

Article

Elucidating International Travelers' Tourism Image of Taiwan: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract: Although Western alien visitors to Taiwan have a unique, well-informed perspective of what appeals to tourists from their countries, little research has been conducted to assess their insights, representing a significant research gap. To fill this gap, this study aims to elucidate how international tourists perceive Taiwan as a tourist destination by collecting detailed qualitative data via in-depth interviews of twenty-four international expatriates. This study illustrated the image differences before and after the visit of international tourists by analyzing the dimensions of tourists' consensus maps and the changes in their perception of the natural, social, cultural, gourmet food, and Aboriginal image of Taiwan. This study provides a better understanding of how international tourists in Taiwan view its current and potential appeal as a tourist destination, so as to identify ways of attracting new tourists from their cultures. Patterns emerged that suggest new approaches for promoting Taiwan tourism and tourism sustainability which might not occur to Taiwanese tourism professionals due to the interviewees' unique points of view. This research concludes that the application of cultural promotion strategies, planned tour packages, and improvement of the image of nature, culture, society, food, and Aboriginal people in Taiwan will thereby improve the overall satisfaction of international tourists, building online image, and forming e-word-of-mouth.

Keywords: tourism image; international travelers; in-depth interview; expatriates; qualitative approach; Taiwan



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1. Introduction

Tourism resources are regarded as national treasures, because such resources create a national image and attract tourists from all over the world to spend a lot of time and money to visit the destinations. Therefore, sustainable tourism is extremely important, and tourist destinations, ranging from tiny villages such as Sambi Village, Indonesia [1] to cities in Turkey [2] and the United Kingdom [3] to entire nations such as the Philippines [4] and New Zealand [5], are making efforts to promote themselves for the purpose of increasing this income in their own regions. Many countries, for instance, seeking to enhance their own nations' reputations, engage in what Anholt terms nation branding [6], with promotional campaigns engineered to provide a specific set of images related to the country, complete with logos and slogans analogous to those used for consumer products.

Through the tourism activities of tourists, tourism output value can be created and destination employment opportunities can be increased. Due to the development of tourism, countries have relaxed entry restrictions and simplified tourist visa procedures. Therefore, as long as tourists book a flight ticket and a hotel and carry simple luggage when they go abroad, it is as convenient as traveling domestically. In order to attract more international tourists, the destination managers make efforts to look for the destination attributes,

develop marketing campaigns, and construct destination images [7]. From a marketing perspective, image is an important antecedent of satisfaction and loyalty [8]. As such, research on tourism image and destination image has been increasing in frequency. The majority of studies have focused on the effects of destination image from the international tourists' point of view [9,10], tourists' statements about their experiences [11], or interviews with or surveys of tourists, mostly either on site [12] or after travel [13,14]. In the practical realm, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) argue that destination promotion through various platforms forms the essence of a potential tourist or traveler's first impression of the induced image that the DMO intends to use to characterize the promotion as a whole [15].

Urry [16] pointed out that the tourism industry is the important key to drive other industries, not just to promote tourism, through the visual dimension to experience our places, but also to explore modern tourism culture, to understand the tourists' behavior. Despite the notable potential for international tourists in Taiwan, tourists from Western countries make up less than a fifth of the total visitor count [17]. This suggests that Western tourists are not as aware of Taiwan's appeal as a tourism destination as Asian tourists are, and they do not have a positive tourism image of the country. Indeed, Taiwan may have a relatively negative reputation in the minds of potential visitors. However, the issue of international tourists has attracted the attention of many scholars. Chi et al. [18] proposed that the decision-making of tourists' travel destinations is not only based on visa policies, but also the quality of tourism services. Makoni et al. [19] pointed out that due to governments' and other tourism stakeholders' planning reasons, resource allocation, and mobilization, accurate visitor forecasting is critical. Shao et al. [20] analyzed the international tourist arrival data from 221 countries or regions from 1995–2018 to explore the structure and evolution of international tourism flows. The result showed that international tourism flows are increasing due to the network density. Therefore, Taiwanese authorities and other tourism stakeholders also need to consider the change in image from international tourists' perspective.

