Green or red faces? Tourist strategies when encountering irresponsible environmental behavior

ABSTRACT

In an increasingly complex global context, Chinese tourist green behaviors and their face-culture have attracted growing academic attention. The interactions among tourists play a critical role in influencing actions, yet little is known about the influence of Chinese tourists' encounters on their green behavior. To address the literature gap, this research examined how tourist-to-tourist interactions within different relationships impact on-site green behavior in Chinese face-culture tourism settings. Based on a qualitative research approach using the critical incident technique, 76 incidents were investigated involving 29 Chinese tourists with different backgrounds. This research showed that the encounters among tourists were affected by tourists' relationships (family, friends, and strangers) and Chinese face culture (the desire to gain and fear of losing face). The results contribute to the sustainable tourism literature by taking into consideration various types of social interactions, which positively or negatively affect green behavior. Fresh insights are revealed on how face consciousness influences Chinese social interactions and pro-environmental behavior in tourism. The analysis of social interactions among tourists provides a new perspective for destination management organizations to enhance green behavior and improve sustainable management practices.

Keywords: Tourist-to-tourist interactions; green behavior; face consciousness; critical incident technique; Chinese culture

1. Introduction

Face is as important to man as the bark is to the tree. - Chinese proverb

Promoting tourists' green behavior is a strategic imperative for sustainable tourism (Eyisi et al., 2021; Lee & Jan, 2015). Several environmental issues in destinations have close ties to irresponsible environmental behavior among tourists (Chiu et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2022). Since Chinese travellers are acknowledged to constitute the largest share of international tourist arrivals, their green behaviors and face-culture are of growing public concern (Cui et al., 2017; Whitmarsh & Lorraine, 2020; Wu et al., 2022). The increasing recognition of this environmental issue has highlighted the need for more research on Chinese tourist green behavior, which can significantly benefit destination natural resources and contribute in a sustainable way to addressing environmental issues (Wang et al., 2018).

The prior research on green behavior has investigated people's decision-making processes. It has been found that cognitive, affective, and normative factors influence pro-environmental behavior (Han et al., 2017; Steg & Vlek, 2009) including attitudes, values, environmental knowledge and concerns, and moral obligations. These factors undoubtedly exert a significant effect on green behavior. However, the role of social interactions among tourists has largely been ignored (Adam et al., 2022; Li & Wu, 2020). Previous studies have explored social norms, the importance of others' perceptions, and their influences upon on-site green behavior (Hargreaves, 2016; Jung & Yoo, 2017). Social interchanges when traveling are a channel through which the driving factors of green behavior (environmental attitudes, green values, personal norms) are exchanged and learned. Social contact is common in tourism (Alon & Noga, 2018; Pearce, 2005; Su et al., 2016) and tourist-to-tourist interactions occur in a wide variety of settings where people share the same places with others, such as in homestays, restaurants, leisure spaces, shopping centers, airlines, and railway stations (Huang & Hsu, 2010; Murphy, 2001). People's on-site green practices are inevitably impacted by the presence of others, yet the influential roles of nearby tourists are somewhat neglected in previous research studies. More research is needed to investigate

green behavior with the perspective of tourist-to-tourist interactions.

The operation of the face concept in social interactions is the most salient factor in fully understanding Chinese behavior (Zhang et al., 2019). Face is the social anchoring of self-image in Chinese interpersonal interactions (Hwang, 2006; Qi, 2011). Recent findings show that green behavior among Chinese tourists is closely linked with face in social interactions (Wang et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Face can motivate Chinese tourists to behave in a more pro-environmental manner. For example, Wang et al. (2018) indicated that rural hosts in China made full use of face awareness to normalize city tourists' green behavior in host-guest interactions. While more research is indicating that face influences green behavior through host-guest interactions (Wang et al., 2018), the knowledge about the effects of face on green behavior in tourist-to-tourist interactions is still very limited. More effort is needed to investigate how tourist-to-tourist interactions impact green behavior in Chinese face-culture tourism settings.

With the aim of contributing the backdrop of Chinese tourist understanding of face consciousness and on-site green behavior, this article investigated social encounters among Chinese tourists with a particular focus on the influence of face consciousness on green behavior. The specific research objectives were to: (1) explore whether nearby tourists influenced on-site green behavior in tourist-to-tourist interactions; and (2) determine how face impacted on green activities in different interactive relationships in tourism. The findings are believed to provide a fresh theoretical perspective on understanding green behavior and may benefit sustainable destination management.

2. Literature review

2.1. Green behavior in tourism

Green behavior is engaging in all forms of activity during travel that minimize negative environmental impacts on communities and destinations (Chiu et al., 2014; Qiu et al., 2022), including minimizing water and energy consumption, recycling plastic and paper, protecting wildlife, and reusing towels (Wang et al., 2018). Green behavior is also known as pro-environmental, responsible, environmentally friendly, and sustainable behavior (Steg & Vlek,

2009). The academic discussion on shaping green behavior has polarized into two theoretical camps (Hargreaves, 2016; Stern et al., 1999). On the one hand, most behavioral and environmental psychologists believe that people's green behavior depends on environmental decision making triggered by personal cognitive, affective, and normative factors (Borden & Schettino, 1979; Fielding et al, 2008). Improving green behavior requires ''nudging'' these determinants in a particular direction (Steg & Vlek, 2009). Numerous studies demonstrate that cognitive variables (attitudes, environmental knowledge and awareness), affective factors (place attachment, anticipated feelings, guilt), and normative determinants (moral obligations, social norms) are instrumental in triggering green behavioral intentions (Homburg & Stolberg, 2006; Schultz, 2005). These factors are usually integrated with established theories, e.g., expectancy value, norm activation, place attachment, motivational, planned behavior, and value-belief-norm theories (Han et al., 2015; Stern, 2000; Young, 2000). Typically, quantitative research methods are adopted to examine the relationships among tourist characteristics and green behavior.

