New Thoughts on Formation of Tourism Perceived Images: An Investigation of Guangxi's Overseas Chinese Students from ASEAN

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Abstract

The research attempts to explain the psychological formation of the image of the sojourn by overseas students who are culturally homogeneous with the sojourn by constructing a comprehensive framework for the composition of the perceived image that contains the new dimension of cultural attachment. In particular, a group of 482 overseas Chinese students from ASEAN with learning experience in Guangxi are the respondents, benefiting from the deep ties between their ethnic and cultural backgrounds with mainland China. It is a strategic consideration based on Guangxi's international tourism market and image promotion for ASEAN. The research uses quantitative analysis to combine the external influences previously supported in the literature, cultural attachment, and Cognitive-Affective-Conative (CAC) three-dimensional perceived image framework into a more comprehensive model to conduct a hypothetical-deductive study. The results of the quantitative analysis consolidate to a certain extent that the internal constitutive conditions of perceived image are promoted by the CAC model and further test the influence of perceived image under the combined effect of internal and external factors. Meanwhile, it is confirmed that cultural attachment has a strong role in the formation of the perceived image of a specific tourist group. The overall conclusions of the research are rich in academic significance and represent a theoretical expansion of the destination marketing system in response to real-world needs.

Keywords: cultural attachment, ASEAN, perceived images, international student

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Introduction

Along with the increasingly rapid internationalization of higher education, the economic impact that international students can bring to their sojourned area is more widely appreciated. The tourism industry also derives some extra benefits from international students' travel activities, word-of-mouth communication, and other travel-related behaviors (Lee & King, 2016). International students are well equipped to become seasoned travelers, using their experiences and cultural sensations in their place of study as their perception (Brown, 2009). Meanwhile, senior travelers can often act as similar opinion leaders in terms of tourism image output and travel knowledge transfer (Milman, 1998). Therefore, in noticing the great role of international students in tourism, certain countries and regions are also adjusting their strategies to provide more intimate tourism services for them as much as possible (Jarvis, 2020).

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southwest China is one zone that expects to capitalize on international students to promote tourism. Guangxi's year-on-year increase in overseas students is attributed to the "Belt and Road Initiative agreement" advocated by the Chinese government, which promotes mutual recognition of academic qualifications between countries (Wu & Chan, 2019; Gong, 2018). Geographically, Guangxi is located in the south of China and has been one of the southward exports of the "Maritime Silk Road" since ancient times, as well as a major bridge for trade between China and ASEAN (Cheng, 2013). Due to this geographic advantage, international students from ASEAN have gradually become the main force in Guangxi's study-abroad market. With their living experience in Guangxi, these international students are highly susceptible to becoming "ambassadors" in the future, connecting Guangxi with their hometowns. Therefore, the issue of using international students to contribute to promoting tourism image has also been mentioned in Guangxi's tourism development strategy.

On the other hand, overseas Chinese are an attractive source group for tourism internationalization in Guangxi. It is essential to develop a targeted tourism image promotion strategy to market such high-quality tourist sources. It is worth noting that a significant number of ASEAN students studying in Guangxi are overseas Chinese. They are the cultural inheritors of the Chinese immigrants. Overseas Chinese become cultural groups with special influence throughout the world (Liu, 2005). The ASEAN member countries, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, for example, have sizable Chinese populations, which especially rank as the first race in Singapore (approximately 2,400,000) and the second in Malaysia (approximately 6,000,000) (Liu, 2021). These groups are probably potential quality customers to travel to China due to their attachment to and desire for the culture of their original land. Thanks to the life experience of studying abroad, Chinese students are likely to act as tourism ambassadors between overseas Chinese and China, bringing more overseas Chinese visitors from their homelands to their sojourn places. Therefore, the study of image composition with overseas Chinese students as a specific group can help Guangxi tourism marketers to gain insight into the process of image promotion.

The tourism marketers in Guangxi are aware of the potential tourism value of Chinese students with study experiences in Guangxi. However, there is still not enough evidence to analyze how their perceived image of Guangxi is formed. Studying tourists' perceived image of a destination is an important precursor to destination marketing (Hahm & Severt, 2018). Perceived images contribute to explaining tourists' perceptions and preferences for destinations, as well as their behavioral intentions related to tourism that arises during image perception (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Existing research extensively covers the perception of tourism destinations, emphasizing the pivotal role of perceived image in destination tourism development studies (Chu et al., 2022). To attract customers, destination marketers allocate substantial resources to craft an appealing tourism image for their target markets. Moreover, in theories of visitor decision-making and behavior, the perceived image of a destination significantly shapes tourists' travel choices (Correia et al., 2007).

In contrast to the common tourists, overseas Chinese students have a strong connection to China in terms of race and blood, and this natural cultural attachment helps them to scrutinize the image of the sojourn deeply. The dimension of cultural attachment has been emphasized and applied by several studies to explain the psychological constructs of international students in cross-cultural adaptation (Keller, 2013; Yap et al., 2017; Hong et al., 2013; Hong, 2017). Simultaneously, consistent with other explanatory dimensions of attachment structure, cultural attachment also has a deep relationship with cognition and affection (Japutra, 2020). It implies that cultural attachment is worth exploring as an influential factor in the composition of perceptual images that emphasize cognition and emotion.

Thus, our previous study (Luo et al., 2023) has emphasized and tested the influence of cultural attachment on the formation of perceived images. This research undertakes a new study that builds on this foundation and devotes particular attention to the role that other widely recognized external factors, together with cultural attachment, potentially have on perceived images. While our previous research utilizes cultural attachment to construct a model of the relationship with the internal dimensions of perceived image, it does not fully explore the totality of other impact factors involved. Hence, this research intends to fill this gap by constructing a comprehensive framework that incorporates multiple factors. Our purpose is to examine in depth the perceived images of Guangxi formed by overseas Chinese students from ASEAN during their sojourn to gain a more nuanced understanding of the influence of cultural attachment and other external factors on the formation of these perceptions.

Furthermore, to maintain the continuity of the research methodology, we employ the same dataset as in previous studies. However, the present research has a different focus. The previous study focuses on the operational definition of cultural attachment in terms of dimensionality and its one-factor influence on perceived image. In contrast, this research focuses on the comprehensive framework constructed with the perceived image as the main subject and the joint role of cultural attachment with other factors. It enables us to explore more objectively how the perceived image is concretely formed in the consciousness of tourists with characteristics of cultural attachment.