Understanding the determinants of destination image helps destination managers to design attractive destination images which may attract more tourists to visit [21]. However, a gap exists regarding how the tourist's image differs before and after the visit. To address this gap, this study aims to elicit insights, suggestions, criticisms, and observations on the entire Taiwan experience from a tourist's viewpoint, to better understand what appeals to international tourists, what would attract new and repeat visitors similar to themselves, their opinions on what Taiwan's tourism professionals and policy makers are doing well, what could be improved to bring more international tourists to the country, and, after bringing in more tourists, how to strike a balance between tourism and sustainable management. Furthermore, based on responses received during the in-depth interviews, patterns may emerge which may suggest themed tours that could be designed specifically to appeal to certain types of international tourists; such themes might not occur to members of Taiwanese society due to their different point of view. Understanding tourists' tourism image and its formation will also help to build a better sustainable marketing model and also meet the SDG business model.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Types of Place Image: Destination Image and Tourism Image

In general, as already observed by Styliadis et al. [22], place image is built up from all the impressions and thoughts gathered by an individual on a particular location. The term is not limited in definition to articulate what sort of person holds a place image, nor what sort of location is being imagined. Destination image adds specificity to the idea of place image by dint of considering a place that has not yet been visited, but which the image holder intends to visit [23]. More precision is brought with the term tourism image, in that it further articulates that the purpose of the travel to a destination is to engage in tourism activities [24], although the term also includes one's image of tourism during and following tourism experiences. In short, the three terms are closely related, have a great deal of

overlap, and vary mostly in their level of specificity; the aspects of intended travel and the purpose of such travel bring a group of associations into the concept [25,26]. Because of the significant amount of overlap between these terms, then, studies examining all three concepts are considered for what they may contribute to the current study's background information, keeping in mind the distinctions between them and the implications these distinctions may hold for the study. Lee and Jan [27] stated that tourism image can be the components of cognitive, affective, and conative images; that is, an important antecedent of tourism image can be tourists' involvement, before, during, or after the trip, because any stimulus can influence tourists' image. Lee et al. [28] indicated that cognitive, affective, and conative images of tourists post-trip were significantly higher than their pre-trip values.

2.2. The Formation of Tourism Image

Tourism images are complex, formed from many sources encountered in a tourist's life [25]. Scholars have attempted to explore the formation and impact of tourism image. Xiao et al. [29] constructed tourist images that were linked with destinations by differentiated marketing strategies, tourists' diverse perspectives, and photo sharing. However, the tourism image is not all positive, and it is likely to be negative due to certain factors. Xu et al. [30] found that when a tourist destination suffered from a negative image, a cute mascot with local cultural meaning can promote the destination and help restore the destination's image. Abbasi et al. [31] assessed how to successfully use social media to attract consumers' attention, promote their destinations, interact with destinations, build e-word-of-mouth, and achieve positive tourism images. Therefore, the generation of a tourism image is diverse.

The media that bring an impression into a consumer's conscious or unconscious awareness vary widely. For instance, they often include mass media such as motion pictures, television programs, newspaper and magazine content, online material ranging from corporate media to personal travel accounts, print books, radio, and music videos [11]. More traditional means of transmitting an impression that forms an element of one's tourist image of a particular place can include face-to-face conversations, photograph or home-movie sharing, letters, telephone conversations, billboards, etc. [32,33]