On the other hand, some environmental sociologists challenge the basic assumptions of well-theorized models (Hargreaves, 2016). They argue that causal analysis of green behavior existing at an individual level overlooks social interactions (Carlos & Luis, 2019; Hargreaves, 2016; Wang et al., 2018). People do not make green decisions in a social vacuum; rather individuals' decision-making processes are constructed and embedded in social interactions. Many scholars have demonstrated that social interactions exert a crucial role in shaping people's responses to green change processes. For example, Wang et al. (2018) found that Chinese hosts at rural B&Bs played active roles in shaping city tourists' green activities through dynamic host-guest interactions. This is accomplished via selectively designed activities, social approval, and humor. However, the impacts of interactions among tourist on green behavior has rarely been studied. More analysis is needed to investigate how social interactions among tourists influence on-site green behavior.

2.2. Tourist-to-tourist interactions

Tourist-to-tourist interactions, derived from customer-to-customer interactions, has been

recognized in the tourism literature as a key aspect of experience (Huang & Hsu, 2010; Lin et al., 2019; Scott & Foster, 2006), and as a driver of feelings of satisfaction and loyalty (Fakharyan et al., 2014; Millán et al., 2016; Wu, 2007). Negative behaviors such as smoking, littering, jumping queues, talking loudly, can spoil travel experiences (Koç et al., 2022; Watson et al., 1994; Wu, 2007). Positive actions including helping behavior, sharing information, sharing expenses, can contribute to memorable experiences and affect satisfaction and loyalty (Murphy, 2001; Reichenberger, 2017). The accumulated research indicates that experiences are shaped by tourist-to-tourist exchanges, and perceived losses or benefits are influenced due to these interactions.

Some scholars suggest that people not only express their feelings, but also take active roles in influencing nearby tourists' behavior (Pearce, 2005; Su et al., 2022; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Tourist behavior can best be understood by considering the influence of social interactions and personal factors people bring into these encounters (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005). This supports the notion that interactions can affect on-site behavior, such as buying, helping, and citizenship behavior. Minimal research is available on how green behavior is influenced by other tourists (Fletcher, 2015; Holloway et al., 2011). For example, Holloway et al. (2011) found that nature tourists provide a valuable intra-tourist gaze for others' activities that harm the environment. Gazing upon others can reduce unfriendly environmental behavior. However, more attention has been paid to analyzing how Western environmentally friendly tourists influence others' green behavior, and not enough of such research is at hand for Eastern tourists. Little is known about how Asians influence others' green behavior through tourist-to-tourist interactions.

2.3. Face, interactions, and Chinese tourist behavior

Responding to the call for academic knowledge innovation and greater understanding of tourist behavior based upon Chinese culture (Tolkach et al., 2017; Winter, 2009), this research examined tourist behavior and social interactions within the notion of face. Face is referred to as the projection of self in the gaze of others (Goffman, 1955; Hu, 1944). The concept of face is divided into social face (*mianzi*, 面子) and moral face (*lian,* 脸) (Hu, 1944;

Hwang, 2006). Social face is associated with social status, public reputation, and recognized achievements (Hu, 1944). Moral face is related to the social evaluation of an individual's moral character (Hwang, 2006). In Confucian culture, moral and social face are associated with social evaluations of one's conduct.

There are two basic changes in the face status (losing face versus gaining face) triggered by social evaluations (Ho, 1976; Zhang et al., 2011). Positive evaluations provoke feelings of gaining face. When behavior surpasses social expectations, individuals tend to receive positive social evaluations. Gaining face develops positive emotional experiences (e.g., pleasure, pride), and further motivates individuals to maintain and even enhance such behaviors. Contrastingly, negative evaluations trigger feelings of losing face. Face is lost when an individual's conduct fails to meet the minimum acceptable social standards. In response, a person may feel embarrassed and ashamed. Such negative feelings accompanying losing face tend to regulate all Chinese behavior. The fear of losing face motivates Chinese people to act according to social norms. Self-conscious emotions, such as shame from losing face and pride from gaining face, are deeply embedded in Chinese beliefs and expectations (Hwang, 2006). Chinese people use face to perceive self, make self-reflective assessments, and react to others in social encounters (Goffman, 1955; Hwang, 2006). Chinese not only need to project acceptable public personal images, but also must support other people in maintaining social face to avoid unease in social encounters. Thus, to maintain effective and smooth social interactions, face is a subtle mechanism that regulates Chinese behavior (Hwang, 2006).