In a nutshell, on the basis of the above background, the research develops a study with the target group of overseas Chinese students from ASEAN who have the experience of studying in Guangxi, China. The goal is to explore their perceived images of Guangxi, China, formed by their sojourn in Guangxi. The research will leverage and incorporate the new dimension of cultural attachment to construct a relatively comprehensive new model. The quantitative analysis will also be completed through a questionnaire survey of 482 eligible respondents. The academic significance of this research lies in the construction of a more comprehensive framework for analyzing perceived images that incorporate the novel dimension of cultural attachment. Since cultural attachment can explain the psychological attachment behaviors of same-race tourists, this framework can provide a reference for studies targeting this type of tourist. In a practical meaning, the study of destination perceived image can provide a more detailed marketing strategy basis for Guangxi, which contributes to the promotion of its tourism image towards ASEAN to attract more overseas tourists.

Theoretical background

The perceived image of a tourist destination is a psychologically constructed representation that reflects tourists' evaluations of a destination in the process of establishing a connection with it (Liu et al., 2017). The composition of an image is a sensory expression of something objective that has been processed by the human brain and fed back to it. Initially, the impact of tourists' psychological recall and reflective behavior on the success of the transaction in purchasing tourism products attracts the attention of scholars (Agapito et al., 2017). This reflection makes us conscious that travelers have a changeable image awareness of potential destinations. Consequently, destination marketing theory extensively discusses the essential function of tourism image in a variety of spheres, such as conceptualization, composition, dimensionality expansion, impact analysis, and image competence (Stylidis, 2020; Kislali et al., 2016; Tasci et al., 2007). These related studies are considered to be valuable in tourism marketing to analyze and stimulate tourism behavior.

As early as the 1970s, basic theories regarding mental images have been noticed and studied. This period focuses on the subjective understanding of people's perceptions of areas that are not permanently inhabited (Hunt, 1975). In subsequent studies, a conceptual distinction between receptive and emissive images of destinations arose (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Among them, perceived image is interpreted more as a derivative concept of receptive image.

In the exploration of the internal influences of perceived image, psychologically based cognitive image and affective image are more widely recognized as the constituent elements of perceived image. Cognitive images are grounded in the collection of knowledge acquired during the various periods when a connection is created between visitors and destinations (Alcañiz et al., 2009; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). On the basis of cognitive awareness, tourists' preferences for destinations are expressed through affective images (Papadimitriou et al., 2013; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). A large body of existing research affirms that cognitive

images have a linear influence on affective images and use them as the basic architecture of perceived images. On this basis, conative image is further introduced as a role in explaining tourists' subsequent intentions and behaviors when composite perceived images are constructed. Both cognition and affection have the potential to drive further intentional behavior in travelers, which makes the internal composition of perceived images explained by the Cognitive-Affective-Conative (CAC) architecture sufficiently logical and explanatory (Agapito et al., 2013; Gartner, 1994).

On the other hand, the research of external influences on perceived images has become wealthier with the accumulation of time. As the mainstream, informational familiarity is acknowledged as the primary influencing factor of the perceived image by a larger number of core papers with dominant status (Kim, Lehto, & Kandampully, 2019; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Santana & Sevilha Gosling, 2018). Visitors receive information from multiple sources even before they arrive at their destination, including induced information (e.g., brochures and marketing campaigns), organic sources (e.g., family, friends, and colleagues), and autonomous sources (e.g., reports, news, and articles) (Santana & Sevilha Gosling, 2018). Cognitive and affective images are constantly constructed in the consciousness of visitors via these various information channels. After integrating information acquisition before (Smith et al., 2015), during (Kim, Stylidis, & Oh, 2019), and after (Yilmaz et al., 2009) the occurrence of tourism behavior, the relationship between information and perceived image is attributed to the same dimension of information familiarity and is widely supported by research in the field of tourism image. Subsequent studies have, to some extent, confirmed the direct or indirect effects of information familiarity on cognitive, affective, and conative images (Santana & Sevilha Gosling, 2018; Stylidis et al., 2020).

Moreover, the motivational drive is considered an influential contributor to the composition of the perceived image. In behavioral theory, motivation often helps people to make decisions. When people decide to travel to a destination, their motivation can usually shape their specific behavior (Hsu et al., 2009). Some studies continue to enrich the quantitative description of tourism motivation from various dimensions (Santana & Sevilha Gosling, 2018; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Tang, 2013). Among them, it is stated that the direct effect of tourism motivation can lead to linear results for both cognitive and affective images (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Slightly different from informational familiarity, tourists' motivation to destinations is often embodied by positive affective images as excellent mental constructs. On this basis, they further form broader cognitive images through purposeful attention (Santana & Sevilha Gosling, 2018). However, extra tourism motivation can also occur in the course of tourism activities, with heightened emotional aspects, such as interests, preferences, and favorable feelings. Tourism motivation reinforces travelers' conative images and intention to recommend or revisit the destination. It highlights the logical relationship between tourism motivation and the perceived image composition of the CAC structure.

With more awareness of the phenomenon that certain tourists spend long periods or repeatedly visit the same tourism destination, attachment theory has been gradually applied and enriched in the study of tourism image (Veasna et al., 2013; Silva et al., 2013). In behavioral research, attachment underscores cognition's crucial role as the framework through which

individuals shape and uphold their self-perceptions. It comprises cognitive, affective, and conceptual dimensions, representing powerful motivational and behavioral tendencies (Hong et al., 2013). With the deepening knowledge of human attachment psychology, scholars in the field of tourism have increasingly realized that re-travelers often have place attachment with emotional tendencies and intentions to their frequently visited destinations (Stylos et al., 2017). This dimension contributes to a further understanding of the perceived image composition of specific tourism groups. However, a further breakdown of particular tourist groups reveals that some of these tourists develop a sense of attachment simply because of a cultural or ethnic connection or emotional disposition to the destination (Ramkissoon, 2015). It means that using place attachment as an external influence does not fully reflect the true genesis of the perceived image of this type of tourist. Cultural attachment theory is a timely remedy to this deficiency. It has been used to explain the cross-cultural habits of study-abroad groups, further explaining the attractiveness of the destination culture in terms of safety, language proficiency, and acculturation (Hong et al., 2013). Cultural attachment has a psychological significance similar to other attachments, and this emphasis on interactions with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral interactions allows for a more specific logical relationship between cultural attachment in the CAC model and perceptual images (Luo et al., 2023).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated based on the above academic background developed by relying on the literature review.