Another way of organizing the different sources of information informing one's tourism image is to articulate a difference between the intended audiences the information was created for. In the case of advertisement in any media, the intended audience is frequently more specific, though some commercial messages are for a broader audience. Advertising people who create these contextualized ads frequently intend to appeal to a specific audience, including content that the audience can easily relate to; that is to say, that is meant to have a more specific connection to the audience's lives than it would for other consumers [34]. According to Lee and Bai [30], material such as advertising, intended to entice partakers, can be termed induced agents. Other information is more editorially neutral, providing information rather than trying to attract or persuade others. Alternately, information that one receives about a tourism location might not be intended by the material's creator as the point of the material at all, but only included for 'local color' or simply because some works need a setting of some kind; nonetheless, the way the location is presented can betray unconscious attitudes about the location and convey a value judgment or an atmosphere which might be either attractive or unattractive to the consumer. In such material, which Lee and Bai [35] describe as autonomous agents, information about a place can be provided in a 'by the way' manner—for instance, when a scene in a Korean soap opera takes place on location, the location is not the focus of the scene. News reports represent another sort of autonomous agent, which can color a viewer's perceptions in a more convincing way, since they are perceived as being unbiased [35]; for instance, reports of a serious accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in March of 2011 brought about a steep decline in leisure tourists' visits to Japan [36], and sudden crises such as the outbreak of COVID-19 have also affected the tourism image [37]. Tourism image is dynamic. Lee and Jan [27] found that personal, culture, and place involvement

are the antecedents of involvement that positively affected the tourism image. The initial image is generated pre-visit; destination construct depends on on-site experience of the destination. Lee et al. [28] compared the effects of pre- and post-trip differences in tourism image (including cognitive, affective, and conative components) on Aboriginal cultural identity in Taiwan. Accordingly, on-site tourism experiences can offer great significance for shaping and changing tourists' image.

2.3. International Travelers' Tourism Image

Tourism image can be one of the most important concepts that influence international tourists' destination choices, identity, and behavioral intention. Scholars have discussed factors, attributes, or attractiveness that influence international tourists' image. However, today is an era of rapid information transmission, and elements such as gourmet food, fashion, and beautiful scenery in film and television dramas have become the driving force for international tourist travel [38]. Mak [11] analyzes the cognitive attributes of destination image based on photos in the English blogs of international tourists after visiting Taiwan and photos of national tourism organisations (NTO) to express the affective destination image attributes of the place, and formed an online destination image. Moreover, Chang and Mak [39] indicated the dimensions of gastronomic image from international tourists' perspective. Accordingly, the attributes and uniqueness of the destination become the competitive advantage of the destination. However, the international tourists' tourism image differences before and after the visit are unclear. Thus, elucidating this issue is worthwhile.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Sites

Interviews were conducted at three locations in this study: Elephant Mountain (Xiangshan) trail in Taipei, Xiangtian Lake in Miaoli, and Chiayi, all of which are described below.

The Elephant Mountain (Xiangshan) trail is located in Xinyi District in the southeast of the Taipei Basin, with an altitude of 183 m and a total length of 1450 m, named for its shape resembling the head of an elephant, which offers magnificent views of the landmark Taipei 101. It has the most precious ecological features in the urban area of Taipei, with a wide variety of wild animals, making it an ecological paradise, so it has become a good place for residents and tourists to visit the mountains and enjoy leisure time outdoors. Moreover, Elephant Mountain is a perfect place for first-time Taipei visitors, who can see a great view of Taipei's downtown area there, because it is very convenient to get from the city to the destination.

Xiangtian Lake is located in Miaoli, with an altitude of 738 m. It is home to the largest tribe among the Saisiyah (Aboriginals in Taiwan). Pasta'ai, the most important ritual of the Saisiyah, has profound historical significance and provides an original mysterious atmosphere. Tourists visit the ritual with piety and respect for the Aboriginal culture, and work together to preserve the original appearance of the Pasta'ai of the Saisiyah Festival [27]. Aboriginal culture is one of Taiwan's most distinctive cultures, and the Saisiyah Pasta'ai Festival in Miaoli shows the cultural value of this ethnic group; thus, the Pasta'ai Festival has also gradually developed from a ceremony to a sightseeing opportunity. Due to the intervention of society, government administrative units at all levels promote it as a sightseeing plan. Every year, a large number of tourists and media crowd into the ceremony [27,40,41].

