

# Research on the Perception and Dissemination of Tourist Attraction Images in Tourist Cities under Cross-Cultural Backgrounds: Data from International Tourists' Online Reviews

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the perception and dissemination strategies of tourist images in tourist cities from the perspective of international tourists with cross-cultural characteristics, coming from different countries. It selects 13 tourist cities in Jiangsu Province, China, as case studies. By analyzing online review data from international tourists entering the country, the study examines both positive and negative perceptions of tourist attraction images. The results reveal that the language and volume of the reviews reflect the origins and scale of the international tourists, while the content of these reviews indicates their preferences for tourist attractions. A comparative analysis of the review data suggests that there are differences in the perceived images of tourist cities. The conclusions of this study suggest that tourism city managers, tourism business operators, and local residents can make efforts to improve the city's tourism development. These improvements can be achieved by utilizing international media platforms to disseminate tourism images, enhancing the quality of tourist attraction operations, and strengthening cultural exchanges in tourism.

## 1. Introduction

Image is the overall impression perceived by people, comprising positive, negative, and neutral elements. For tourist cities, while a negative image exposes deficiencies and can provide insights for improving services for tourists, a positive image has a positive word-of-mouth effect and can serve as a powerful tool to attract tourists. The neutral image of a tourist city indicates room for transformation, suggesting that it can be turned into a positive image.

A key feature of tourist cities is their focus on lifestyle consumption. Tourists' overall impressions of tourist cities derive from six aspects of tourism: dining, lodging, transportation, sightseeing, shopping, and entertainment. The perception of a tourist city's image is mainly focused on tourist attractions and is reflected through tourists' online reviews. From a cross-cultural perspective, this paper examines the image perception of tourist attractions in 13 tourist cities in Jiangsu, China, through the analysis of online reviews by international tourists on the TripAdvisor website.

## 2. Literature review

The concept of a tourism image was first introduced by J.D. Hunt in 1975 and refers to the sum of a tourist's beliefs, evaluations, and impressions of a destination. The tourism image can be divided into a projected image

and a perceived image<sup>1</sup>. The projected image refers to the promotional image of the destination, while the perceived image refers to the impression and evaluation formed by tourists through media or their own travel experiences, as described by Kotler P, Haider D, and Rein I in 1993<sup>2</sup>. This indicates that the promotional image of tourism and the perceived image of tourism may or may not be consistent, but the perceived image can be influenced through media. Negative images perceived by tourists can also be reversed through adjustments to the promotional image.

Research on tourists' perception of images over the past decade has shown that the use of online and social media reviews has become very common. Tourists' online comments on social media are of significant reference value for the dissemination and management of Barcelona's tourist image, as highlighted by Marine Roig E and Clavé S A in 2015<sup>3</sup>. For example, some scholars have analyzed user-generated content on Instagram to explore how tourists participate in the image dissemination of two tourist attractions in Portugal and Spain, as studied by Iglesias Sánchez P P, Correia M B, Jambrino Maldonado C, et al., in 2020<sup>4</sup>. In recent years, research on tourist reviews on the Airbnb platform has led to the development of a framework for analyzing tourism images and the proposal of strategies for marketing the dissemination of tourism images, as noted by Lalicic L, Marine Roig E, Ferrer Rosell B, et al., in 2021<sup>5</sup>. Literature reviews have found that tourists' online reviews reflect a strong subjectivity in their perception of images.

In recent years, research on international tourists' perceptions of the image of Chinese tourist cities has also

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been based on big data from tourism websites or travel blogs. For example, scholars Wu K.J., Wen J.T., and Yang Z. (2022) focused on the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as their research subject<sup>6</sup>. They analyzed the perception of tourist images among overseas tourists on TripAdvisor and proposed strategies for the dissemination of tourist destination images. For some high-quality tourist attractions, international tourists' reviews tend to have a higher positive sentiment, leading to a larger proportion of positive images formed. Despite this, such high-quality scenic areas still need to deepen image dissemination. For instance, researchers Du SH.Y. and Wang X.P. (2023) studied the comments of international tourists on China's Huangshan Scenic Area on TripAdvisor, proposing strategies to enhance the cultural image dissemination of Huangshan Scenic Area based on positive reviews from international tourists<sup>7</sup>.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has heightened the significance of social media in the dissemination of tourism images. Researchers Christoph Pachucki, Reinhard Grohs, and Ursula Scholl-Grissmann (2022) conducted a study to explore how and to what extent the pandemic has altered destination communication on social media and consumer engagement with it<sup>8</sup>. Utilizing data collected from 1,136 Facebook posts across 85 Austrian tourism destinations, they found that consumer engagement on social media increased and that social media dissemination became more emotional.