H1 : Informational familiarity significantly influences overseas Chinese students' perceived images of Guangxi.

H1a: Informational familiarity significantly influences the cognitive image of overseas Chinese students.

H1b: Informational familiarity significantly influences the affective image of overseas Chinese students.

H1c: Informational familiarity significantly influences the conative image of overseas Chinese students.

H2 : Tourism motivation significantly influences overseas Chinese students' perceived images of Guangxi.

H2a: Tourism motivation significantly influences the cognitive image of overseas Chinese students.

H2b: Tourism motivation significantly influences the affective image of overseas Chinese students.

H2c: Tourism motivation significantly influences the conative image of overseas Chinese students.

H3 : Cultural attachment significantly influences the overseas Chinese students' perceived images of Guangxi.

H3a: Cultural attachment significantly influences the cognitive image of overseas Chinese students.

H3b: Cultural attachment significantly influences the affective image of overseas Chinese students.

H4c: Cultural attachment significantly influences the conative image of overseas Chinese students.

H4 : Overseas Chinese students' cognitive image significantly influences the affective image of Guangxi.

H5 : Overseas Chinese students' cognitive image significantly influences the conative image of Guangxi.

H6 : Overseas Chinese students' affective image significantly influences the conative image of Guangxi.

Research Methodology

The research constructs a comprehensive model incorporating a new dimension of cultural attachment, combining the theoretical logic and hypotheses described in the previous section. It attempts to analyze the composition of the perceived images of international students with blood and ethnic ties with sojourn in their country of origin.

The model has two levels of explanatory capacity. The first one is the interaction of the internal components of the perceived image, including the three dimensions of cognitive image, affective image, and conative image. The second hierarchy represents three external factors that potentially influence the perceived image: informational familiarity, tourism motivation, and cultural attachment. The conative image is an endpoint of the framework because the measurement of respondents' subsequent intention in constructing the perceived images is a major research objective. In conjunction with all hypotheses, the overview research framework is shown in Figure 1.

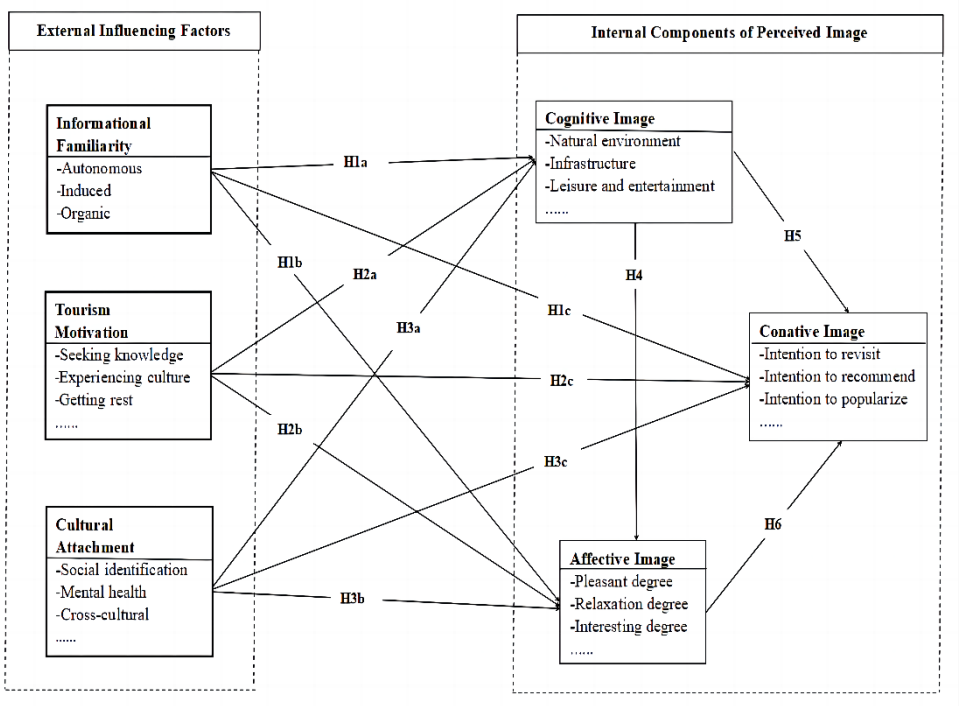

Figure 1 Research Framework

Measurement Scale

The questionnaire is designed with strict reference to the literature background as well as the guidance of the research framework. A total of 46 selected questions in 7 sections are designed. Of these, 39 selections are used to measure 6 dimensions of informational familiarity, tourism motivation, cultural attachment, cognitive image, affective image, and conative image. These selections are administered with the 7-point Likert scale to obtain more credible data, ranging from strongly disagree (1 point) to strongly agree (7 points). The remaining question items belong to socio-demographic characteristics. Table 1 illustrates the operational definitions of the dimensions and the number of items they contain.

The research utilizes SPSS26.0 as the data analysis instrument, which efficiently tests the reliability and validity of the collected data and performs correlation analysis under the influence of multiple factors. The main methods applied include independent sample t-test, factor analysis, reliability analysis, and correlation regression analysis. Data for all dimensions are treated as means for variables, a method that facilitates regression analysis and has been shown in previous literature to be effective in validating correlation results under the influence of a multifactorial variable structure (Santana & Sevilha Gosling, 2018; Tasci, 2007; Jeong & Holland, 2012).

Table 1 Dimensions Adapted from Literature Review

Dimensions	Operational Definition	No. of Items	Sources
Informational Familiarity	ASEAN Chinese students' secondary sources of information obtained, including autonomous, induced, and organic sources.	9	Santana and Sevilha Gosling (2018), Baloglu and McCleary (1999), and Beerli and Martín (2004).
Tourism Motivation	Chinese students from ASEAN who are living in Guangxi to generate the behavioral motivation for tourism.	5	Santana and Sevilha Gosling (2018), Beerli and Martín (2004), and Tang (2013).
Cultural Attachment	The process of adaptation from self-culture and to the culture of the settlement that Chinese students from ASEAN are constantly generating during their sojourn in Guangxi.	10	Hong et al. (2013), Hossain and Lamb (2020), and Keller (2013).
Cognitive Image	Perceived images produced by virtue of cognition during ASEAN Chinese students' sojourn in Guangxi.	5	Agapito et al. (2013), Gartner (1993), and Baloglu and McCleary (1999).
Affective Image	ASEAN Chinese students' perceptual images produced by virtue of their emotions during their sojourn in Guangxi.	5	Agapito et al. (2013), Gartner (1993), and Baloglu and McCleary (1999).
Conative Image	Perceived images produced by virtue of expected behaviors during ASEAN Chinese students' sojourn in Guangxi.	5	Agapito et al. (2013), Gartner (1993), and Woosnam et al. (2020).