Chiayi City is located in southern Taiwan; the whole city is located north of the Tropic of Cancer, in the heart of the Chia-Nan plain. It is the starting point of the Alishan Forest Railway, which has prospered in the past due to the development of forestry. Due to its very early development history, many historic sites remain in urban areas, forming important tourism resources. Alishan Forest Railway in Chiayi is Taiwan's alpine forestry railway system, still in operation. It was built during the era of Japanese rule. Due to its

special historical background, it has attracted quite a few international tourists to come here for pilgrimages.

Elephant Mountain, Xiangtan Lake, and Chiayi City each have their own unique characteristics to attract international tourists. The researchers conducted site investigations on the spot and selected them as the study areas.

According to data released by the Tourism Bureau [16], international tourists have the highest rate of stay in northern Taiwan; the second-highest is central and southern Taiwan, and there are also a small number of international tourists who are particularly interested in Aboriginal culture, so the research team went to Xiangtan Lake to interview international tourists.

3.2. Data Collection

In-depth interviews were employed to collect the data. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Taiwan. The window of time during which the interviews were conducted was between November 2017 and August 2018. In order to better understand the changes in the tourism image of international tourists post-travel, the research team continued to follow up with respondents via social media, such as Facebook Messenger, LINE, and e-mail. The participants were international tourists in Taiwan from non-Chinese-speaking countries. Two criteria were used to select participants for the interviews: first, the international tourists' first time visiting Taiwan; the participants in this group were selected from travel agencies; second, the international tourists who are non-Chinese speakers. According to data released by the Tourism Bureau [16], international tourists to Taiwan hit a new high in 2019, reaching 11.84 million passengers, of which about 2.71 million were from mainland China and nearly 9.14 million were non-mainland-China tourists. The composition of tourists to Taiwan is becoming more and more diverse. In the highly competitive tourism environment around the world, Taiwan is steadily striving for more diverse tourist sources. Therefore, this study excludes Chinese-speaking tourists with high homogeneity.

This study explores the changes in international tourists' image of Taiwan before and after their visit, and conducts in-depth interviews with international tourists who visited Taiwan. The sampling is purposive sampling. The sample size is 24 international tourists, including 12 males and 12 females. The interviews were conducted in English by a native English-speaking scholar. The average sample size is 28, with a minimum of five and maximum of 65 respondents [42]. Table 1 lists the respondents for this study. All the interviews conducted by the researcher lasted from 45 to 60 min and were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Initially, a brainstorming session was held to attain an overarching group of topics or questions from which to choose. These ideas were then organized by type, including groups of notions that were either "optional" or "unsuitable". This process also helped to determine the project's study questions, which in turn became the organizing principle for the questions scheduled to be asked of the respondents. Since the study questions included the opportunity to provide insights and suggestions as well as opinions and criticisms, requests to comment on each of the main topics were built into the interview items.

3.3. Locating Interview Subjects and Arranging the Interviews

In this study, interviews were conducted at three locations, and the sampling was conducted by purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews. The interview data of the 24 respondents were transcribed verbatim and coded after confirmation. For analysis, the interview transcripts were first divided into different paragraphs and given a set of codes. For example, in the code P2-S3-L4-7, P2 represents the second respondent, S3 represents the third page of the interview transcript, and L4-7 represents the fourth to seventh lines. Then the ideas that the respondents wanted to convey were analyzed in the abstract to form a consensus map which provided the respondents as the consensus constructs would be most likely to provide frank and unbiased observations for the study.

Table 1. Profile of the participants.

