sense of home” is a widely discussed concept in the studies of migration and nursing (e.g. Falk, Wijk, Persson, & Falk, 2013; Ranta & Juhila, 2020; Van Hoof et al., 2016) to describe a feeling of at-homeness (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). Selwyn and Frost (2018) have demonstrated that “home” remains a challenging concept with widely different views in the literature. In addition, home does not necessary to be singular (as

in page 12) as individual might see multiple locations as home. Despite, they postulate that the sense of home could encompass feelings and emotions in spaces or places related to materials, politico-economic, and symbolic realms, but also the routines of everyday life. Contrary to migrants who might build another home after travelling away from their ancestral home (as discussed by Sapritsky, 2018), tourists do not generally see a destination as their home due to the temporary and short-term nature of being at a destination. Instead, they might have a sense of away-from-home because there is an absence of everyday routine during travelling. On this point, tourists’ perception of away-from-home environments should be one of the core issues in the research of tourist behaviour and needed to be put forward and investigated.

This study proposes a conceptual model of SAFH (see Fig. 1) with three parts and seven constructs. The first part is the concept of SAFH incorporating the constructs of five senses (i.e. novelty, uncomfortableness, insecurity, situational uncontrollability, and emotional isolation) drawn from the literature of “sense of home” as discussed in the following section. The second part of the model examines two antecedents - influences of destination familiarity and cultural proximity on SAFH. Destination familiarity is employed to test the influence of the tourist-destination relationship on their perception of being away. Cultural proximity is used to examine the relationship between home and destination. In addition, geographical distance is built into the model to compare the differences between long-haul and short-haul travel, as Ryan (2002) suggested that tourists who share similar culture may perceive destinations differently because of different spatial distances travelled.

2.2. Home and sense of away-from-home (SAFH)

Tourism has a circular structure. The fundamental assumption of tourism is that people leave their “home” to enjoy leisure time in a selected place away, and later return “home” (Kannisto, 2016). Spatially home (origin) and away (destination) are the two ends of tourism (White & White, 2007). Therefore, home/origin is the baseline for people to experience and define the rest of the world (Case, 1996). In this context, the sense of home is arguably critical. As aforementioned, studies related to relocation, such as migration (e.g. Popov, 2010; Riemer, 2000; Wiles, 2008), nursing (Falk et al., 2013; Van Hoof et al., 2016) and “second home” (Wu et al., 2018) also discussed the sense of home and home making. Travel happens in a leaving-home environment, thereby hospitality studies borrowed and emphasized “the sense of being at home” (Wang, 2007), “commercial home” (Cai et al., 2019) and “home away from home” (Wildish et al., 2016) to describe home-like experiences tourists gained from lodging suppliers. In sum, “home” is a concept that has been realized but at times underestimated in some tourism studies.

“Home” is a complex concept, consisting “of physical places, social practices and mental meanings” (Lahelma & Gordon, 2003, p. 277). As a boundary between inside and outside, home represents a comfortable, safe, convenient, and reliable space (Wang, 2007). In psychological construction, individuals’ sense of home includes the senses of stability, safety, and comfort, with a strong feeling of belonging (Moore, 2000). Seamon (2015) classifies the term of “at-homeness” into five characteristics, namely, the sense of root, the possession of specific space, the accumulation of life force, environmental comfort, and human warmth. According to Riemer (2000), a person’s “sense of home” is used to evaluate a context that they know, they like, and with which they are familiar and comfortable. Uriely (2010) conceptualizes three guiding dimensions to evaluate tourists’ senses of being at “home”: Familiarity with place, situational control and privacy, and sociability in associations. In summary, “the sense of home” consists of familiarity, control, belonging, safety, and comfort.

Cohen (1979) suggests that tourism is about “centre” and “centre-out-there”. Home is the “centre”, and then the “centre-out-there” refers to another place, inhabited by another social community with

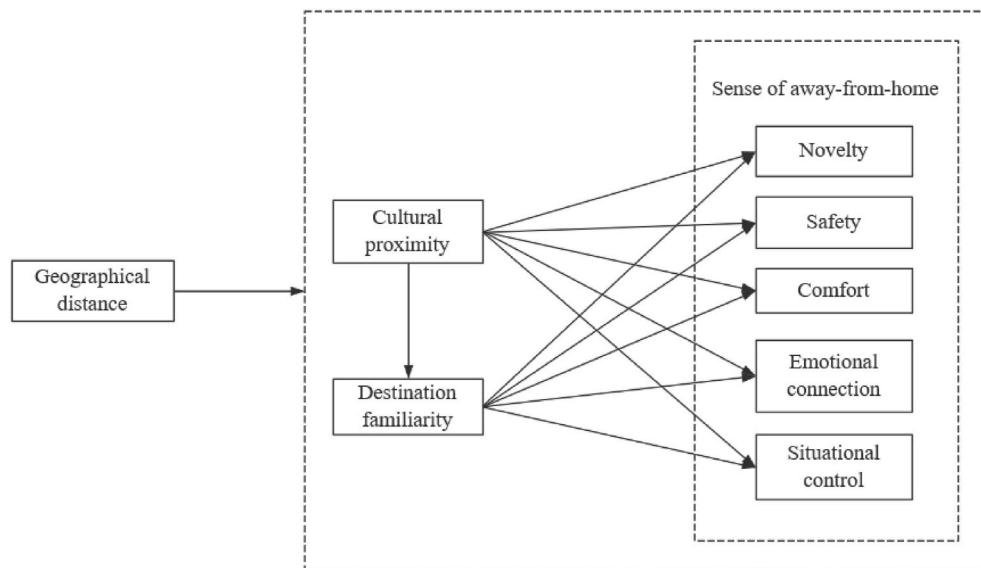


Fig. 1. The conceptual model of sense of away-from-home (SAFH).

another culture. During travelling, tourists are primarily in contact with an environment at a distance from their everyday context. Therefore, if the sense of home is as aforementioned, the psychological responses of tourists to the new environment, could be insecurity, uncomfortableness, lack of control, and novelty (Guan et al., 2018; Long, 2008). Some of the senses, such as “familiarity/novelty” (Prentice, 2004; Toyama & Yamada, 2012) and “risk/safety” (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Lepp & Gibson, 2008) have been mentioned and examined in previous studies of tourists at a destination. Yet, other senses, such as emotional connection, lack of control and comfort, are rarely discussed. Taking home as a reference point, SAFH could be revealed giving the possibility of having a broader understanding of tourists’ feeling for the destination environment. Therefore, this study proposes a definition of SAFH:

“The emotive state people develop or experience in a particular tourist destination or new environment, relative to their home environment. It consists of five senses: Novelty, uncomfortableness, insecurity, situational uncontrollability, and emotional isolation.”