The impact of face on Chinese tourist behavior is recognized in recent research, and this has highlighted the need for incorporating face into Chinese tourist behavior studies. The existing research demonstrates that face is connected to a wide variety of Chinese purchase behavior (Gao et al., 2017; Li et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2017), gift giving behavior (Kwek & Lee, 2015), anti-social behavior (Zhang & Bai, 2015; Zhang et al., 2019) and green behavior (Wang et al., 2018). Several studies focus on Chinese luxury purchasing behavior motivated by face concerns. This research suggests that Chinese consumers tend to feel under pressure to live up to social status expectations within their networks to maintain or gain face (Chan et al., 2009; Ho, 1980; Li & Su, 2007; Wan & Poon, 2014).

Face is playing a crucial role in shaping Chinese green behavior in social interactions. Chinese individuals high in face consciousness are more likely to be sensitive to others' evaluations in social interactions and eager to behave well to protect or gain face. For example, Wang et al. (2018) indicated that Chinese urban tourists who have strong face consciousness are more likely to demonstrate pro-environmental attitudes in socially acceptable ways in host-guest interactions. When negative environmental behavior is noted by rural B&Bs hosts, urban travelers perceive face loss and that affects their behavior. Alternatively, when green behavior is publicly praised by rural hosts, the feeling of gaining face motivates individuals and encourages fellow tourists to also demonstrate green behavior. Although some scholars have found that face is an influential cultural factor affecting green behavior when Chinese tourists engage in social interactions, little research has examined whether face exerts an influence on nearby people's green behavior in tourist-to-tourist interactions. Based on this review of previous research, there are limited insights on the effects of tourist-to-tourist interactions on nearby people's green behavior, and even less on the impacts of face on regulating sustainable activities. To address the gap, this research empirically investigated the impact of face consciousness on Chinese green behavior through tourist-to-tourist interactions.

3. Research method

3.1. Critical incident technique (CIT)

This research followed a qualitative methodology and was exploratory in nature. The critical incident technique (CIT) is a research method first introduced by Flanagan (1954). It is an analytical method that uses self-reported stories to classify observations of personal behavior, specific events, or phenomena (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964; Gremler, 2004). It requires respondents to tell a story they experienced which is relevant to the incidents (Gremler, 2004). Therefore, it delivers a deeper understanding of incidents from the perspective of respondents (Butterfield et al., 2005). Moreover, CIT provides a rich source of behavioral data to explore how respondents understand incidents, solve practical problems, and further develop psychological principles (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954). CIT has been widely applied in a variety of tourism research areas, including travel experiences

(Petrick et al., 2006; Yin & Poon, 2016), social interactions (Yin & Poon, 2016; Zhang et al., 2010), motivations (Bianchi, 2016), satisfaction (Bianchi, 2016; Petrick et al., 2006), crisis management (Paraskevas & Altinay, 2013) and consumer behavior (Bitner et al., 1994; Grove & Fisk, 1997).

Since there has been very little research on the impact of tourist-to-tourist interactions on environmentally responsible behavior, CIT appeared to be a well-suited research method and there are several reasons for selecting this technique. First, because of its inductive nature CIT is especially useful for a topic that has not been well researched (Gremler, 2004; Grove & Fisk, 1997). This allows the process to generate concepts and theories without any hypotheses (Grove & Fisk, 1997). Second, it offers rich behavioral data from participants' perspectives, which can provide powerful insights into how environmentally responsible behavior is affected in the context of tourist-to-tourist interactions (Zhang et al., 2010). Moreover, CIT is culturally neutral. Therefore, it can encompass respondents from multiple cultures to offer their own stories about experiences they had, rather than expressing their views on researcher-initiated questions (Zhang et al., 2010).

3.2. Data collection

Data were collected from November 2017 to June 2018 through semi-structured interviews. West Lake in Hangzhou and Xianshan Lake in Huzhou, two well-known and popular Chinese lake tourism destinations in Zhejiang Province, were the study sites. There were two reasons for choosing these two destinations. First, lake tourism, as one important form of the mass tourism destinations, has particular environmental sensitivity and ecological fragility (Amuquandoh, 2010). Environmental resources in lake tourism are more vulnerable to tourist irresponsible behavior (Wu et al., 2022). Second, in lake tourism, there is intensive interaction among tourists, which may affect tourist on-site environmental attitudes and behaviors. Many operations (such as boats, lakeside parks, shops, B&Bs and restaurants) in lake tourism may offer tourist-to-tourist interactions, which also constitute memorable experiences for travellers. Destination management organizations of lake tourism understand that tourist green behavior depends not only on the regulations they provide to travellers, but

also how well travellers interact with each other (Jung & Yoo, 2017).Twenty-nine Chinese tourists were interviewed including 16 women and 13 men, aged from 20 to 68 years, with a wide range of backgrounds (i.e., occupations and academic qualifications), as reported (Table 1). To avoid memory lapses, respondents were asked to recall incidents involving other travelers during trips within the past three months. After providing detailed stories, respondents were asked to describe how they felt and responded to the interactions.