Participants	Gender	Age	Nationality	Education	Location	Date
P01	female	27	Holland	Graduate School or higher	Taipei Xiangshan	5 November 2017
P02	female	47	South Africa	Graduate School or higher	Chiayi	11 March 2018
P03	male	62	South Africa	University or college	Chiayi	11 March 2018
P04	female	60	South Africa	University or college	Chiayi	11 March 2018
P05	male	35	Canada	University or college	Chiayi	11 March 2018
P06	male	26	USA	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	28 April 2018
P07	male	25	USA	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	5 May 2018
P08	female	25	Japan	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	5 May 2018
P09	male	26	USA	Graduate School or higher	Taipei Xiangshan	5 May 2018
P10	female	36	The Philippines	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	5 May 2018
P11	male	34	Singapore	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	5 May 2018
P12	female	34	Indonesia	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	5 May 2018
P13	male	54	Germany	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	5 May 2018
P14	male	20	Germany	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	5 May 2018
P15	female	20	Switzerland	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	19 May 2018
P16	female	35	Malaysia	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	26 May 2018
P17	female	31	Malaysia	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	26 May 2018
P18	male	29	Australia	University or college	Taipei Xiangshan	26 May 2018
P19	male	45	Australia	Graduate School or higher	Taipei Xiangshan	26 May 2018
P20	female	20	Canada	High school	Taipei Xiangshan	26 May 2018
P21	male	20	France	High school	Taipei Xiangshan	26 May 2018
P22	male	20	Germany	High school	Taipei Xiangshan	26 May 2018
P23	female	20	Australia	High school	Taipei Xiangshan	26 May 2018
P24	female	23	Japan	University or college	Miaoli	20 August 2018

3.4. Conducting the Interviews

In order to gain a detailed understanding and analysis of the responses provided by the interviewees, the interviews were recorded with high audio quality. Free-form responses were also organized and analyzed in hopes of determining patterns of ideas that, combined, could provide fresh approaches to the questions of promotion and tourism image.

After the interviews were concluded and their recordings verified as successful and reasonably audible, the speakers' words were transcribed in script format (transcribed verbatim). The semi-structured nature of the interviews helped to keep track of the responses to specific questions, while other more spontaneous comments were kept separate until all such input was considered and could be organized using a tagging system. These responses were organized thematically. Multiple tags could be applied to the same remarks; for example, a comment could be classified as both a criticism and a suggestion. In this way, respondents' remarks may belong to multiple groups and be considered in different aspects.

3.5. Forming the Consensus Map

The research team checked and discussed all constructs one by one. Then, according to Zaltman and Coulter's [43] concepts of originator construct, connector construct, and destination construct, we initially drew a construction consensus map, and "converged" the construct according to the relevant constructs mentioned by one quarter ($n \geq 6$) of the total number of respondents. Because of the heterogeneity and uniqueness of the interviewees in this study, the team also included meaningful constructs into the consensus in the figure. This map can help us understand the respondents' thoughts or changes on Taiwan's tourism image before, during, and after the trip.

4. Findings

4.1. The Change in Natural Image

Figure 1 shows the consensus map of changes in the natural image of participants. The initial natural image consists of an island country with natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons, floods, and landslides. Eight participants indicated that they heard from the news that Taiwan has frequently suffered from natural disasters.