The findings and perspectives from the aforementioned studies serve as a foundation for this article and provide methodological and theoretical references for the study of international tourists' perceptions of tourism images and dissemination strategies.

### 3. Methodology and data analysis

This article employs international tourist review data from the TripAdvisor website for its research. The methodology used is general statistical description, which involves categorizing, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the collected review data.

#### 3.1 Data collection

All data in this article come from the TripAdvisor China website, covering the period from the earliest recorded review date of January 1, 2022, to April 1, 2024. The collected data include the types of foreign languages used by international tourists on the website, the number of reviews, and the classification of review tendencies (positive, negative, neutral). The case studies are based on attractions in 13 tourist cities in Jiangsu Province, China. According to the rankings of attractions by tourists on the TripAdvisor China website, the top three attractions in each city were selected, and the review data from international tourists for the top three attractions in each city were compiled into a statistical list. See Table 1.

**Table 1:** Top 3 Attractions and International Tourist Reviews in 13 Tourist Cities of Jiangsu, China

City and Top3 Attractions	Languages & Number of Online Review
1.Nanjing Nanjing Museum, Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, Xuanwu Lake	English 124,342,228; Japanese 20,47,19; Korean 6,7,7; Russian 5,10,7; Italian 5,12,10; French 5,6,5; Spanish 5,11,4; German 2,12,10; Portuguese 2,5,7; Thai 1,1,1; Dutch 0,6,1; Swedish 0,5,0; Hindi 0,3,3; Norwegian 0,3,0; Finnish 0,1,1; Polish 0,10,1; Hungarian 0,0,1.
2.Suzhou Suzhou Classical Gardens, Lion Forest, Wangshi Gardens	English 210,146,314; Russian 32,12,14; French 30,17,26; Japanese 29,43,14; Italian 23,7,16; Spanish 22,5,13; Portuguese 14,4,2; German 14,8,13; Korean 9,3,1; Dutch 6,2,4; Polish 3,1,1; Swedish 2,0,3; Greek 2,0,1; Hebrew 1,0,1; Thai 1,1,1; Vietnamese 0,1,0; Czech 0,0,1; Danish 0,2,1; Hindi 0,1,0; Hungarian 0,0,1.
3.Xuzhou Mausoleum of King Chu of Xihan Dynasty, Yunlong Lake, Xuzhou Museum	English 49,10,7; Japanese 3,2,3; Danish 2,0,0; German 1,2,0; Swedish 1,0,0; Russian 1,1,1; Portuguese 1,1,2; Italian 1,1,0; French 1,0,0; Spanish 1,2,0; Dutch 1,1,1
4.Wuxi The Giant Buddha of Lingshan, Yuantouzhu of Tai Lake, Wuxi Nanchan Temple	English 214,40,68; Japanese 15,8,39; Italian 7,2,4; German 6,2,5; Russian 6,3,2; Portuguese 5,0,5; French 5,1,3; Spanish 3,1,1; Dutch 3,0,1; Korean 2,2,1; Thai 2,0,0; Danish 3,0,1; Turkish 2,0,0; Swedish 1,0,0; Hindi 1,0,1; Czech 1,0,1; Vietnamese 1,0,0.
5.Changzhou China Dinosaur Park, Hongmei Park, Yancheng Site	English 64,27,12; French 6,10,0; Japanese 5,7,1; German 3,1,1; Russian 3,2,1; Hindi 2,0,0; Spanish 2,1,1; Portuguese 1,3,0; Korean 1,0,0; Italian 1,0,0; Danish 1,0,0; Polish 0,0,1.
6.Yangzhou Shouxi Lake, Ge Gardens, He Garden	English 72,24,15; Japanese 12,6,5; French 5,4,3; German 4,2,0; Russian 2,0,0; Portuguese 2,1,1; Italian 2,1,1; Korean 1,1,0; Spanish 1,1,1.
7.Zhengjiang Jinshan Temple of Zhenjiang, Xijindu Ancient Street, Beigu Mountain	English 18,15,8; Japanese 6,11,7; French 0,2,0; German 0,1,0; Russian 0,1,0; Swedish 1,0,0; Portuguese 1,1,1; Italian 0,1,0; Dutch 0,1,0; Spanish 0,1,0.
8.Nantong Lang Mountain, Nantong Hao River, Nantong Museum	English 28,15,6; Japanese 8,4,2; Dutch 3,1,0; German 2,0,1; Russian 2,1,0; Spanish 2,0,0; Swedish 1,0,0; Portuguese 1,2,0; French 1,1,0.