The following questions were posed: 1) Did nearby tourists affect your green behavior (e.g., recycling, resource-saving activities) in the past three months? Did you experience the influence of nearby tourists on your own green behavior? 2) Could you describe how your encounters with nearby tourists influenced your green behavior in more detail. (i.e., what did nearby tourists do or appear to do to interact with you?) 3) Did the influences or effects of nearby tourists on your green behavior vary by individuals? Would you like to describe how you thought about and responded to the incidents? 4) How did you interact with nearby tourists within face concerns in different social relationships? 5) If possible, could you describe your travel experiences to make other tourists to be greener? How did you feel about these incidents?" The interviewees could freely express their thoughts, feelings, responses, and strategies. In the interviews, field notes were taken based on the respondents' own words (Edvardsson, 1992).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

3.3. Data analysis

Content analysis was utilized to classify the types of impacts of tourist-to-tourist interactions on green behavior (Kassarjian, 1977; Krippendorff, 2010). The analytical process followed the CIT method adopted by Baker et al. (2007). Three tourism researchers involved as judges placed the recalled incidents into categories according to similarities (Flanagan, 1954; Gremler, 2004). First, the coding process was conducted by two independent judges who had received professional doctoral-level research training. Based on role theory, they sorted the incidents into three major groups after careful and repeated reading. The first-level

codes of major groups, namely interactions with family, friends, and strangers, were reached through mutual agreement. Each incident was categorized into the major groups. Second, the first judge placed each incident into the major groups and classified the subcategories. The second judge put each incident into the subcategories that the first researcher had defined. The two judges discussed and reached a consensus. Finally, the third judge made a decision about the whole classification scheme to ensure the reliability and consistency of the classification (Perreault & Leigh, 1989).

4. **Results**

In total, 76 classifiable incidents were identified. According to Gremler (2004), the sample size of incidents was adequate because CIT can use a smaller set of incidents to obtain an in-depth understanding of respondent experiences. Role theory means the ways people behave in social interactions principally determined by the roles that they adopt (Goffman, 1955). This can enhance the understanding of individual behavior by focusing on explanations of social interactions associated with actors' social positions (Biddle, 1986;Wu et al., 2021). Role theory is adopted as a theoretical model to explore the effect of customer-to-customer interactions on behavior (Solomon et al., 1985). Grove and Fisk (1997) distinguished customer-to-customer interactions as friend and stranger interactions. As role theory has been adopted to study customer-to-customer interactions, it is an appropriate framework to explore the influence of social interactions among tourists on green behavior. Pearce (2005) indicated that tourist behavior in social contact can be understood by using role theory. The relevant previous studies touch upon the role types in tourist-to-tourist interactions according to social ties, including family, friend, and stranger interactions (Kim & Choi, 2016; Nicholls, 2010; Pearce, 2005; Um & Yoon, 2021). Friend interactions involve tourists engaging with their friends (Nicholls, 2010). Family refers to people interacting with family members (Pearce, 2005). Interactions with strangers are encounters with others who are nearby but are strangers (Wu, 2008). The three major categories of incidents were identified as:

(1) Family interactions (21 incidents)

(2) Friend interactions (22 incidents)

(3) Stranger interactions (33 incidents)

The family interaction incidents were further subdivided into persuading (1A), handling (1B), and controlling (1C). Friend interactions were classified into comparing (2A), saving face (2B), and imitating authority (2C). The incidents with stranger interactions were subdivided into coughing (3A), photographing (3B), herding behavior (3C), and ignoring (3D) (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

4.1. Family interactions and green behavior

The first major category that emerged from the critical incident analysis was family interactions. This usually entails conversations and contacts between respondents and family members (e.g., parents, children, husbands, wives). There were 21 critical incidents of family interactions and green behavior, representing 27.6% of the total. Within this major category, the incidents were subdivided into three subcategories, as described below:

Persuading (1A). This was the act of persuading family members to behave in pro-environmental ways while traveling. Persuasive communication can influence individual's environmental attitudes and encourage green behavior (Demarque et al., 2013). To facilitate family members' green decision making, respondents embedded persuasive messages with the face threat of unfriendly environmental behavior (Zhang et al., 2019). The face threat of potentially irresponsible behavior is readily accepted by family members because they would also adjudge other irresponsible tourists with the same evaluation criteria. Six such incidents were identified, including the following:

- A 32-year-old female interviewee (P6) said: *"When taking a boat ride in Xianshan Wetland Park, I saw my three-year-old daughter wanted to throw a plastic bottle of mineral water into the lake. I held her hand and seriously said to her that good children should develop good hygiene habits and not litter. Otherwise, it will damage*

the environment. People around you will criticize you. I wanted to tell my child that whether in school, at home or traveling outside, you must have good environmental habits. Moreover, others will evaluate inwardly that my child lacks quality, and my family does not shoulder the responsibility for a good education. We will be very embarrassed. "

Handling (1B). Handling refers to people directly resolving the environmental problems of family members. Most of the respondents who chose to directly handle events were female. Female respondents felt they could solve family member negative environmental indiscretions without sacrificing their travel experiences. Relative to men, women typically were more environmentally concerned and engaged in green behavior (Zelezny et al., 2010). Female respondents displayed higher levels of personal environmental responsible behavior (e.g., recycling, saving water) (Hunter et al., 2013). This research identified nine such incidents, with the following as examples:

- A 42-year-old female interviewee (P3) said, "*I was very happy to see my family together eating melon seeds and chatting when we were at a rural B&B. We were throwing the melon seed shells on the ground. After chatting, I would take out my broom to clean the grounds. Also, sometimes, the children went out to play and forgot to turn off the lights. When I saw that, I turn off the lights for them. When they came back, I generally told them to pay more careful attention to environmental behavior, keep clean and tidy after playing, and pay attention to water and electricity conservation.* "

Controlling (1C). Controlling implies that the respondent forced family members to adopt environmental protection actions during trips. The respondents who controlled others believed that green behavior is a desirable habit, and that compulsory behavior is needed to cultivate the habit. Individuals with this high level of commitment to environmental protection are keen to control others' ecological worldviews and pro-environmental behavior (Davis et al., 2009). Six such incidents were pinpointed in this research, including the following example:

- A 26-year-old female interviewee (P27) said, *"When my boyfriend (now husband) and I were traveling on the Su Causeway of West Lake in Hangzhou, he threw the Coca-Cola bottle he just drank like a basketball shot. It fell outside of the rubbish bin, but he pretended not to see it. I was very angry. I stopped him on the spot and asked him to pick it up. It made him very ashamed. I guess that he just wanted to show off. But he finally picked it up and threw it in the trash. If he had such bad environmental habits outdoors, he would not be any better at home. If we get married in the future, I would be exhausted to clean the house. Therefore, I had to educate him to form better green habits. Indeed, I already changed many of his hygiene habits.*

4.2. Friend interactions and green behavior

The study collected 22 critical incidents involving friend interactions (e.g., classmates, colleagues) and there were three subcategories as described below:

Comparing (2A). This meant that respondents evaluated the behavior of peers with great subtlety, and encouraged pro-environmental behavior through comparisons. The interviewees who chose this strategy in friend interactions tended to be women with higher educational achievement and high social status. Social comparisons of green behavior can be considered as a form of social competition, which leads to enhanced personal green behavior (Turner, 2010). Female interviewees tended to regard green behavior as a personal quality and a form of subtle comparison in friend interactions. These comparisons may motivate peers to adopt green behavior. Six incidents were collected, including the following example:

- A 35-year-old female civil servant interviewee with higher education (P8) said, *" When I traveled with my official leader and colleagues, I paid attention to my behavior to conform to my social identity. I know the outcomes and consequences of irresponsible behavior. They may ruin my professional image. Colleagues subtly compare with each other in their interactions. I do not want to be a joke in the eyes of my colleagues."*

Saving face (2B). Saving face means that respondents did not directly point out the

negative environmental behavior of peers, but politely and kindly solved the problems to save the faces of each other (Wang et al., 2018; Su et al., 2022). Chinese tourists are motivated to avoid the social embarrassment of losing face. Saving face in social interactions can eliminate negative feelings of embarrassment and restore peer willingness to engage in travel (Zhang et al., 2019). Interviewees dealt with the environmental problems of friends to save face for them and not damage their relationships. Ten incidents were identified, including the following example:

- A female interviewee (P24) said: *"Once I went to climb a hill near West Lake with some friends. After we had some snacks, we found there was no garbage can nearby. I saw that one friend wanted to leave litter on the ground. I told him that I brought a plastic bag, please put your garbage in it."*

Imitating authority (2C). This is the imitation of the environmental behavior of the authoritative leaders in groups of friends. Male respondents tended to imitate the behavioral patterns of authority figures. Six incidents were collected, including the following example:

- A 23-year-old male college student interviewee (P13) said, *"I usually follow the environmental behavior patterns of authorities, such as leaders, teachers, and bosses. If authorities are concerned about green behavior, I will pay attention to it. If they do not care, I will also not care. Otherwise, I would be going against group norms. It seems that I was not the same as my friends."*

4.3. Stranger interactions and green behavior

The behaviors of strangers were the most frequent incidents impacting on green activity. There were 33 incidents, which represented 43.4% of the total. These incidents were subdivided into four subcategories:

Coughing (3A). Coughing was a signal given to attract the attention of strangers and drop hints about their negative environmental behavior (Wu, 2008). By coughing deliberately, interviewees tried to remind strangers to pay greater attention to responsible actions when they noticed unacceptable behavior. Environmental attitudes are encoded in coughing during

stranger interactions. People who are sensitive to social cues are more likely to decode the meaning of coughing and change their behavior (Wang et al., 2018). Five incidents were detected, including the following example:

- One female interviewee (P8) said, *"I drank tea with my brother and sister-in-law in the destination. A tourist sitting at a table opposite to us smoked and spat. I hate the smell of cigarettes. I coughed on purpose to attract his attention. Then, I said to myself, "Where is the smell of cigarette coming from." The man slowly put out his cigarette and walked away."*

Photographing (3B). Photographing was where the respondents took photos or videos of strangers' negative environmental behavior. Photographing is a common behavior in tourist social encounters (Hockert et al., 2018). Prior studies on photographic behavior have focused on the nature of the tourist gaze and investigated various meanings of photography (Hockert et al., 2018). Photographing has the power to interrupt or stop environmentally irresponsible behavior. Through camera lenses, strangers worry about their irresponsible behavior that may be posted into microblogs or on WeChat. Four incidents were identified that included the following example:

- A female interviewee (P10) said, *"Some tourists did not stop their children's irresponsible environmental behavior. I was angry when I saw a young couple let their kids throw stones at wildlife in the animal park. I took videos with my phone and posted them on a microblog. Let the network public opinion judge."*

Herding behavior (3C). Herding behavior refers to a phenomenon in which tourists follow close at hand strangers' behavior for a given period regardless of their own attitudes (Bae et al., 2021;Rook & Laurens, 2006). Tourists may engage in irresponsible behavior by following the actions of nearby strangers who are slightly better off. Herding behavior tends to occur via weak social ties (Wu, 2008). The number of nearby strangers already partaking in irresponsible behavior motivates tourist herding behavior. In this situation, some people blindly conform to the "norm" and imitate strangers' irresponsible behavior. Five incidents

were identified that included the following example:

- A male interviewee (P20) said, *"This is often the case in my trips when it is hard to find a trash can when I want to throw garbage away. If the ground were very clean and no tourists left garbage there, I do not throw things on the ground. However, if more than one tourist around me throws things on the ground, I follow them. I think this place is OK for us to throw rubbish. I am not doing it alone, everyone does it."*

Ignoring (3D). Many respondents were not willing to acknowledge on-site irresponsible behavior by strangers. Nineteen incidents accounting for 28.8% were discovered. The main reason for standing off was the fear of potential conflicts. Twelve incidents suggested that interference with strangers' irresponsible environmental behavior might bring potential conflicts. Two of these were as follows:

- A 59-year-old female interviewee (P23) said, *"I believe individuals with irresponsible environmental behavior have low personal quality. I always walk away from irresponsible environmental activities that do not concern me. If I urge the stranger to behave better, the stranger may respond to me to mind my own business. I am just an old tourist. I do not want to quarrel with strangers"*

- A college student interviewee (P20) said, *"Some tourists have uncivilized behavior. They like spitting, littering, and talking loudly. It happens to me often. I think promoting green behavior is the duty of the destination management organization. I do not have strong environmental awareness to enhance strangers' green behavior. I just pursue happiness during travel."*

5. Conclusions, discussion, and implications

The critical incident technique was used to explore the influence of tourist-to-tourist interactions on green behavior. A total of 76 incidents were identified. According to role theory, the incidents were divided into three categories: family, friend, and stranger interactions. Most (57 incidents) demonstrated that social interactions among tourists had an impact on on-site green behavior. The other 19 incidents reflected no influence on others in

interactions; people tended to ignore irresponsible environmental behavior to avoid potential conflicts or damage travel experiences.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This research contributes to the existing tourism literature by exploring the influence of tourist-to-tourist interactions on on-site green behavior. The results are consistent with previous research that such behavior is impacted by social interactions (Hargreaves, 2016; Wang et al., 2018), but the findings further enrich current knowledge from the unique perspective of tourist-to-tourist interactions. This may offer a new research pathway for future studies. The theoretical contributions are as follows:

First, this investigation offers a novel perspective for understanding how green behavior is constructed and embedded in tourist-to-tourist interactions. Unlike previous research focusing on personal inputs that trigger green behavior (Homburg & Stolberg, 2006; Lee et al., 2015), this study contributes by developing an understanding of how nearby tourists influence green behavior decisions in various forms of social encounters in travel. The findings are in line with the recent research that social interactions exert an influence on green behavior (Li & Chen, 2022; Li & Wu, 2020). This is the first inquiry to identify three major categories of critical incidents regarding the impacts of nearby tourists on green behavior (family, friend, and stranger). These findings enrich the existing knowledge of green behavior and may stimulate new lines of research (Li & Wu, 2020). Based on the tourist role construct (Pearce, 2005), it also reveals the strategies used by people within the three major categories of social relationships, offering additional insight into how green behavior is shaped through interpersonal contact.

Second, ten subcategories of the three major incident categories reflect various forms of interactive behavior strategies. These strategies show that social interactions among tourists not only positively promote green behavior, but also negatively affect pro-environmental actions. For example, people when interacting with friends or strangers may abandon personal environmental values and engage in the same environmentally unfriendly behavior

as others (e.g., in "imitating authority", "following others"). Previous studies have paid greater attention to the positive effects of social interactions on tourist environmental behavior (Li & Wu, 2020; Wang et al., 2018), while ignoring the potential negative influences of social encounters on pro-environmental behavior. Chinese tourists may imitate nearby tourists' environmentally unfriendly behavior to avoid embarrassment in interpersonal interactions. This form of social emulation supports Hwang's (2006) research, which suggests that the power status of both sides of Chinese social interaction are unequal. These interactions feature dominant and secondary actors. The secondary actor tends to follow or conform to the behavior of the dominant to avoid social embarrassment caused by behavioral differences (Hwang, 2006).

Most importantly, the application of the critical incident technique has shed light on how the face consciousness of Chinese tourists plays a normative role in shaping green behavior through tourist-to-tourist interactions, as shown in Figure 2. The findings confirm that the concept of face is a crucial variable impacting upon nearby pro-environmental behavior in Chinese tourism situations. Face consciousness in tourist-to-tourist interactions acts to build mutual understandings of green behavior and generates various action strategies during interpersonal encounters. This supports previous findings that face is a mechanism regulating Chinese tourist green behavior (Wan & Poon, 2014; Wang et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019).