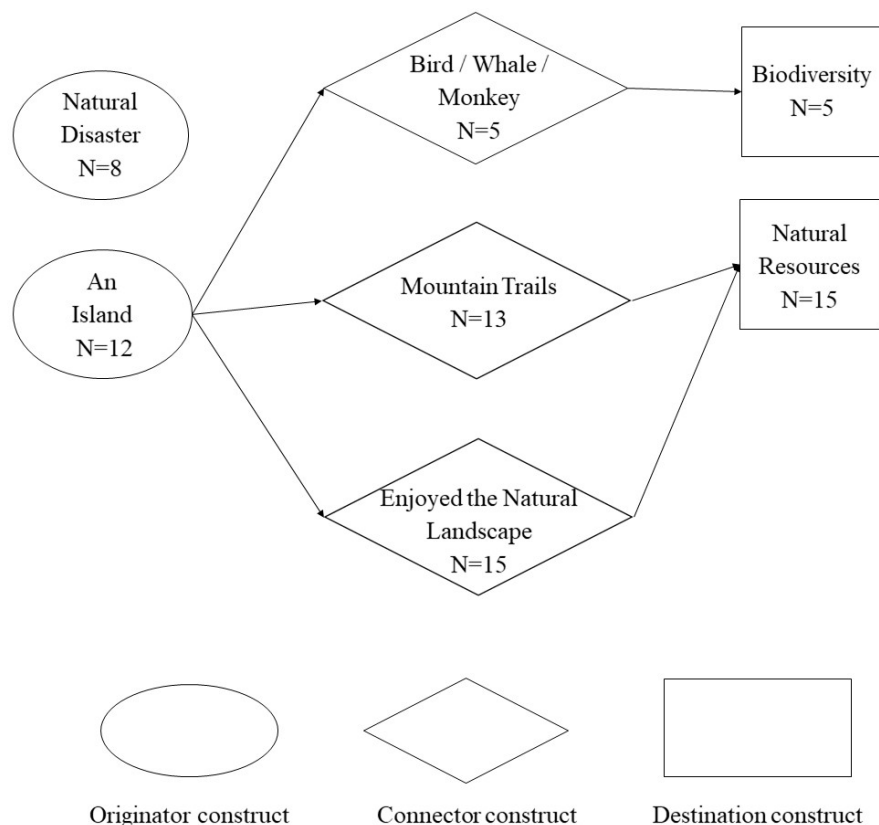


Figure 1. The consensus map of the change in natural image.

I know Taiwan is an island, from the news that we know some natural disasters in Taiwan such as earthquakes, typhoons, floods, and landslides. (P03-S1-L15-16, P14-S1-L04-05)

Due to Taiwan's location, climate, topography, and high forest coverage rate, it has become an ecological land for animals and plants. Many wildlife sanctuary areas have been established in Taiwan. Therefore, wildlife watching attracts international tourists. Five participants indicated that Taiwan is a great place to observe wild animals.

This was really a meaningful tour, you can observe monkeys up close, as if you are in a natural environment. (P02-S2-L12-14)

It was a wonderful tour to do the bird watching, I took some photos of birds, I saw many species, it's worth a visit. (P09-S3-L19-21)

The whale watching activity in Hualien was a great activity. I think this itinerary was very in-depth and let me to see the beauty of Taiwan. (P16-S4-L24-25)

Many hiking trails have been built all over Taiwan. Tourist viewing spots are planned well. Thirteen participants indicated that they were amazed by Taiwan's mountain trails, and twelve participants mentioned that they enjoyed the natural landscape.

There are no mountains in my country, I enjoy hiking. I really like the design of the trails. Mountain hiking was wonderful, to be surrounded by nature. (P01-S1-L3-4)

“Maokong Gondola” was a really nice experience, I enjoyed different views of Taipei City and also Taiwan preserve the perfect natural landscape. (P13-S2-L21-25)

4.2. The Change in Social Image

Figure 2 shows the consensus map of changes in the social image of participants. The initial social image consists of same-sex marriage, the relationship with China, and products made in Taiwan.