As multiple interrelationships between variables are involved, the research applies the prior testing method suggested by Oksenberg et al. (1991) to further determine the confidence level of the question items. The method suggests collecting approximately 50 empirical respondents as the test sample and demonstrating the variability of the sample using the high and low score differentiation method and independent samples t-test to obtain the final results. The method can show the referenceable value of the sample from a differential perspective and has been affirmed by other researchers (Hair et al., 2005). The results of the prior test analysis are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 Prior Test Results of External Factor Variables (N = 50)

Variables	Indicators	t (L/H)	df (L/H)	p (L/H)	MD	N (L/H)	Mean (L/H)
IF1	Traditional media	-5.46/-5.46	24/14	0.00/0.00	-2.69	13/13	3.92/6.62
IF2	New media information	-3.02/-3.02	24/14	0.01/0.01	-1.54	13/13	5.15/6.69
IF3	Article information	-4.87/-4.87	24/15	0.00/0.00	-1.85	13/13	4.85/6.69
IF4	Documentary information	-3.46/-3.46	24/14	0.00/0.00	-1.85	13/13	4.62/6.46
IF5	Travel guides information	-3.16/-3.16	24/16	0.00/0.01	-1.31	13/13	4.69/6.00
IF6	Commercial marketing	-4.92/-4.92	24/19	0.00/0.00	-2.15	13/13	3.92/6.08
IF7	Information from family	-4.20/-4.20	24/20	0.00/0.00	-1.62	13/13	4.39/6.00
IF8	Information from friends	-2.86/-2.86	24/15	0.01/0.01	-1.54	13/13	4.69/6.23
IF9	Information from colleagues	-8.14/-8.14	24/19	0.00/0.00	-2.39	13/13	4.23/6.62
TM1	Searching knowledge	-10.42/-10.42	26/22	0.00/0.00	-3.14	14/14	3.14/6.29
TM2	Experiencing culture	-4.57/-4.57	26/20	0.00/0.00	-2.00	14/14	4.43/6.43
TM3	Getting rest	-7.32/-7.32	26/17	0.00/0.00	-2.50	14/14	3.79/6.29
TM4	Leaving study and working	-3.93/-3.93	26/20	0.00/0.00	-1.64	14/14	4.29/5.93
TM5	Enjoying the tour	-3.16/-3.16	26/19	0.00/0.01	-1.22	14/14	5.14/6.36
CA1	Attachment to the culture	-6.62/-6.62	24/17	0.00/0.00	-2.92	13/13	3.54/6.46
CA2	Sense of belonging to the destination	-6.61/-6.61	24/18	0.00/0.00	-3.00	13/13	3.38/6.38
CA3	Safety	-5.61/-5.61	24/22	0.00/0.00	-1.77	13/13	4.77/6.54
CA4	Destination tolerance	-6.00/-6.00	24/19	0.00/0.00	-2.23	13/13	4.23/6.46
CA5	Friendly local residents	-4.74/-4.74	24/20	0.00/0.00	-1.62	13/13	4.92/6.54
CA6	Health	-5.88/-5.88	24/18	0.00/0.00	-1.85	13/13	4.77/6.62
CA7	Integrating and adapting to culture	-4.41/-4.41	24/17	0.00/0.00	-1.62	13/13	4.54/6.15
CA8	Learning and using dialects	-5.98/-5.98	24/21	0.00/0.00	-2.54	13/13	3.54/6.08
CA9	Good communication	-4.51/-4.51	24/18	0.00/0.00	-1.69	13/13	4.38/6.08
CA10	Liking the culture	-5.45/-5.45	24/24	0.00/0.00	-1.46	13/13	5.00/6.46

Note: t (L/H): significant confidence intervals for high/low clusters, df (L/H): the degree of freedom of the high/low clusters, p (L/H): the degree of significance of the high/low clusters, MD: the difference of the mean values, N (L/H): the number of samples with high/low clusters, M (L/H): the mean values of high/low clusters, IF: informational familiarity, TM: tourism motivation, and CA: cultural attachment.

Table 3 Prior Test Results of Internal Factor Variables (N = 50)

Variables	Indicators	t (L/H)	df (L/H)	p (L/H)	MD	N (L/H)	Mean (L/H)
COG1	Natural environment	-4.82/-4.36	30/16	0.00/0.00	-1.58	14/18	5.14/6.72
COG2	Tourism facilities	-5.62/-5.29	30/20	0.00/0.00	-1.64	14/18	4.86/6.50
COG3	Entertainments and leisure	-6.65/-6.11	30/17	0.00/0.00	-1.65	14/18	4.57/6.22
COG4	Humanity environment	-3.81/-3.43	30/15	0.00/0.00	-1.52	14/18	4.93/6.44
COG5	Social atmosphere	-6.72/-6.25	30/19	0.00/0.00	-2.10	14/18	4.29/6.39
AFF1	Feeling pleasant	-5.40/-5.26	33/18	0.00/0.00	-2.01	17/18	4.76/6.78
AFF2	Feeling relaxing	-5.91/-5.86	33/29	0.00/0.00	-1.37	17/18	5.35/6.72
AFF3	Feeling interested	-4.81/-4.71	33/22	0.00/0.00	-1.37	17/18	5.29/6.67
AFF4	Feeling trendy	-5.43/-5.36	33/27	0.00/0.00	-1.41	17/18	4.70/6.11
AFF5	Feeling original	-5.65/-5.53	33/20	0.00/0.00	-1.66	17/18	5.18/6.78
CON1	To revisit	-8.70/9.01	27/14	0.00/0.00	-2.47	15/14	4.53/7.00
CON2	To recommend	-3.43/3.52	27/19	0.00/0.00	-1.18	15/14	5.47/6.64
CON3	To miss	-6.02/6.14	27/22	0.00/0.00	-1.76	15/14	4.67/6.43
CON4	To popularize	-6.16/6.30	27/20	0.00/0.00	-1.65	15/14	5.13/6.79
CON5	Good impression	-6.52/6.70	27/18	0.00/0.00	-2.19	15/14	4.60/6.79

Note: t (L/H): significant confidence intervals for high/low clusters, df (L/H): the degree of freedom of the high/low clusters, p (L/H): the degree of significance of the high/low clusters, MD: the difference of the mean values, N (L/H): the number of samples with high/low clusters, M (L/H): the mean values of high/low clusters, COG: cognitive image, AFF: affective image, and CON: conative image.