The first sense of SAFH, Novelty, refers to the degree of contrast between tourists’ current perception of a trip and their experience (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). It is at the one end of the novelty-familiarity continuum (Basala & Klenosky, 2001). The sense of safety/insecurity is an individual’s feeling resulting from the extent to which the external safety conditions meet personal safety needs (Zou & Meng, 2020). Concern over safety is one of the major factors influencing travel intention in today’s turbulent environment (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005), particularly during recent Covid-19 pandemic. The concept of emotional connection/isolation is drawn from individuals’ specific feeling of own home (Wright, 2009) and refers to individuals’ emotional connectedness to a destination (Mayer & Frantz, 2004). The meaning of comfort/uncomfortableness is something like “feeling at home” or “feeling welcomed” (Jansen, 2011), which is one of the elements expected by tourists in a destination (Prentice, 2004). A sense of situational control/uncontrollability has been proposed as one psychological mechanism underlying the relationship between perceived support and psychological well-being during stressful experiences (Atienza, Collins, & King, 2001). It relates to one’s ability to handle situations on their terms.

2.3. Cultural proximity

The idea of cultural proximity was proposed in an earlier study of media export (Straubhaar, 1991). Later, La Pastina and Straubhaar

(2005) suggest that the audience is more inclined to accept programs with familiar culture, language, and customs due to the senses of identity and belonging. In the context of tourism studies, cultural proximity refers to the similarity between the culture of the origin and the destination (Kastenholz, 2010). Cultural proximity plays a significant role in tourists’ perception and behaviour. Intuitively, the more similar the perceived culture is, the more likely individuals are to visit the destination. This hypothesis has been empirically tested and accepted for Australian residents (Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2007), potential Chinese tourists (Liu et al., 2014), and Taiwanese (Su, Huang, Brodowsky, & Kim, 2011). Szytniewski, Spierings, and Van der Velde (2016) suggested that there are four types of cross border shopping attributes, namely attractive familiarity, unattractive familiarity, attractive unfamiliarity, and unattractive unfamiliarity. The attractive unfamiliarity can increase tourists cross border shopping, but unattractive unfamiliarity has the opposite influence.

However, other studies arrived at different findings. Kastenholz’s (2010) study of northern Portugal confirmed that cultural proximity does affect the image of the destination, but the relationship is not linear. Tourists who have neither the most distant nor the nearest (i.e. in the middle level) cultural proximity have the most positive image of the destination. Jackson (2001) reported the preferences of destinations with similar or different culture may vary because of the individualistic or collectivistic cultural backgrounds of tourists. Due to the inconsistent results in previous studies, the role of cultural proximity should be further investigated.

Culture encompasses two types of factors (Warner & Joynt, 2002): One can be exemplified as common values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviour norms, and the other refers to factors, such as symbols, customs, rituals, ceremonies, and perceptions. Accordingly, there are two approaches to measure cultural proximity. The first approach is to measure the explicit factors, including common language, religious beliefs, communication, and similar political and economic systems as suggested by Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2009), Melitz (2008) and Straubhaar (1991). The second approach is to measure the implicit factors, such as trust, power, individualism/collectivism, competitiveness, thinking, and value (e.g. Brake, Walker, & Walker, 1995; Bruneel, Spithoven, & Maesen, 2007; Ng et al., 2007). The two approaches are both utilized in previous studies in the research areas of trade, media, and tourism. For example, the scale of cultural proximity used by Su et al. (2011) include both explicit and implicit factors. In this study, merely the first approach is employed. When travelling, tourists leave home and stay temporarily

in a destination. The implicit factors, as mentioned above, may not be easily captured by the tourists during their short period of staying at the destination. In contrast, the explicit factors, which are more easily observed by the tourists, would be more appropriate to be used in the context of AFH.

2.4. Destination familiarity

In the field of consumer research, familiarity mainly refers to consumers' knowledge of a product class and the amount of time spent by consumers to process information about products and services (Johnson & Russo, 1984). If this concept is to be applied in tourism studies, it becomes more complicated. In some studies, it refers to tourists' knowledge and affect towards a certain destination, known as destination familiarity (Kim, Lehto, & Kandampully, 2019). But, in the context of "familiarity/novelty", it relates more to tourists' psychological reaction to a new destination environment. To distinguish these two types of familiarity, this study adopts destination familiarity to describe tourists' personal relationship (i.e. knowledge and affect) with the destination environment.

The destination familiarity construct is pertaining to origin-destination geographical distance, previous visitation experience, and the level of general knowledge about the destination (Hu & Ritchie, 1993). Baloglu (2001) argues that familiarity incorporates previous experiences (i.e. experiential familiarity), the extent of information used (i.e. informational familiarity), and how familiar with a place an individual believes oneself to be (i.e. self-rated familiarity). Later, Prentice (2004) proposes a broader concept of destination familiarity covering informational, experiential, educational, self-described (i.e. self-rated), proximate (i.e. the extent to which individuals feel connected to a destination), self-assured (i.e. own judgments and feelings of safety), and expected (i.e. the extent of cosiness and attractions expected). This broader concept, although attempting to depict a full picture of familiarity in the tourism context, does raise some confusion. For example, informational, experiential, and educational familiarity could be regarded as the sources of familiarity, rather than familiarity per se. These seven types of familiarity are integrated and have causal relationships as argued by Tan and Wu (2016).