On the one hand, face plays a self-disciplinary role in tourist-to-tourist interactions by regulating green behavior. Several respondents linked green behavior with face consciousness. They recognized the social evaluation of irresponsible environmental behavior as an influence on personal and peer face consciousness. People directly or subtly persuade or encourage fellow travelers to behave in pro-environmental ways to avoid the shame of losing face. The recipients readily sense the meaning of losing face through negative actions, and this may be translated into more favorable pro-environmental behavior. The findings confirm existing literature that face is a key force regulating green behavior in tourism in China (Wang et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2022; Zhang & Bai, 2015). The face concept is similar to the ideas of Foucault (1978) that Chinese tourists feel the effects of the "prisoner's dilemma"

sensing constant surveillance, a psychological process that creates fear of losing face and the desire to gain face, which has the intrinsic power to normalize environmentally responsible behavior (Wang et al., 2018; Li et al., 2020).

On the other hand, face plays a normative role in shaping green behavior. Those who are face sensitive readily take onboard even the most subtle information communicated through others' environmental behavior expectations (Zhang et al., 2019). In contrast, face insensitive people tend to ignore subtle cues provided by other on-site tourists.

Individuals choose varying face strategies to influence others according to the social ties in relationships (Hwang, 2006). For example, people tend to indirectly influence friends and strangers with face-saving strategies to minimize or avoid face threats. Contrastingly, tourists tend to directly persuade and educate family members to behave in a pro-environmental fashion (Wang et al., 2018). Certain respondents genuinely cared about how green behavior affects face. They discouraged or compensated for irresponsible environmental behavior so that personal or family face were not lost. These are among the first findings in tourism to examine the influence of face consciousness on family members' unfriendly environmental behavior.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

5.2. Managerial implications

Some valuable implications can be derived for tourism managers to improve pro-environmental actions. Green behavior is not only an individual decision-making process triggered by personal factors, but also can be influenced by the presence of other tourists (Li & Wu, 2020). Destination management organizations (DMOs) may assume that tourist-to-tourist interactions are beyond their control. However, they must be more proactive in guiding tourist-to-tourist interactions and eliminating the negative effects of social interactions on destination environmental sustainability (Zhang et al., 2019). DMOs should focus more on interactive processes and encourage visitors to act as "social individuals" who

are protectors of natural and cultural environments. Environmental education should be tailored according to audience types (Pearce, 2005). For example, destinations that cater for families should stress the significance of green behavior in social and societal contexts. Clear and unambiguous messages should be communicated that unfriendly environmental behavior brings negative social evaluations to family and friends, and is detrimental to broader society as well.

The results show that negative interactions tend to increase environmental pollution. People may imitate others' irresponsible actions. Here, the "broken window effect" may operate highly visible demonstrations of inappropriate actions encourage more anti-social behavior. As such, one person's irresponsible behavior creates much greater environmental damage and pollution as others follow. Through tighter and more obvious controls on visitor behavior, DMOs must improve neglected aspects of public hygiene, through installing warning signs to stop irresponsible behavior and cautioning those who engage in such actions (Chiu et al., 2014). DMOs should assist front-line service-providers to reduce the negative impacts of tourist-to-tourist interactions by providing face sensitivity training (Wang & Zhang, 2020). Usually, such training is seldom provided to service-providers. Given this and previous evidence on face psychology, interactive scenarios, and pro-environmental behavior, DMOs should develop green visit strategies for service-providers to foster positive encounters and enhance green behavior.

The socially shared "face" (Ho, 1974; Hwang, 2006) influences pro-environmental behavior through people-to-people interactions in tourism in China. DMOs can make better use of face consciousness to create more effective green strategies. First, green behavior should be directly associated with face concerns. Destination managers should promote green motivations and actions linked with the desires to gain face (Wang et al., 2018). They should amplify the positive rewards of gaining face, stimulating pride in behaving in pro-environmental ways. DMOs must also discourage irresponsible behavior by connecting such actions with fears of losing face (Zhang et al., 2019). They should convey face-threatening messages to those who are not sympathetic to the environment. Second, face is a subtle

instigator for enhancing or lessening pro-environmental behavior within groups of Chinese travelers. DMOs should do more to generate greater collective face concern among Chinese travel groups that will lead to higher levels of pro-environmental behavior.

6. Limitations and future research directions

This research is not without limitations which must be acknowledged. First, all the participants were Chinese tourists in domestic destinations in Zhejiang Province. As a result of globalization, destinations are attracting visitors from different nations. It would be beneficial to explore social interactions among tourists from different countries to make cross-cultural comparisons. The pro-environmental motivations and strategies of people from various cultures may be diverse. Second, this study adopted the critical incident technique to investigate Chinese tourist face consciousness and its role in shaping green behavior during tourist-to-tourist interactions. The findings relied on respondent memories of travel experiences. As the nature of CIT is exploratory, future studies should investigate the underlying associations between face consciousness and green behavior. Accordingly, diverse research methods, such as quantitative cause-and-effect models, experiments, and observation, should be used in different destination settings to add more robustness to these results.