The prior test groups each set of variables according to 27% of the low scores versus 73% of the high scores, which has been demonstrated in previous studies to detect the explanatory capacity of variability in samples using mean values (Hair et al., 2005). The df represents the degrees of freedom of the question item, with the reference standard of df > 3. MD indicates the mean difference. At a criterion of $p < 0.05$, the results show significant differences between high and low subgroups for all variables. Therefore, based on the experience of previous studies (Esu, 2015; Shani et al., 2010), all question items can be retained for the sequential study.

Sample Structure

Since there are no previous exact statistics on the number of overseas Chinese students in Guangxi, the research first interviews the heads of the international departments of 18 universities in Guangxi that have the qualification to enroll international students by means of a telephone survey to conduct a more precise sampling design. The final estimate of the total sample population eligible for the research is approximately 9,600 people. Following the statistical suggestion of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the total population of 9,600 is due to a minimum of 368 respondents. However, the research doubles the number of questionnaires distributed from 368 to 736 to increase data accuracy.

In addition, the 18 universities are mainly concentrated in two regions of Guangxi. Considering the possible impact of geographical differences in tourist attractions on image formation, the research uses cluster random sampling to divide these universities into two

clusters by region. Of these, 5,400 (57%) overseas Chinese students are in the south-central region, and 4,200 (43%) are in the northern region. Therefore, the sample size is proportionally distributed among the two regions to provide a comprehensive representation of the distribution of respondents. The sampling framework is shown in Figure 2.

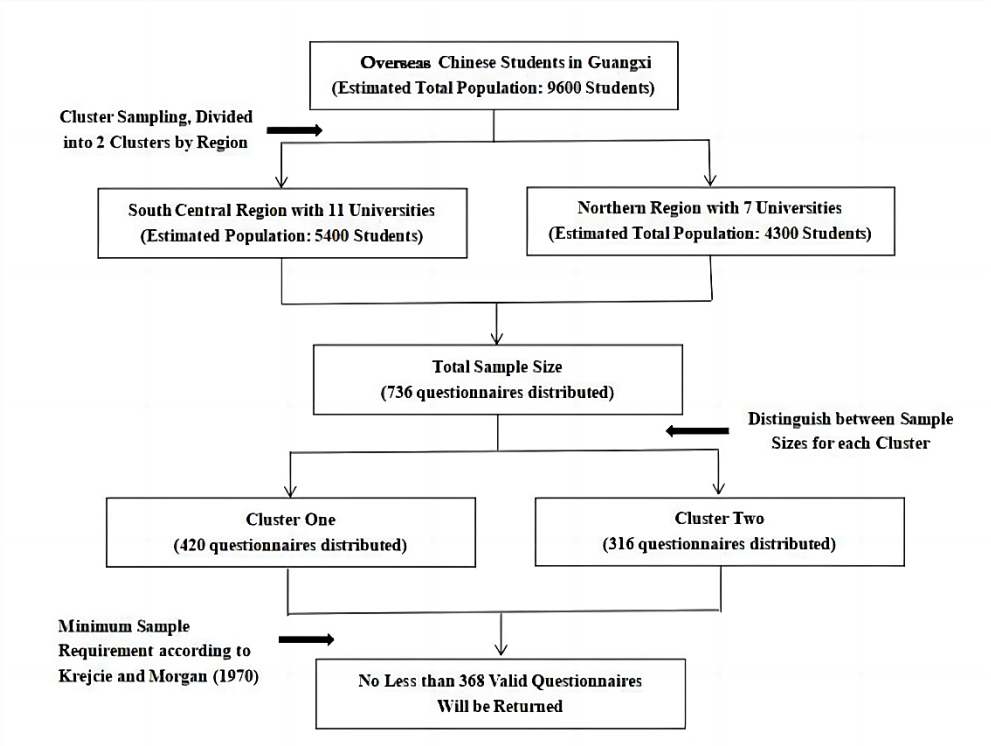

Figure 2 Sampling Framework

Due to the low geographic variability of the universities within each cluster, a random sample of three universities in each cluster is sufficiently representative. It permits convenient distribution and recovery of the questionnaires. The basic information of the six randomly selected universities is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Distribution of Selected Respondents

Region	No.	Universities	Selected Populations	Sample Size	Minimum Recovery	%
South Central Region	1	Guangxi University	1,100	242	121	57%
	2	Guangxi University of Finance and Economics	450	100	50	
	3	Beibu Gulf University	350	78	39	
Northern Region	1	Guilin University of Electronic Technology	750	164	82	43%
	2	Guilin Tourism University	500	108	54	
	3	Hezhou University	200	44	22	
Total			3,350	736	368	100%

Data collection is accomplished in a face-to-face manner. Paid by the researcher, the assistance of the international student coordinators of the six selected universities is requested due to the fact that they have the registration lists of overseas Chinese students, which are kept confidential. Questionnaire distribution through the coordinators allows direct positioning of the target respondents. The questionnaire started on November 15, 2022, and ended on November 30. Qualifying respondents are approached at international colleges of six universities by using a simple random sampling procedure. A total of 525 questionnaires are collected. Excluding 43 questionnaires with missing answers, 482 valid questionnaires are obtained for the quantitative analysis. The socio-demographic characteristics of the samples are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Structure of Respondents (N = 482)

Indicators	**Items**	%	**Items**	%
Gender	Male	47.44	Female	52.56
Age	18−22	68.30	23−25	29.57
	Over 25	2.13		
Nationality	Thailand	28.73	Vietnam	20.61
	Malaysia	20.12	Burma	13.49
	Laos	7.39	Others	9.66
University	Guangxi University	26.86	Guangxi University of Finance and Economics	16.57
	Beibu Gulf University	11.62	Guilin University of Electronic Technology	22.67
	Guilin Tourism University	14.28	Hezhou University	8.00
Specialty of study	Management	30.60	Linguistics	13.15
	Computing	30.31	Education	14.79
	Others	11.15		

Of the 482 questionnaires, there are more female respondents (52.56%) than male (47.44%). Most of these overseas Chinese students are from Thailand (28.73%), Vietnam (20.61%), and Malaysia (20.12%). Five of the eighteen universities have contributed a larger sample size. It is consistent with their academic rank and international educational visibility in Guangxi. Of these, Guangxi University, Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, and Beibu Gulf University are located in the cluster of south-central regions, and the number of questionnaires used is 256. Meanwhile, Guilin University of Electronic Technology, Guilin Tourism University, and Hezhou University are from the northern region, and the number of questionnaires used is 226. The percentage of returned available questionnaires to each university is also consistent with the sample size. Among all respondents, 18−22 years dominate (68.30%), which may be related to the internationalization of educational resources in Guangxi toward undergraduate degrees. In addition, the selection of specialties is most popular among students studying management (30.60%) and computing (30.31%).