Destination familiarity has been recognized as an important factor influencing tourists' perceptions and behaviour. A place, if considered more familiar than others, has a greater chance to be selected by tourists (Andsager & Drzewiecka, 2002) since familiarity strengthens tourists' closeness to the place (Hammit, Kyle, & Oh, 2009) and retains it to the later stages of the choice process (Baloglu, 2001). Besides, familiarity also plays a very important role in destination reputation (Marinao, Vilches-Montero, & Chasco, 2015), tourists' perception of destination image (Kim et al., 2019), long-term relationship with a destination, and visit and return intention (Tsai, 2012).

2.5. The casual relationships between SAFH, cultural proximity, destination familiarity and geographical distance

Cultural similarity and difference can interplay with tourists' perceptions and behaviours by serving the roles of both a facilitator and an inhibitor (Bi & Lehto, 2018). To be a facilitator, the greater similarity between the destination culture to that of tourists' place of origin, the more likely tourists are to visit it (Ng et al., 2007). One explanation could be that cultural similarity correlates negatively with travellers' perception of risk. Despite seeking novelty, tourists only prefer a certain extent of change and non-threatening experiences when travelling (Cohen, 1979). A similar culture between a tourist's origin and destination reduces their perception of risk, and increases the senses of safety, comfort, and situational control. Also, the close cultural ties between home and destination arouse tourists' emotional closeness with the destination (Su et al., 2011). In contrast, a certain cultural distance between origin and destination facilitates tourists' travelling, as

novelty-seeking and escape are regarded as two common motivations of travelling (Crompton, 1979). In other words, cultural similarity may also inhibit tourists' sense of novelty. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: The greater the cultural proximity between origin and destination, the less the tourists' sense of novelty in the destination.

H1b: The greater the cultural proximity between origin and destination, the greater the tourists' sense of safety in the destination.

H1c: The greater the cultural proximity between origin and destination, the greater the tourists' sense of comfort in the destination.

H1d: The greater the cultural proximity between origin and destination, the greater the tourists' sense of situational control in the destination.

H1e: The greater the cultural proximity between origin and destination, the greater the tourists' sense of emotional connection in the destination.

The influences of destination familiarity on tourists' feelings of comfort, safety and emotional attachment to the destination are empirically verified by Tan and Wu (2016). In terms of situational control, it measures the extent to which an individual can intentionally produce desired outcomes and prevent anything undesired (Cutright, Bettman, & Fitzsimons, 2013). In an unfamiliar destination environment, due to breaking of regular order and increase of randomness, tourists might feel a lack of control and behavioural constraints (Arramberri, 2001; Shani, 2013). Tourists, who are familiar with the destination, have considerable knowledge of the destination, which reduce their senses of novelty (Basala & Klenosky, 2001). Therefore, tourists' familiarity with the destination and their sense of novelty has opposite directions. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: The greater the tourists' destination familiarity, the less their sense of novelty in the destination.

H2b: The greater the tourists' destination familiarity, the greater their sense of safety in the destination.

H2c: The greater the tourists' destination familiarity, the greater their sense of comfort in the destination.

H2d: The greater the tourists' destination familiarity, the greater their sense of situational control in the destination.

H2e: The greater the tourists' destination familiarity, the greater their sense of emotional connection in the destination.

Cultural relatedness or similarities between home and the destination could be a source of tourists' destination familiarity (Huang, Chen, & Lin, 2013). Prentice (2004) coins the term of proximate familiarity to describe the familiarity stemming from closeness between tourists' origins and the destination. It was operationalized as nationality. The notion is that due to the differences between countries, tourists have different levels of familiarity. Thus, the cultural proximity impacts on tourists' familiarity. Its influence on various tourists' SAFH is mediated by destination familiarity. The hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H3: Cultural proximity positively influences destination familiarity.

H4a: The relationship between cultural proximity and tourists' sense of novelty in the destination is mediated by destination familiarity.

H4b: The relationship between cultural proximity and tourists' sense of safety in the destination is mediated by destination familiarity.

H4c: The relationship between cultural proximity and tourists' sense of comfort in the destination is mediated by destination familiarity.

H4d: The relationship between cultural proximity and tourists' sense of situational control in the destination is mediated by destination familiarity.

H4e: The relationship between cultural proximity and tourists' sense of emotional connection in the destination is mediated by destination familiarity.

Geographical distance, in this study, is the measure of the distance between two geographical points of tourists' home and destination. Living in nearby geographic locations, peoples may have a long history of communication and exchange (Ghemawat, 2001) and generate similar cultural characteristics, such as language, religion, or value

(Domosh, Neumann, Price, & Jordan-Bychkov, 2011). Hence, geographical distance affects individuals' perceptions of cultural proximity (Liu, Li, Cárdenas, & Yang, 2018). Given credits to the close geographical distance, European New Zealanders did not find to be as attracted to the Maori culture as those from Europe and North America, even though these two groups share a similar culture (Ryan, 2002). In the case of Chinese domestic tourism, the concepts of cultural proximity and destination familiarity are also applicable, as China has many sub-regional cultures (Liu & Faure, 1996). For example, Fang, Liu, Luo, and Yu (2017) classified ten sub-regional cultures for China, which are based on indicators of nature, economy, population, culture, ethnicity, agriculture, transportation, urbanization, the settlement landscape, and administrative division. In summary, the last hypothesis is proposed as:

H5: Tourists from different geographical distances have significantly different perceptions of cultural proximity, destination familiarity, and the five senses of away-from-home.