9.Lianyungang Huaguo Mountain, Lianyungang Fishing Bay, Liangyungang Harbor	English 6,3,3; Russian 3,3,4; Korean 2,0,0; Japanese 2,2,4; Hindi 1,0,0; French 1,0,0.
10.Yancheng Yandu Park, Yancheng Water Street, Yongning Temple	English 1,1,1; Portuguese 1,0,1; Russian 1,2,0; Japanese 2,0,1; Korean 0,2,1; Italian 0,1,0; Spanish 0,0,1.
11.Taizhou: Taizhou Ancient Street, Mei Lanfang Park, Wanghai Tower	English 7,4,2; Portuguese 3,0,0; Russian 1,0,0; Japanese 1,0,2; French 1,0,0.
12.Huaian Huaian Ancient Government, Haxia Ancient Town, Chinese Huaiyang Cuisine Museum	English 0,2,1; Japanese 1,2,2; Italian 0,0,1.
13.Suqian Xiang King's Hometown, Luomahu Wetlands, Santaishan Forest Park	English 4,2,1; Japanese 0,1,0; German 0,0,1.

Source: <https://www.tripadvisor.cn/>

Despite the diverse cultural backgrounds of international tourists, their reviews of tourist attractions in the 13 cities of Jiangsu share similar tendencies, indicating that the experiences offered by the attractions

are fundamentally the same. In terms of the orientation of online reviews from international tourists, there is a higher proportion of positive reviews compared to negative ones. The review samples are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Sample International Tourist Reviews for Tourist Cities in Jiangsu, China

City	Sample of comments
1.Nanjing	It is amazing; It is worthy to visit there; A huge museum; definitely worth it; beautiful; nice... don't waste your time with the WeChat; There is limited English...
2.Suzhou	Exquisite, exemplary, beautiful; experience different views; something interesting... Crowded; not enough time; need to pay full price...
3.Xuzhou	Broad and profound, ancient, skilled; beautiful environment; rich collection... Little historical explanation....
4.Wuxi	Good natural scenery; grand, tremendous; beautiful lake; food... Overcrowding...
5.Changzhou	Fun, enjoy, Suitable for children; free park, fresh air, beautiful; ancient history... A little confused; poor order...
6.Yangzhou	Picturesque, water sports, souvenir; beautiful and clean; lots of bamboo; interesting garden... Uncivilized tourists; nothing special...
7.Zhengjiang	Fun, worth it, historic site; story and legend...
8.Nantong	Beautiful mountain and lake; the ancient moat; good museum...
9.Lianyungang	Common landscape; beautiful harbor... Scenic is not very good; dull...
10.Yancheng	park, street; ancient temple...
11.Taizhou:	Featured street, antiqued, memorial park... Dull, nothing special...
12.Huaian	Nothing special, high price, dull, lonely...
13.Suqian	Beautiful forest park; well protected wetlands... Inelegance and artificial ancient site...

Source: <https://www.tripadvisor.cn/>

### 3.2 Data analysis

Table 1 and 2 compile the data on reviews from international tourists on TripAdvisor's China website for the major attractions in the 13 tourist cities of Jiangsu. Analyzing this data can reveal the distribution characteristics of international tourists, their preference features, and the image characteristics of the tourist cities.

#### 3.2.1 Online Review Languages and Geographic Distribution

The languages used in international tourists' reviews and the number of reviews can indicate the possible regions of origin of these tourists. Firstly, according to Table 1, inbound tourists to Jiangsu, China, primarily originate from English-speaking countries, followed by those from non-English-speaking countries. Based on geographic considerations, these tourists mainly come from North America, Southeast

Asia, and Europe, which are also the main source regions for China's inbound tourism and hence are the primary targets for the dissemination of tourist city images. Secondly, among tourists from non-English-speaking countries in Table 1, the majority are from Russia, Japan, and South Korea, with relatively fewer tourists coming from non-English-speaking European countries. This suggests that countries geographically closer or more culturally familiar are more likely to become major sources of tourists, and tourists from these countries may find it easier to engage in cross-cultural communication and exchange with the destination country.

Clarifying the distribution of international tourists' regions of origin can aid in developing strategies to revive the international tourism market. Research by Xi Y.B. (2024) on the 49 primary source markets for China's inbound tourism found that the most important source markets are South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, and the United States<sup>9</sup>. This study also, to some extent, confirms the conclusions of that research.

### 3.2.2 International Tourists' Attraction Preferences

The number of comments by international tourists can reveal their possible preferences for tourist attractions. In Table 1, the number of comments from international tourists corresponds directly to the top 3 attractions in the tourist cities. Judging from the highest number of comments in English, international tourists pay more attention to high-quality tourist attractions, showing a clear preference for scenic spots with rich cultural and historical connotations. They also show interest in attractions with beautiful natural landscapes, while lacking interest and attention in artificial, non-natural attractions that lack cultural depth, such as replicas and faux-antique sites. This reflects international tourists' preference for natural scenery and appreciation for exotic cultural attractions. For example, high-quality attractions like the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, Xuanwu Lake, and Ming City Wall in Nanjing; classical gardens in Suzhou; ancient Han dynasty sites in Xuzhou; Slender West Lake in Yangzhou; and Tai Lake in Wuxi, have garnered more attention from international tourists than other areas.