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Table 1. Respondent characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Academic
P1	Male	24	Entrepreneur	University
P2	Female	63	Worker	Middle school
P3	Female	42	Saleswoman	College
P4	Male	69	Worker	Middle school
P5	Male	44	Cook	High school
P6	Female	32	Finance Director	University
P7	Male	21	Student	University
P8	Female	35	Civil servant	University
P9	Female	26	Teacher	Graduate
P10	Female	22	Student	University
P11	Male	33	Teacher	Graduate
P12	Female	27	Civil servant	University
P13	Male	23	Student	College
P14	Female	36	Teacher	Graduate
P15	Male	42	Shopkeeper	College
P16	Male	26	Worker	College
P17	Female	20	Student	University
P18	Female	21	Student	University
P19	Male	34	Soldier	University
P20	Female	23	Student	University
P21	Male	32	Entrepreneur	University
P22	Female	58	Doctor	College
P23	Female	55	Worker	High school
P24	Female	24	Worker	University
P25	Male	35	Doctor	Graduate
P26	Male	32	Policeman	University
P27	Female	26	Teacher	University
P28	Male	35	Salesman	University
P29	Female	25	Worker	University
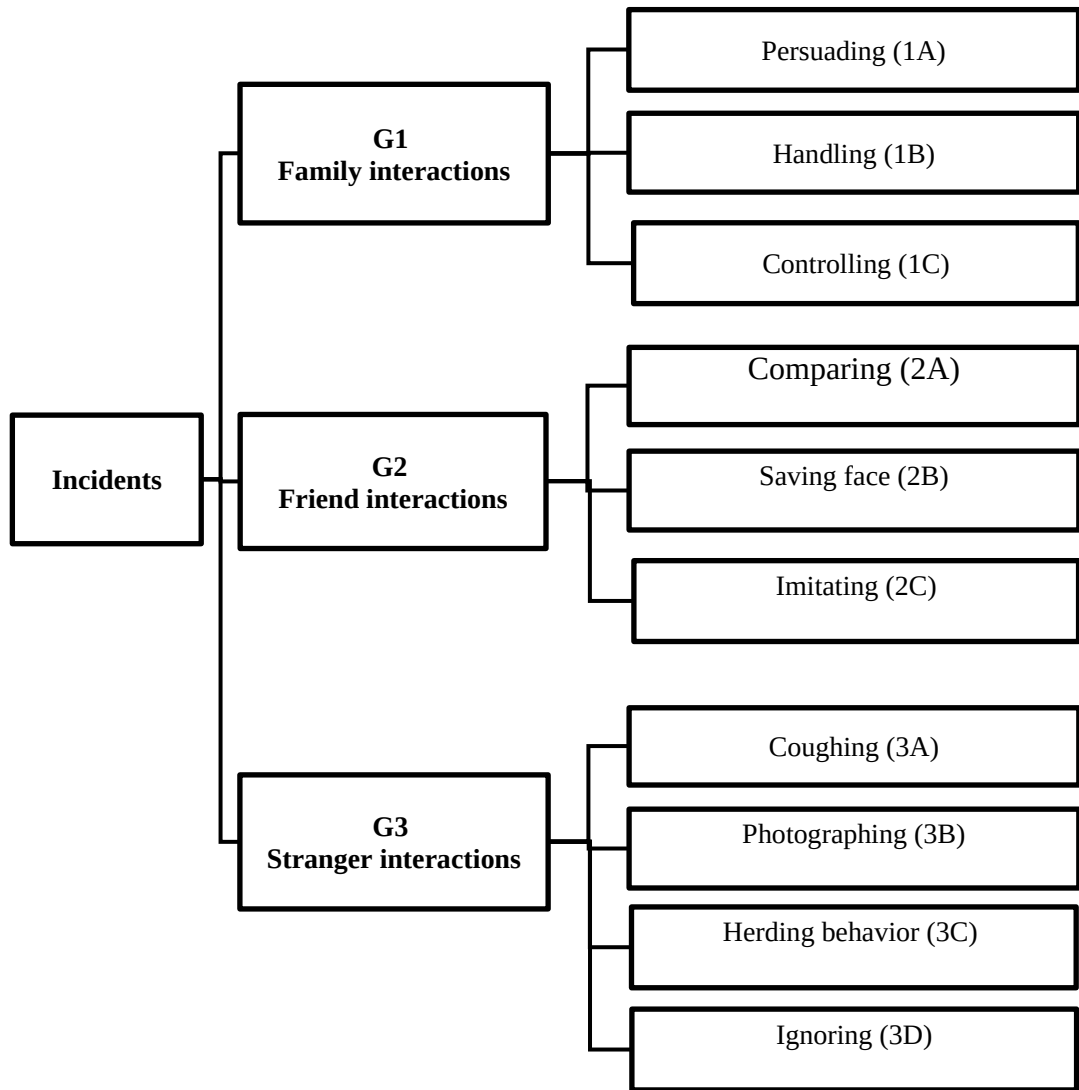
Fig. 1. Categories and subcategories of critical incidents

Normative effects of face on green behavior

	Autonomy	Heteronomy
Interactive initiator	Internalized virtual social evaluation	Face saving and face threating
Interactive receiver	Understanding and acceptance	Conforming behavior. Capturing implicit social expectations.

Fig. 2. Normative effects of face on green behavior in tourist-to-tourist interactions