3. Methodology

3.1. Constructs and measurement items

The questionnaire, consisting of the measurement items of the seven constructs, was designed in accordance with relevant literature, where the details are presented in the Appendix. The measurement items of the five SAFH constructs were derived from the respective studies: Novelty (Toyama & Yamada, 2012), safety (Artigas et al., 2015; Tasci & Boylu, 2010), comfort (Jansen, 2011; Prentice, 2004), emotional connection (Artigas et al., 2015; Chen & Phou, 2013; Jansen, 2011), and situational control (Chemers, 2000; Lee-Kelley, 2002; Perrone, Sullivan, Pratt, & Margaryan, 2004). The measurement items of the destination familiarity construct were adopted from Artigas et al. (2015). Regarding the construct of cultural proximity, items related to explicit cultural characteristics, such as language, customs, food, and clothing, were obtained from studies of destination perception and cultural proximity (e.g. Chahal & Devi, 2015; Eusebio & Vieira, 2013; Moon & Han, 2018; Straubhaar, 1991). In previous studies, these items were used to evaluate tourists' on-site perception of a destination. Differently, respondents were asked to rate these items in respect to their perception of the similarity between their homes and the destination in this study. The five-point Likert scale with "1 - strongly disagree/very small" to "5 - strongly agree/very large" was used in line with the suggestion of Meschi (1997). The questionnaire also collected the basic information of the respondents, such as gender, age, and current place of residence.

3.2. Data collection & sample population

The data collection had two steps. Before the questionnaire went to the public, a pilot test was conducted to increase the quality of questions. One of the authors translated the English version of measures to Chinese and then another author examined the Chinese version and then re-translated the items back to English. A cross-check on both the original English version and the re-translated English version were performed. Two experts were invited to review the structure and content of the questionnaire to ensure readability and avoid confusion. On-site surveys were conducted on scenic areas around West Lake and Lingying Temple, in Hangzhou China around October 2018. As a well-known tourist destination, Hangzhou attracts domestic Chinese tourists nationally. In 2019, it was ranked in the top 7 among 297 Chinese destinations in terms of tourists' arrivals, tourism industry income, and consumption per tourist (Jiemian News, 2019). Domestic tourists from all over the country were approached to complete questionnaires by ten pre-trained survey helpers. Finally, 460 valid questionnaires were obtained after a screening off incomplete questionnaires and transferred them into dataset for analysis (See the raw data and calculation in Data-in-Brief).

The profile of the samples is shown in Table 1. The female and male

Table 1
The profiles of the sample (N = 460).

Variable	Category	Total Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	216	47.0
	Female	244	53.0
Age	Under 18	14	3.0
	18–34	301	65.4
	35–49	91	19.8
	50–64	50	10.9
	65 and over	4	0.9
Geographical Distance	Over 500 km	168	36.5
	500 km or less	292	63.5

respondents are relatively even distributed. Most respondents are under the age of 50. To address H5, the respondents were separated into two groups based on the geographical distance between their residential cities and the destination. The sample sizes for groups over and under 500 km account for 63.5% and 36.5% respectively. The software of ArcGIS 10.5 was used to calculate the geographical distance between the residence of the respondents and Hangzhou. The usage of 500 km geographic distance as the criterion is based on two context specific reasons. First, this 500 km radius approximately coincides with the geographical demarcations of the north and south divide of China at Huai River and Qinling Mountain Range (to the north of the research site -Hangzhou) and the Nanling (the South Range, to the west and south of Hangzhou). The Huai River - Qinling is the common geographical-climate divide of the north and south of China (Meng & Zhang, 1999) where climatic and cultural differences exist which can be easily observed on the two sides of Huai River. Similarly, Nanling serves as an important demarcation to distinguish Yangtze River culture and Pearl River culture in South China. Second, Wu et al. (1997) found that over 80% of Chinese tourists travel within the distance scope of 500 km. Studies conducted 23 years later indicated that almost 70% of Chinese tourists travel distances less than 500 km and show preferences towards short-haul destinations (Bai et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2020). In sum, the criterion of 500 km has both geographical and tourist behavioural meanings.

4. Results

4.1. Reliability and validity of measurements

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted to examine the validity of measurements. First, principal component factoring was performed on 7 constructs using SPSS 21.0 software package. Items were retained if their factor loadings were greater than 0.50 in magnitude (Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy was 0.837 which is above the recommended level (Kaiser, 1974). The p-value of Bartlett's test of sphericity was lower than 0.005. Cronbach's alpha and Corrected Item-Total Correlation were used to assess items' reliability. The data analysis indicated that the deletion of items CP1, CP4, CP5, SC1 and SC3 could improve the overall reliability, as well as the reliability of constructs situational control and cultural proximity. The final model includes 26 items across 7 constructs.

Using AMOS23.0 software, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the 4measurement model. Items CP2 and CP3 which have factors loadings lower than 0.5 were eliminated. Consequently, the number of items consisting of the construct of culture proximity has been dropped from twelve to seven. The factor loadings of remaining items range from 0.532 to 0.929. The T value is greater than 1.96 (p < 0.001). The combined reliability (CR) of each latent variable ranges from 0.808 to 0.873, which is greater than the threshold 0.6 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The average variance extraction value (AVE) of all latent variables is greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Therefore, this questionnaire has satisfactory convergent validity. To test discriminant validity, the value of square root of AVE was compared to the value of Pearson correlation coefficient between the variable and other variables. Since each construct's square root of AVE is greater than Pearson correlation coefficient between the corresponding variable and other variables, the measurement has qualified discriminant validity. Table 2 and Table 3 show the results of CFA, Cronbach's alpha and discriminant validity examination respectively.