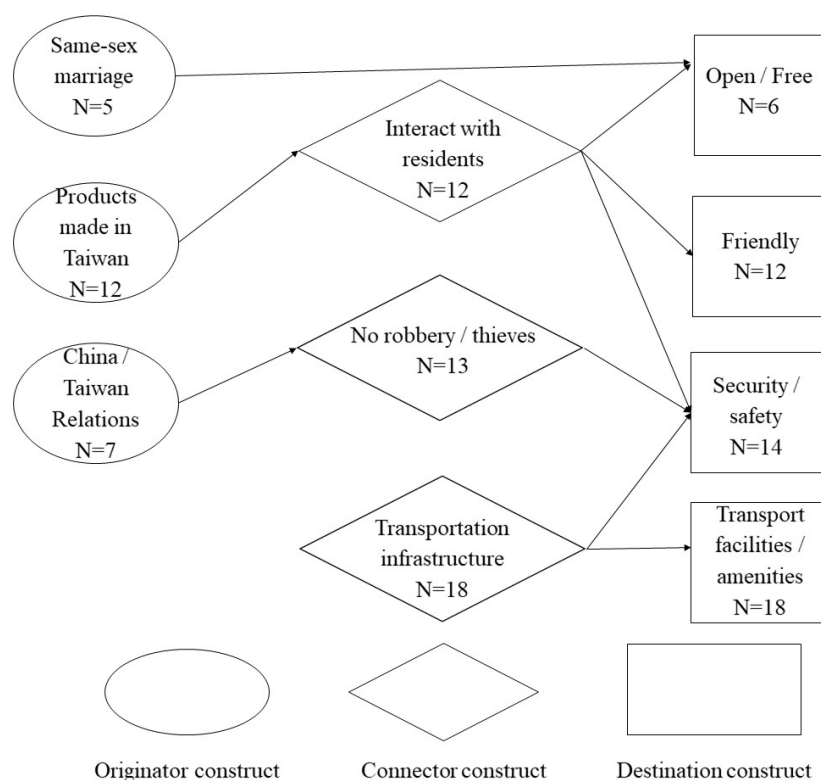


Figure 2. The consensus map of the change in social image.

My first impression of Taiwan I got from products with the label “Made in Taiwan” from my childhood. (P02-S1-L5-7)

My first exposure to the idea of Taiwan was products with “Made in Taiwan” labeled or printed on them, but they didn’t give me much idea of what it was like as a place or as a culture. (P03-S1-L6-8)

Through the actual experience of tour activities, participants saw the well-organized transportation infrastructure, saw residents’ regular daily life in Taiwan, interacted with local residents, and felt that Taiwan is a free and open place.

I like how available public transportation is here; you can get anywhere. (P01-S3-L14-17)

I am amazed that I can go around the island in a short time, the public transportation facilities are perfect, especially the train line, which circles Taiwan, is very convenient. (P02-S3-L5-8)

I had chances to make friends with the locals and interact with them. They are friendly to me. (P011-S2-L8-9)

Social security for tourists is important; thirteen participants indicated that Taiwan is a safe place to visit, with no robberies or thieves around them.

I felt pretty safe, I don’t need to worry about things being stolen or being robbed. (P04-S3-L8-9, P011-S3-L20-25)

4.3. The Change in Cultural Image

Figure 3 shows the consensus map of changes in the cultural image of participants. The initial cultural image consists of colonial culture, Kung Fu, movies, celebrity charm, festivals, religions, and activities. Taiwan's colonial history has experienced Dutch, Spanish, and Japanese rule; at each stage, colonial-style buildings came into being. The government of Taiwan is also committed to preserving the architectural style and history of each period. For international tourists from the Netherlands and Japan, it is of great significance to see the history and architectural style of their ancestors on the remote Taiwan island at historic sites.