The differences in international tourists' preferences for attractions are actually a reflection of their diverse cross-cultural backgrounds. Scholars Kun Zhang, Zhibin Lin, and Jinyi Zhang (2021) took the Summer Palace in Beijing, China, as a case study, analyzing 2,227 photos uploaded by 176 tourists from 42 countries in Asia, North America, and Europe on Yahoo<sup>10</sup>. The study found that North American tourists prefer water scenes, European tourists like leaves and the sky, and Asian tourists are fond of traditional architecture. This reflects the cultural similarities between Americans and Europeans, who pay more attention to natural scenes, while Asian tourists focus on the cultural architectural environment. The analysis of the concentration of international tourist review numbers in this paper also demonstrates that international tourists from different

cultural backgrounds have distinct preferences for natural versus cultural attractions.

### 3.2.3 Differences in the Image of Tourist Cities

The image of tourist cities, known as the perceived image, is the impression and evaluation formed by tourists through media or their own travel experiences (Kotler P, Haider D, Rein I, 1993)<sup>2</sup>. Social media data can serve as a reliable metric for measuring the perceived image of city tourism in the digital age. The impressions of international tourists on tourist cities can reflect the image differences between various cities.

In Table 1, the language and number of international tourist reviews show a declining trend according to the order of the 13 cities, indicating that the perceived images of the 13 tourist cities differ and can be divided into three levels: high, medium, and low.

The first level includes Nanjing, Suzhou, Xuzhou, and Wuxi, where international tourists come from a wide range of sources. From the languages of the tourist reviews, it can be seen that these cities have a large number of reviews, high participation, and many positive reviews (see Table 2), demonstrating a good international image. The second level includes Changzhou, Yangzhou, and Zhenjiang, where international tourists are relatively widespread, participation is higher, and there are many positive reviews but also noticeable negative reviews (see Table 2), showing an average international image. The third level comprises Nantong, Lianyungang, Yancheng, Taizhou, Huai'an, and Suqian, where there are fewer international tourist reviews, insufficient participation, not many positive reviews, and noticeable negative reviews (see Table 2), indicating a lack of international image.

## 4. Conclusions

In summary, this study found that the overall number of international tourists entering Jiangsu, China, is not large, and their regional distribution is uneven, primarily from North America, Southeast Asia, and Europe, with a lesser number of tourists from Europe. These inbound tourists' choice of attractions has cultural characteristics, indicating differences between Eastern and Western cultures. At the same time, reviews from inbound tourists reveal differences in the images of tourist cities. For tourist cities, attracting inbound tourists and improving the city's tourism image are directions for effort by tourism city managers, attraction operators, and community residents for the development of city tourism. This reflects the practical significance and insights of this article, while theoretically, it verifies some existing research findings, showcasing the theoretical significance of this study.

Firstly, tourism city managers can endeavor to expand international channels for disseminating tourism images. International media channels are the main avenues for attracting international tourists. According to China Tourism News (December 21, 2023), in the 2023 ranking of provincial-level tourism management departments in China based on their international dissemination power index, Jiangsu ranked third among 25 Facebook accounts, second

among 25 Twitter accounts and 24 Instagram accounts, and fourth among 20 YouTube accounts and 14 TikTok accounts. Chinese tourist cities need to make more use of international social media platforms to promote their tourism images.

Secondly, tourism businesses can strive to improve the quality of tourist attraction operations. Tourist cities are not lacking in tourism resources, but the low-quality development and utilization of these resources will not attract tourists. Research has confirmed that international tourists' preferences impact international tourism consumption (Yang Ke, Wei Xiang, Hu Diancheng, Wang Kai, Ni Zhenggang, 2024)<sup>11</sup>. Online reviews reveal that international tourists prefer high-quality attractions that combine natural and cultural elements, providing a reference for tourism businesses in the operation of attractions.

Lastly, residents of tourist destinations can work to promote cross-cultural exchanges with international tourists. Tourism is known as people-to-people diplomacy, where international tourists can serve as envoys of cultural exchange, interacting culturally with locals and narrowing the cultural distance. Cultural distance can both stimulate international tourists' curiosity and hinder their choice of unfamiliar destinations (Zhou Lingqiang, Bi Juan, 2017)<sup>12</sup>. Too great a cultural distance is not conducive to the choices of international tourists. Facilitating exchanges between locals and visitors, free interaction among users on social media platforms, and friendly contacts with inbound and outbound tourists can alleviate the unfamiliarity with foreign cultures and promote the development of international tourism.

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