4.2. Model modification

The index of goodness of fit for the initial model, including CFI, GFI, NFI, IFI, TLI, did not perform well. The $\chi^2/df = 5.389 > 3, p = 0.000 < 0.05$, which indicated an unsatisfactory fitness of model. To increase the model's goodness of fit, the initial model was modified. Paths from e29 to e30, e30 to e31, e31 to e32, e47 to e48, e52 to e53 were added (see Data in Brief for details). The main indicators of model fit for the revised model were significantly improved. $\chi^2/df = 2.550 < 3$ and CFI, GFI, IFI, NFI and TLI equal to 0.937, 0.900, 0.937, 0.901 and 0.926 respectively. All indices meet the criteria (>0.9) (Brown, 2006). AGFI is 0.873, which is more than the threshold of 0.8 (Brown, 2006). In structural equation modelling, R² indicates the extent that the dependent variables can be explained by the independent variables (see Fig. 2). In social science research, one independent variable can have many potential influencing factors and therefore, the value of R² can be relatively small (Cameron & Windmeijer, 1996, 1997). Since the variables of SAFH only have two predictors, the low values of R² are acceptable. Also, if the aim of the study is to establish the significance of predictors, the value of R² is irrelevant to the model goodness-of-fit. There is no specific threshold suggested for the magnitude of R² to satisfy the validity of a model (Rousson & Goşoni, 2007). In conclusion, the revised model has a good fit. Fig. 2 presents the results of the structural model examination.

4.3. Testing of hypotheses

The direct relationships between cultural proximity and tourists' SAFH were firstly estimated. For the five constructs measuring tourists' SAFH, two constructs – novelty and comfort – correlate to cultural proximity. The other three hypotheses, namely H1b, H1d and H1e, are

not supported (see Table 4). In other words, the cultural similarity between tourists' origins and Hangzhou can influence their feelings of novelty and comfort but does not directly relate to the other senses of AFH. Second, destination familiarity is the antecedent of novelty, comfort, safety, situational control, and emotional connection. H2a to H2e are supported. The findings imply that tourists who are more familiar with the destination would consider the destination a more comfortable and safer place. They also perceive that the travelling situations are easier to be controlled and that they have a greater emotional connection with the destination. For tourists who are more familiar with the destination, the destination has less novelty. The hypothesis H3 on cultural proximity and destination familiarity is also not verified. In the entire model, cultural proximity has limited influence. One possible explanation is that since tourists from different places of China have different regional cultures, the data of cultural proximity could be erratic and scattered. To overcome this problem, geographical distance is proposed as a proxy measure. The sample pool was thereby divided into two sub-samples using geographical distance, since very often peoples who live in geographically proximate places share similar cultures. The models for two sub-groups were compared to test the hypothesis H5.

As aforementioned, the sample was divided into two groups. In one group (i.e. long-haul group), the origin of the respondents to Hangzhou is over 500 km. While in the other group (i.e. short-haul group), the origin of the respondents to Hangzhou is less than 500 km. The comparison of these two sub-models indicates that there is a significant difference between the two groups (see Table 5). The relationships between destination familiarity and most dimensions of SAFH are supported in both sub-groups. That means, no matter where the tourists are coming from, their personal knowledge and experience with the destination correlate to their feelings of away-from-home. Hypotheses related to cultural proximity are mostly supported in the long-haul group, while the results for short-haul group are the inverse. In the views of long-haul tourists, the differences between their original places and Hangzhou are significant, which influence their destination familiarity and further their senses of AFH. For short-haul tourists, the differences, as well as similarity between their homes and Hangzhou, are not obvious and thus difficult to be identified by the tourists themselves or be captured in this research. Therefore, the influence of cultural

Table 2
Results of CFA.

Latent variable	Observed variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Factor loading	T value	p	Composite reliability	AVE	Cronbach's alpha value
Destination familiarity (DF)	DF1	3.256	0.930	0.929			0.858	0.676	0.839
	DF2	3.194	0.883	0.898	22.797	***			
	DF3	3.307	1.020	0.599	14.054	***			
Novelty (NL)	NL1	2.189	0.830	0.755			0.831	0.625	0.818
	NL2	2.098	0.745	0.908	15.809	***			
	NL3	2.087	0.785	0.693	14.401	***			
Safety (SA)	SA1	3.891	0.889	0.562			0.816	0.606	0.788
	SA2	4.272	0.675	0.826	12.337	***			
	SA3	4.115	0.748	0.905	12.724	***			
Comfort (CO)	CO1	3.889	0.834	0.847			0.828	0.617	0.825
	CO2	3.648	0.839	0.776	18.893	***			
	CO3	3.911	0.797	0.728	17.308	***			
Emotional connection (EC)	EC1	3.209	0.876	0.882			0.856	0.748	0.855
	EC2	3.167	0.896	0.847	18.663	***			
Situational control (SC)	SC2	3.585	0.855	0.653			0.808	0.586	0.797
	SC4	3.335	0.817	0.825	13.652	***			
	SC5	3.311	0.817	0.807	13.541	***			
Cultural proximity (CP)	CP6	3.346	1.021	0.785	13.947	***	0.873	0.500	0.874
	CP7	3.124	1.044	0.738	13.297	***			
	CP8	3.496	1.026	0.673	12.357	***			
	CP9	3.535	1.002	0.766	13.682	***			
	CP10	3.596	0.973	0.768	13.719	***			
	CP11	2.846	0.957	0.532	10.105	***			
	CP12	3.002	1.061	0.645					

Note: ***p < 0.001.

Table 3
The test of discriminate validity.