Analysis

Data analysis starts with factor analysis. As suggested by Cudeck (2000), factor analysis can effectively test the correlation, variability, and stability among all question items to determine further the validity of the explanatory capacity of the overall variables. In addition, due to the new variable of cultural attachment introduced in the research, the inter-dimensional relationship of the quantitative model needs to be further examined. It needs to be tested by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Another important purpose of EFA is to retain the number of valid factors and reduce the number of question items that may produce errors (McDonald, 2014). The principal component factor extraction method is used here and takes the form of an oblique inversion to derive the factor values for each question item.

As recommended by Santana and Sevilha Gosling (2018), the validity of factor analysis can be verified from Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy. The reference criterion selected herewith, which is limited to a minimum value of KMO not less than 0.6, is comparable to previous literature (Bahkia et al., 2019). Above this range, it is possible to ensure that the factor loading values are compatible with the needs of further analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity is then referenced to the significance criterion of $p < 0.05$. After sequentially conducting EFA for each dimension, all variables satisfy the above standards.

EFA assists in sifting out the less explanatory items and stabilizes the structure of the dimension. Items with a factor loading greater than 0.6 are retained. Items like IF2, IF4, TM2, CA2, CA8, CA9, and AFF4 do not reach the above standard, so they are deleted. The remaining factor loading results are shown in Tables 6 and 7. The Explained Variance (EV) of all dimensions after removing items exceeds 50%, and the strength of inter-correlation among items is all greater than 0.3 (Asuero et al., 2006). The set structure is considered to have favorable validity.

Relying on the factor loading values of the remaining items informed by the validity analysis, the analysis can proceed to the subsequent step of calculating the convergent validity among the variables (Average Variance Extracted (AVE)), simple reliability (Cronbach's coefficient alpha), and composite reliability. As shown in Table 8, the calculated values of items retained in each dimension for both simple and composite reliability are higher than the required minimum value of 0.7. They represent a more stable internal consistency of the inter-dimensional constructs (Cronbach & Shavelson, 2004).

On the other hand, the convergent validity is calculated from the average variance of the retained items in each dimension. According to Hair et al. (2005), convergent validity indicators with reference values more than 0.5 should typically be retained, which can bring significant benefits to the model analysis. The AVE values of all dimensions in the research are within this reference range. Hence, the remaining items are further retained.

The research also employs PLS correlation analysis to test the path coefficients of each variable. Most dimensions exhibit significant path coefficients ($p < 0.001$, $p < 0.05$), except for

informational familiarity and tourism motivation's impact on the affective image and tourism motivation's effect on the conative image. The EV (R2) for cognitive, affective, and conative images as dependent variables is 0.610, 0.617, and 0.694, respectively. These values indicate that the regression analysis between dependent and independent variables yields explanatory results, validating the analysis conducted. Figure 3 illustrates the outcomes of the PLS path analysis.

Table 6 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Results of Retained Items

Items	Factor loading results					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
IF1	0.728					
IF3	0.701					
IF5	0.773					
IF6	0.744					
IF7	0.796					
IF8	0.841					
IF9	0.737					
TM1		0.703				
TM3		0.781				
TM4		0.784				
TM5		0.652				
CA1			0.639			
CA3			0.727			
CA4			0.775			
CA5			0.753			
CA6			0.781			
CA7			0.726			
CA10			0.694			
COG1				0.656		
COG2				0.673		
COG3				0.770		
COG4				0.781		
COG5				0.784		
AFF1					0.830	
AFF2					0.771	
AFF3					0.713	
AFF5					0.742	
CON1						0.824
CON2						0.749
CON3						0.749
CON4						0.765
CON5						0.777

Table 7 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Results of Validity Indicators

Variables	KMO	Bartlett's Test	df	EV	Inter-Correlation
IF	0.802	$p < 0.001$	21	62.01%	Retained items > 0.3
TM	0.702	$p < 0.001$	6	58.98%	Retained items > 0.3
CA	0.887	$p < 0.001$	21	53.18%	Retained items > 0.3
COG	0.806	$p < 0.001$	10	54.02%	Retained items > 0.3
AFF	0.766	$p < 0.001$	6	58.56%	Retained items > 0.3
CON	0.826	$p < 0.001$	10	59.82%	Retained items > 0.3

Note: IF: informational familiarity, TM: tourism motivation, CA: cultural attachment, COG: cognitive image, AFF: affective image, CON: conative image, KMO: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin, df: degree of freedom, and EV: Explained Variance.

Table 8 Reliability Test Results for Each Dimension

Dimensions	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Informational familiarity	7	0.794	0.797	0.580
Tourism motivation	4	0.703	0.709	0.536
Cultural attachment	7	0.845	0.848	0.532
Cognitive image	5	0.783	0.784	0.540
Affective image	4	0.747	0.747	0.602
Conative image	5	0.833	0.835	0.600