Latent variable	Destination Familiarity	Safety	Comfort	Emotion Connection	Situation Control	Cultural Proximity	Novelty
DF	0.822						
SA	0.290	0.778					
CO	0.301	0.695	0.785				
EC	0.347	0.418	0.594	0.865			
SC	0.302	0.416	0.530	0.523	0.766		
CP	-0.080	0.017	0.029	-0.034	-0.033	0.707	
NL	-0.148	-0.294	-0.328	-0.282	-0.261	-0.093	0.791

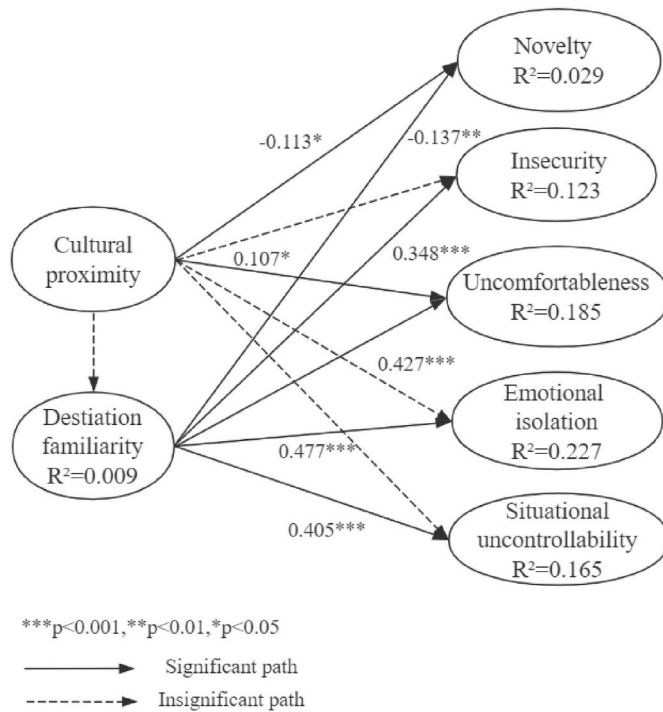


Fig. 2. Outcome of the structural model examination.

Table 4
Test for the structural model.

Hypothetical path relation	Standard path coefficients	C.R.	p	Test result
H1a: NL←CP	-0.113	-2.123	0.034*	Supported
H1b: SA←CP	0.088	1.696	0.090	Not supported
H1c: CO←CP	0.107	2.082	0.037*	Supported
H1d: SC←CP	-0.014	-0.262	0.794	Not supported
H1e: EC←CP	0.007	0.143	0.887	Not supported
H2a: NL←DF	-0.137	-2.601	0.009	Supported
H2b: SA←DF	0.348	5.803	***	Supported
H2c: CO←DF	0.427	7.385	***	Supported
H2d: SC←DF	0.405	6.556	***	Supported
H2e: EC←DF	0.477	8.141	***	Supported
H3: DF←CP	-0.094	-1.790	0.073	Not supported

***p < 0.001; *p < 0.05.

difference can be very limited on short-haul tourists' perception of AFH environment. The empirical data analysis supports the fifth hypothesis, H5.

Since the relationship between cultural proximity and destination familiarity exists in the long-haul group, the mediate role of destination familiarity between cultural proximity and tourists' senses of AFH is

Table 5
The test of structure model for long-haul and short-haul groups.

Group	Hypothetical path relation	Standard path coefficients	C.R.	p	Test result
Short haul group (Less or equal to 500 km)	H1a: NL←CP	-0.006	-0.089	0.929	Not supported
	H1b: SA←CP	0.019	0.290	0.772	Not supported
	H1c: CO←CP	0.028	0.422	0.673	Not supported
	H1d: SC←CP	-0.045	-0.700	0.484	Not supported
	H1e: EC←CP	-0.005	-0.070	0.944	Not supported
	H2a: NL←DF	-0.151	-2.177	0.030*	Supported
	H2b: SA←DF	0.365	4.713	***	Supported
	H2c: CO←DF	0.407	5.731	***	Supported
	H2d: SC←DF	0.371	5.056	***	Supported
	H2e: EC←DF	0.415	5.818	***	Supported
	H3: DF←CP	-0.028	-0.426	0.670	Not supported
Long haul group (Over 500 km)	H1a: NL←CP	-0.260	-2.550	0.011*	Supported
	H1b: SA←CP	0.229	2.378	0.017*	Supported
	H1c: CO←CP	0.279	2.934	0.003**	Supported
	H1d: SC←CP	0.070	0.758	0.449	Not supported
	H1e: EC←CP	0.067	0.805	0.421	Not supported
	H2a: NL←DF	-0.167	-1.721	0.085	Not supported
	H2b: SA←DF	0.356	3.386	***	Supported
	H2c: CO←DF	0.484	4.565	***	Supported
	H2d: SC←DF	0.485	4.039	***	Supported
	H2e: EC←DF	0.566	5.161	***	Supported
	H3: DF←CP	-0.217	-2.256	0.024*	Supported

***p < 0.001; *p < 0.05.

examined, using bootstrap approach offered by AMOS 23 (see Table 6). Two criteria are used to assess the mediating effect. First, the values of the average indirect effect are in the ranges of upper and lower bounds. Second, the range between upper and lower bounds does not contain 0. Combining the p value of each path for long-haul group and the above two criteria, destination familiarity plays a partial mediating role in the relationships of cultural proximity to comfort and safety and a full mediating role is the relationships of cultural proximity to situational control and emotional connection. Cultural proximity directly influence novelty. Thus, the hypotheses H4b to H4e are accepted in the long-haul group.

Table 6
The test of mediating effect of destination familiarity for the long-haul group.

Path relation	Standard indirect effect	Lower bounds	Upper bounds
CO←DF←CP	-0.105	-0.230	-0.016
SC←DF←CP	-0.105	-0.238	-0.017
EC←DF←CP	-0.123	-0.258	-0.024
SA←DF←CP	-0.077	-0.188	-0.017
NL←DF←CP	0.036	-0.005	0.126

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Summary of key findings and discussion

This study aims to explore and determine the composition of tourists' sense of away-from-home (SAFH) in the destination environment, and to investigate the influence of cultural proximity and destination familiarity on their SAFH. It also examines the role of geographical distance in shaping tourists' SAFH. The proposed model is tested among Chinese domestic tourists. Several findings are worth noting.

Firstly, Chinese tourists' SAFH was identified based on the analysis of previous studies about home and away, which consists of five senses: Novelty, uncomfortableness, insecurity, situational uncontrollability, and emotional isolation. The empirical analysis supports the argument to a certain extent as discussed below. According to the mean score of each item (see Table 2), Chinese tourists regard Hangzhou as a place that they have average to low emotional connection, situational control, and novelty. According to Chen, Dwyer, and Firth (2014), people may engage in long-term and/or short-term interactions with a place. A long-term exposure to a place will induce the formation of an emotional connection and situational control relating to individuals' social and affective connections to that place. However, under a temporary and new environment, these feelings may hardly be aroused (Guan et al., 2018). In addition, Chinese tourists also perceive Hangzhou as a highly secure and comfortable place. The feelings of safety and comfort are always intertwined (Karsono, Indira, & Deni, 2016) and mainly root in physical environment. For example, the study of Acosta and Camargo (2018) suggests that citizen's safety perception can be influenced by their judgment of the visual appearance of a street image. Good quality and maintenance of facilities, clean air and environment, alongside relaxing spaces, can make tourists feel comfortable, as suggested by Karsono et al. (2016).

Secondly, the causal relationships between destination familiarity and tourists' SAFH were tested and supported. Previous studies acknowledge that the constructs of safety, comfort, and emotional connection are the compositions of destination familiarity (Prentice, 2004). This study, in contrast, suggests that the senses of safety, comfort and emotional connection are consequences of destination familiarity. Tourists who are more familiar with the destination also perceive to have a higher level of control during the journey and at the destination. The sense of novelty is verified to be negatively related to destination familiarity. In this study, destination familiarity and a sense of familiarity are defined as two distinct concepts. The former is about tourists' knowledge and close relationship towards a destination, while the latter is an emotional and friendly response. The results indicate that the two concepts have a causal relationship. In other words, tourists' prior knowledge of a destination could induce their feelings of familiarity to the destination. Therefore, the term 'familiarity' needs to be distinguished - between destination familiarity and sense of familiarity, and successively their relationships between novelty need to be re-considered. The sense of familiarity is an opposite of novelty, which generates the novelty-familiarity continuum (Basala & Klenosky, 2001). In contrast, despite destination familiarity having a connection with the sense of novelty, they are two distinct constructs (Toyama & Yamada, 2012).

Thirdly, the impact of the cultural proximity construct merely emerged in the long-haul group (H1a,b,c supported) but not in short-haul group (all H1a-e not supported). This finding indicates that tourists with a larger cultural distance would notice the difference between their origin and Hangzhou, which would further increase their sense of novelty and reduce their senses of comfort and safety. The mediate role of destination familiarity did not exist in the short-haul group. The insignificant role of destination familiarity may be due to the diversity of information sources. The short-haul group can obtain destination familiarity from several sources. They have more opportunities of personal visitation, as well as receiving related information from the media and

from family and friends. Cultural proximity plays an insignificant role in shaping their destination familiarity, as the hypothetic relationship between cultural proximity and destination familiarity is not supported in the short-haul group. For short-haul, all dimensions of SAFH correlate merely with their destination familiarity (H2a-e), but not with cultural proximity (H1a-e). In contrast, the observations of differences between home and destination contribute largely to long-haul tourists' destination familiarity, which influence their SAFH (except Novelty as H2a is not supported). In summary, the influences of cultural proximity and physical environment cannot be underestimated when investigating tourists' perceptions toward a destination, particularly in the case of the geographical distance between the origin and destination is large.

5.2. Theoretical and managerial implications

Theoretically, this study has three implications. First, this study re-examined tourists' psychological responses to the destination based on the comparison of senses of home and away. As the baseline to experience the rest of world, the importance of home in shaping tourists' feelings of away from home should be emphasized. In this notion, this study proposes the novel concept of SAFH. This novel approach of including the perspective of home-away context brings new understandings of tourists' perception on the destination environment. For example, the construct situational control has rarely been investigated in the literature of destination perception research. It was adopted in this research based on the literature discussing the senses of home and away in the context of visiting relatives and friends (Uriely, 2010).

Second, this study pioneers in bringing perspectives of origin-destination relationship and tourist-destination relationship into individual tourists' perceptions of their journeys. Previous studies examined tourists' relationships with the destination on the level of person-to-person, for examples, tourists' emotional solidarity with residents (Styliadis, Woosnam, & Ivkov, 2020), tourists' social distance to the residents (Çelik, 2019). In contrast, this study focuses on the relationship between tourist and the destination as a single unit. It examines the role of tourists' personal knowledge of a place/destination, using the construct of destination familiarity. It is one of their perceptions of AFH environment. The study also emphasized the origin-destination relationship in the model simultaneously using the construct of cultural proximity. This investigation echoes Liu et al. (2018)'s call for more studies on cultural similarity and difference in individual behaviour and perception level. In sum, this study is among the first in tourism research exploring the influences of origin-destination relationship and tourist-destination relationship simultaneously on tourists' destination perception.

Third, the scale of cultural proximity was modified in accordance with the context of home and away. The reference point theory suggested that, to classify, compare and evaluate one's decision, people need to set an anchor point (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Since tourists travel from home to a destination, their sense of home could be an anchor point influencing their perception of the destination. Therefore, this study modified the scale of cultural proximity by investigating the origin-destination differences in the eye of tourists. The findings contradict the argument that the boundary between "home" and "away" is vanishing in a well-connected world, particularly with the increase in the channels of communication (White & White, 2007). The senses of "home" and "away" will still exist if the significant differences between the two places remain. It is worth noting that in this study, several measurement items of culture proximity have been dropped, from twelve to seven items. The insignificance of some items of culture proximity may be due to the selection of the destination for the survey. Hangzhou as a metropolis may have a unique city building and natural environment, but items related to language, religion, clothing, food, and custom are hardly felt to have any significance by the domestic visitors. The items consisting of culture proximity could vary from destination to destination and be influenced by the background of tourists – the

respondents. Therefore, the relevancy of any of the culture proximity measurement items needs to be specifically examined in each case of study.