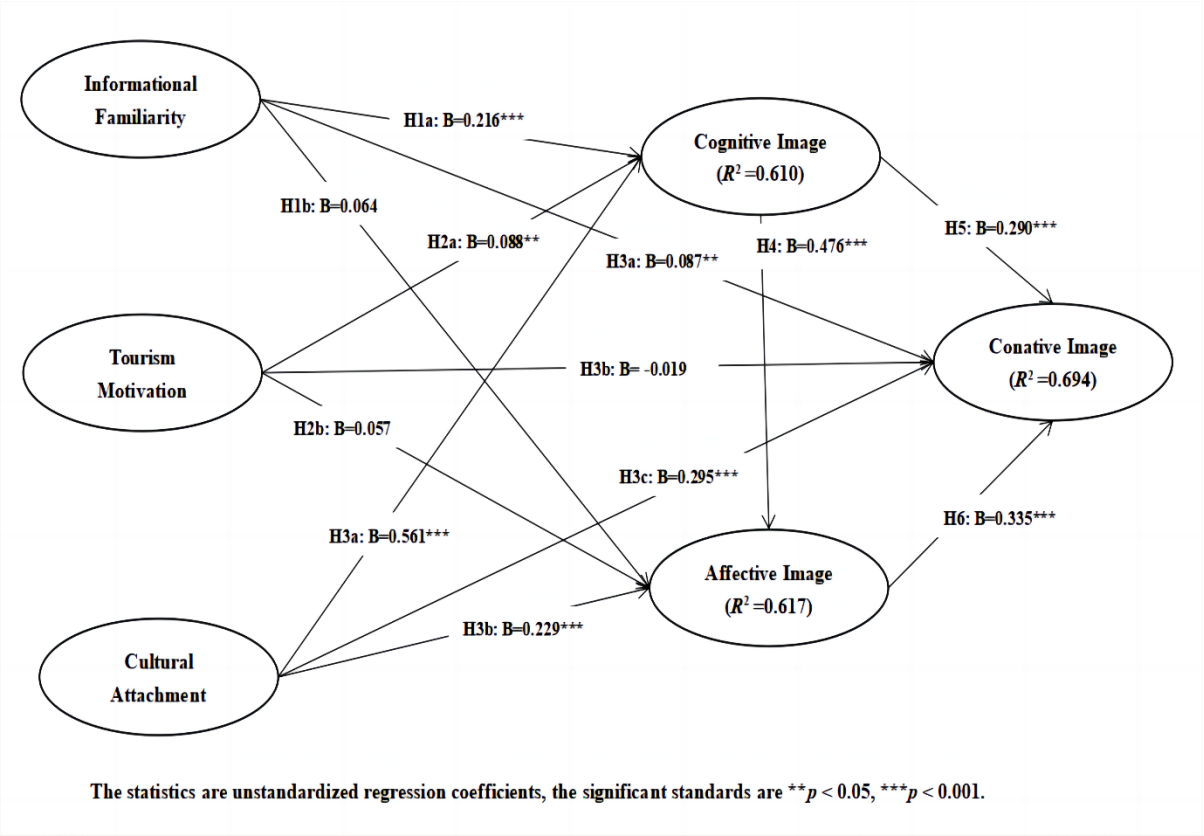

Figure 3 Results of Path Analysis

The research uses multiple regression analysis to assess the significant linear relationships between independent and dependent variables. The correlation data from this analysis serves to validate the earlier hypotheses. Key quantitative findings are presented in Table 9.

Table 9 Detailed Data Results for Regression Analysis

DV	IV	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	p	95.0% CI for B		VIF	R^2
		B	Std. E	β			Low	High		
COG	Constant	1.002	0.180		5.569	0.000	0.649	1.356		0.610
	IF	0.216	0.036	0.219	5.946	0.000	0.144	0.287	1.656	
	TM	0.088	0.031	0.104	2.875	0.004	0.028	0.148	1.596	
	CA	0.561	0.038	0.564	14.909	0.000	0.487	0.634	1.752	
AFF	Constant	1.262	0.176		7.169	0.000	0.916	1.607		0.617
	IF	0.064	0.036	0.068	1.794	0.074	-0.006	0.134	1.778	
	TM	0.057	0.029	0.070	1.948	0.052	-0.001	0.114	1.623	
	CA	0.229	0.043	0.241	5.307	0.000	0.144	0.314	2.567	
	COG	0.476	0.034	0.498	10.989	0.000	0.391	0.561	2.562	
CON	Constant	0.194	0.181		1.072	0.284	-0.162	0.549		0.694
	IF	0.087	0.035	0.085	2.494	0.013	0.018	0.156	1.790	
	TM	-0.019	0.029	-0.022	-0.668	0.505	-0.075	0.037	1.636	
	CA	0.295	0.043	0.285	6.816	0.000	0.210	0.380	2.718	
	COG	0.290	0.047	0.279	6.128	0.000	0.197	0.383	2.910	
	AFF	0.335	0.045	0.307	7.491	0.000	0.247	0.423	2.611	

Regression Equation:
COG = 1.002 + 0.216IF + 0.008TM + 0.561CA.
AFF = 1.262 + 0.064IF + 0.057TM + 0.229CA + 0.476COG.
CON = 0.194 + 0.087IF - 0.019TM + 0.295CA + 0.290COG + 0.335AFF.

Note: IF: informational familiarity, TM: tourism motivation, CA: cultural attachment, COG: cognitive image, AFF: affective image, CON: conative image, DV: dependent variable, IV: independent variable, t: regression t-coefficient, p: significance, CI: confidence interval, B: unstandardized coefficient, Std.E: standard error, β: standardized coefficient, and VIF: Variance Inflation Factor. R^2 indicates the explanatory capacity of the independent variable for the dependent variable.

The comprehensive analysis reveals that the values of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) are below 3 in the path analysis for all dimensions. The result suggests the absence of high correlation issues between dimensions, affirming the credibility of the research findings (Hair et al., 2005). Additionally, the standardized coefficients (β) for informational familiarity influencing cognitive and conative images stand at 0.219 and 0.085, respectively, with corresponding t-values of 5.946 and 2.494. The effect of informational familiarity as an independent variable on the cognitive image ($p < 0.001$) and conative image ($p < 0.05$) is significant. Hence, H1a and H1c are confirmed. However, the effect of informational familiarity on the affective image is insignificant in the results, so H1b does not persist. Therefore, H1 is partially supported by the effect of informational familiarity on perceived images.

In contrast, in the test of the effect of tourism motivation on the three internal factors of perceived image, only the effect against the cognitive image is significant ($p < 0.01$, $t= 2.875$). It means that H2a is supported while H2b and H2c are not. It is noteworthy that tourism motivation even has a significantly negative effect on conative image ($\beta= -0.022$, $t= -0.668$).

In particular, the effect of cultural attachment on perceived image is the most significant among the three factors of external influence on perceived image discussed in the model. The effects of cultural attachment on the cognitive, affective, and conative images are all within

the significant criteria $p < 0.001$ with t-values of 14.909, 5.307, and 6.816, respectively. Thus, H3, H3a, H3b and H3c are validated.

Moreover, the remaining three hypotheses (H4, H5, and H6) are also validated. The interplay of the three factors within the perceived image is more stable. Both the influence of cognitive image on the affective image ($\beta = 0.498$, $t = 10.989$) and conative image ($\beta = 0.279$, $t = 6.128$) or the influence of affective image on conative image ($\beta = 0.307$, $t = 7.491$) are at relatively higher significant levels ($p < 0.001$).

The research results validate the proposed research model to some extent, and the analysis supports most of the hypotheses regarding the relationship between the dimensions. Firstly, the new concept of cultural attachment focused on and incorporated in this model is confirmed to be highly correlated with the CAC in perceived image architecture previously suggested by Agapito et al. (2013). Due to cultural homogeneity, tourists have a receptive perception of the tourism and culture of their national country of origin (Sánchez-Rivero & Pulido-Fernández, 2011). This psychological attachment tendency is ethnoculturally centripetal.

In contemporary times, when immigrant culture is highly developed, the test of the relationship between cultural attachment and tourism image is beneficial in helping tourists with a desire to return to their country or homeland to achieve their tourism objectives. To some extent, this is a further requirement for tourism market segmentation. While developing compatible tourism products, tourism service providers should focus on the root appeal contained in a cultural attachment to broaden the channels for cross-cultural adaptation and the destination tourism image. The results of the hypotheses are shown in Table 10.

Table 10 Hypothetical Results

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Result
H1			Partial supported
H1a	Informational familiarity	Cognitive image	Supported
H1b		Affective image	Not Supported
H1c		Conative image	Supported
H2			Partial supported
H2a	Tourism motivation	Cognitive image	Supported
H2b		Affective image	Not Supported
H2c		Conative image	Not Supported
H3			Supported
H3a	Cultural attachment	Cognitive image	Supported
H3b		Affective image	Supported
H3c		Conative image	Supported
H4	Cognitive image	Affective image	Supported
H5	Cognitive image	Conative image	Supported
H6	Affective image	Conative image	Supported

In addition, the test results confirm the valid role of the cultural attachment dimension, enabling a wealthier and more precise study of destination images. Previous studies have focused on place attachment and community attachment and the behaviors of domestic

tourists or local residents related to tourism activities (Silva et al., 2013; Stylidis, 2020). Cultural attachment provides a further valuable reference from the perspective of internationalization and culturally homogenous interactions. Among the three factors influencing the CAC structure of the perceived image, the influence of cultural attachment on the cognitive image is more significant ($\beta = 0.564$, $t = 14.909$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, tourists like international students can better understand the overall environment of the destination in the process of having a predisposition for culture. It helps to deepen their knowledge about the destination and serves the purpose of promotion.

The research continues to examine the important dimensions of informational familiarity and tourism motivation recommended in previous studies. Some results are consistent with previous findings, although some hypotheses have not been confirmed (Santana & Sevilha Gosling, 2018). With deeper contact with the destination, the experienced traveler's perception of the ground tends to override some of the antecedent effects of perceived image formation. Some re-tourists form composite perceptual images by virtue of their cognitive and emotional connections to the destination, which are often hardly influenced by other sources of information. They do not need to rely on separate motivations to drive behavior. Hence, it means that when dealing with this customer segment, it is more important for tourism service providers to focus on enhancing the visitor's experience during each trip.

On the other hand, the significant effective correlation of the three factors within the CAC of the perceived image is reconfirmed to be consistent with the previous literature (Agapito et al., 2013). The perception of the environment, atmosphere, and facilities related to the place of residence contained in the cognitive image significantly influences overseas Chinese students' emotional and action responses to the tourism and culture of the place of residence. Similarly, the interests and preferences represented by the affective image also influence the composite image formed by overseas Chinese students' further intentions. This result further suggests the importance of reinforcing perceptions of tourism. In other words, Guangxi should further enhance its services for overseas Chinese students in the process of tourism promotion to improve their tourism experience during their stay. This subliminal image will provide crucial persuasive messages to promote tourism image to other travelers in the future.

As the endpoint of the model, the examination of the conative image is crucial. The research conclusion on overseas Chinese students is ultimately to make them a part of the internationalization of Guangxi's tourism image. Among all the dimensions that have an impact on the conative image, the data are affective image ($\beta = 0.307$), cultural attachment ($\beta = 0.285$), cognitive image ($\beta = 0.279$), and informational familiarity ($\beta = 0.085$) in descending ranking. All effects are significantly positive, except tourism motivation, which produces a small negative correlation. The validation results extend the discussion of factors related to the perceived image formed by travelers' intentions and support the views of some previous studies (Agapito et al., 2013; Pike & Ryan, 2004). It is worth mentioning that the important role of cultural attachment in the volitional feedback on perceived image composition is likely to lead to its application to other aspects of the study of travelers' behavior.

Conclusion

The tourism image holds significance within marketing strategies. It embodies the impression and perception of a destination or tourism offering, directly impacting tourist decision-making. A favorable and captivating tourism image can draw in more tourists, amplifying the destination's allure and visibility. Cultivating a positive image through marketing tactics and promotional endeavors stimulates tourism expansion, bolsters visitor numbers, and fortifies a destination's competitiveness. Moreover, a strong tourism image fosters enduring tourist loyalty and encouraging repeated selections of the destination or product, which underpins sustained business growth. After realizing the above values, this research further comprehensively constructs a framework for the composition of perceived images that includes the dimension of cultural attachment. From the results, this research is a valuable reference and contribution in both academic and practical fields.

In the academic field, the research is an attempt at interdisciplinary theoretical integration, relying primarily on psychology's in-depth exploration of cultural connections in response to attachment theory to go towards the psychological construction of a perceived image for a specific tourist. To a certain extent, it can help to analyze the research on tourist images based on the need for market segmentation. For tourism development, the research is specific to the particular object of cultural attachment groups. It can help to develop the economic relations in tourism constructed by same-race or same-culture travelers from different countries. It provides a research reference for practitioners working to promote this type of tourism market. It is worth noting that the respondents selected for the research are overseas Chinese students, which is in line with Guangxi's overseas strategic purpose for image promotion.

The limitation of the research is that the selection of respondents is strictly controlled to be overseas Chinese students from ASEAN, and while this is a precise aid to marketability, whether these empirical groups can be aligned with the rest of the Chinese diaspora should be studied further. In conclusion, the research incorporates a new dimension of cultural attachment and designs a more comprehensive framework of perceived image composition based on the CAC model, which has not been fully discussed in previous studies. The research combines the scientific theories of tourism and psychology and self-innovation while validating some previous ideas. Although the interviewed group has some limitations, the research still has sufficient academic reference value.

In the future, subsequent studies can select international students from different geographical regions or different identity backgrounds for mediated or moderated comparative analysis on the basis of this study. It can also conduct different research practices to further explore the role of international students as a group in perceived tourism image communication.

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