This study also has some implications for destination management. First, if Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) attempt to create an “at-homeness” environment for tourists, it could be helpful to include elements such as familiarity, comfort, safety, control, and other emotionally connected circumstances. Especially the senses of safety and comfort may be stimulated by altering the attributes of a destination (Cai et al., 2019). According to Rojek and Urry (1997), living in a McDonaldized World, many tourists prefer highly predictable and controlled vacations. Therefore, the environment bubble (Cohen, 1972) and the commercial home (Cai et al., 2019) are two examples of the efforts that destinations make to reduce tourists’ senses of risk and insecurity. Reflecting on more recent development due to Covid-19 pandemic, Chinese tourists, for example, have increasingly demanding for more safety and health precautions. Destinations with high-quality medical facilities, services with high level of safety and hygiene, and well-managed number of visitors are perceived to have a secure environment (Wen, Kozak, Yang, & Liu, 2020). Meanwhile, destination administrators need to balance the environment catering to Chinese tourists’ needs while keeping the essence of the locality and novelty intact.

Second, any significant difference between home and destination could affect tourists’ SAFH. DMOs can enhance or decrease their SAFH by manipulating the destination’s explicit factors. For a city destination, solely focusing on modern features of the city may decrease tourists’ SAFH, as they are more likely coming from well-developed cities or countries. Conversely, to increase tourists’ SAFH, DMOs may develop the destination with emphasis on authenticity and local cultural heritage. Nonetheless, travel preferences are complex phenomena (Øgaard, Doran, Larsen, & Wolff, 2019). Even one tourist may prefer similarity, between his/her home and the destination, on certain destination factors but difference on other factors. Hence, DMOs may use different strategies for developing different destination factors. Moreover, since tourists’ familiarity with a destination could influence their SAFH, destination administrators could improve tourists’ familiarity by increasing or reducing destination-related information, and thereby affecting their SAFH indirectly.

5.3. Limitations and future research

The limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, merely one destination is investigated in this study. The generalizability of these findings may therefore be limited to well-developed city destinations. Future studies should involve more diverse types of destination, for example, destinations in remote or ethnic-minority areas. Second, this study only investigated Chinese domestic tourists. Although China has many sub-regional cultures as aforementioned, the differences between them may not be significant enough to influence the results of this study. Especially, in this modern world, urbanization and mobility dilute the differences between China’s regions. It influences the measurement items included in the examination of the culture proximity construct and possibly the results. Inviting tourists who live in distant places to participate in a study would also help to further examine the validity and influence of geographical distance. For future studies in China, the

perspective of non-Chinese tourists could also be examined by the model to provide a different perspective. In the last section of the introduction, the importance of home and familism to Chinese tourists has been discussed, and thereby caused their comparisons between home and destination. This does not single out Chinese to be atypical; other communities might behave in a similar way and the concept could be generalised. Nonetheless, this verification has to leave to future studies. Lastly, as the model is ended with tourists’ SAFH, will SAFH influence tourists’ attitudes and behaviours toward a destination? A successive study will be helpful to address this question.

Authorship responsibility

We assert that all authors have seen and approved the content of the submitted manuscript. The paper presents original work not previously published in similar form and not currently under consideration by another Journal. If the paper contains any intellectual property and copyright of any persons other than the authors, then permission of the copyright owners to publish that material has been obtained and is clearly identified and acknowledged in the text of the paper. The study has been conducted following ethics guidelines.

Authorship Contributions

Jingjing Guan: Conception and design of study, theoretical development, draft manuscript; Jin Hooi Chan: Theoretical development, writing, review and editing; Jiaping Bi: Acquisition and analysis of data; Xiaoguang Qi: Critical revision, writing interpretation & discussion.

Everybody who participated substantially in the study is not omitted from the article; and all persons listed as authors qualify for authorship. All persons named in the Acknowledgment section have given their permission to be named.

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Declaration of Competing interest

We do not have and have not had a financial interest or other relationships in which the individual benefits by receiving a salary, royalty, intellectual property rights, consulting fee, honoraria, ownership interest, or other financial benefit.

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Appendix

Constructs	Measurement Items	Sources
Novelty/A sense of familiarity	NL1: Hangzhou has provided me with an extraordinary experience. NL2: Hangzhou brings me a new experience.	Toyama and Yamada (2012)

(continued on next page)

(continued)

Constructs	Measurement Items	Sources
Safety/Insecurity	NL3: Hangzhou is a fresh place SA1: When I am in Hangzhou, my family will not worry about my safety. SA2: Hangzhou is characterized by public safety. SA3: Felling Safe in Hangzhou	Artigas et al. (2015); Tasci & Boylu (2010)
Comfort/Uncomfortableness	CO1: I feel comfortable in Hangzhou. CO2: To me, Hangzhou is a cosy place. CO3: The physical and social elements in Hangzhou are cosy	Jansen (2011); Prentice (2004)
Emotional connection/Emotional isolation	EC1: I feel emotionally attached to Hangzhou. EC2: I feel a sense of belonging in Hangzhou.	Artigas et al. (2015); Chen & Phou (2013); Jansen (2011)
Situational control/Situational uncontrollability	SC1: Travelling with public transportation system in Hangzhou is easy for me. SC2: I feel that local people in Hangzhou are easy to get along with. SC3: I can easily access various information about Hangzhou. SC4: I feel I am in control of my whole journey when travelling in Hangzhou. SC5: I can easily handle any unexpected situations when travelling in Hangzhou.	Chemers (2000); Lee-Kelley (2002); Perrone et al. (2004)
Destination familiarity	DF1: I am familiar with Hangzhou. DF2: I know Hangzhou very well. DF3: I am always aware of this place.	Artigas et al. (2015)
Cultural proximity	CP1: Language CP2: Custom CP3: Food CP4: Clothing CP5: Religion CP6: Place governance CP7: Local regulations CP8: Natural environment CP9: Infrastructure CP10: Landscape CP11: Friendliness of local people CP12: Civility of local people	Chahal & Devi (2015); Eusebio & Vieira (2013); Moon & Han (2018); Straubhaar (1991)

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