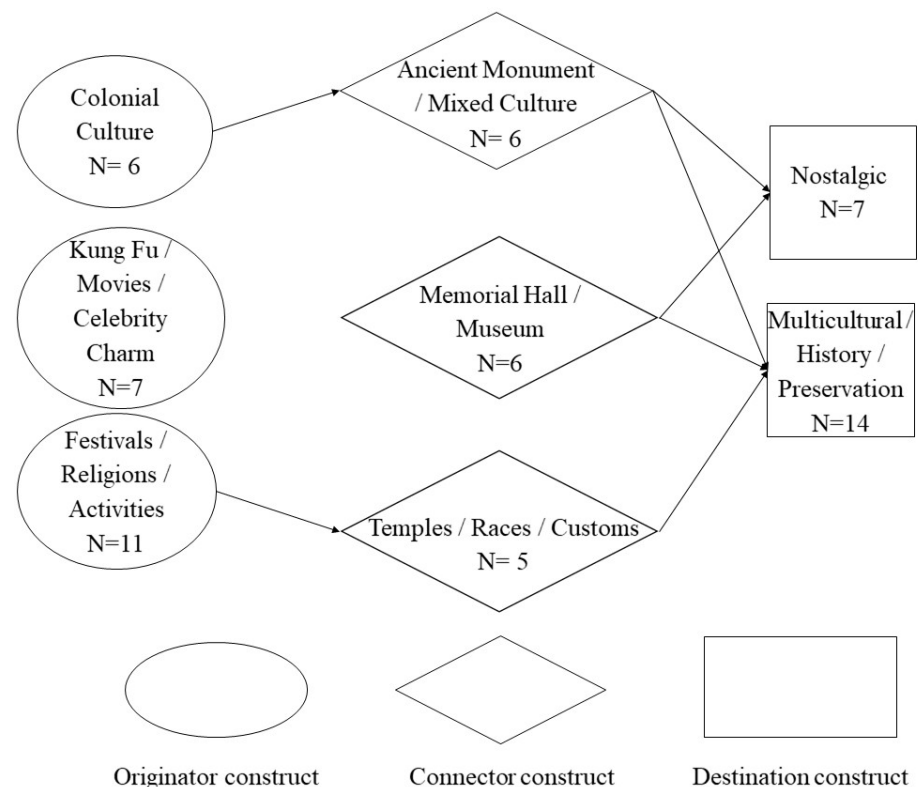


Figure 3. The consensus map of the change in cultural image.

I am Dutch, and I especially want to know some history of Taiwan and the Netherlands, especially some well-known related buildings, so that I can witness them with my own eyes. (P011-S1-L1-5)

I took the Alishan Forestry Railway to Fenqi Lake. For Japanese people, this is a very famous scenic spot, because it has a great relationship with our Japanese ancestors, and there is a kind of touched and meaningful feeling there. (P08-S3-L11-15)

Some historical sites, such as Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall and the Palace Museum, also attract international tourists. Through field visits, images of multiculturalism, history, and preservation are created.

I've been around the normal Taipei tourist spots like the Palace Museum—very nice—I didn't know Taiwan has preserved so many Chinese treasures, and the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall where commemorate Chiang Kai-shek, a famous man in history, we can see the trajectory of history and the changes of the times. (P04-S2-L3-5)

Before coming to Taiwan, many international tourists had an impression or stereotype of Taiwan because of kung fu, movies, and celebrity culture. During their trip to Taiwan, they found out that these activities are not everywhere.

The most impressive movie is The Joy Luck Club, where he introduced some Taiwanese and Chinese history and culture, as well as immigration to the United States. (P06-S2-L20-22)

I like Kung Fu a lot, I felt Kung Fu equals Chinese or Taiwan. From the television show Kung Fu or even the movie Kung Fu Panda. For those, I really want to visit Asia. (P13-S3-L7-8)

Some famous movies about Chinese culture, famous athlete Wang Jianming, Jeremy Lin, famous movie director Ang Lee. Chinese Kung Fu. I thought everyone in Taiwan can do Kung Fu. (P05-S2-L6-8)

Participating in festivals, religious events, and other events (such as the Taipei 101 Run Up) is the motivation to attract some international tourists to Taiwan. During their visit to Taiwan, they can see Taiwan's temple architecture, culture, customs, and history, and experience Taiwan's unique style.

The motivation for coming to Taiwan is to participate in the Taipei 101 Run Up competition, then I see different cultures, customs and history. I think it is very unique and meaningful to me. (P14-S3-L27-3, P15-S3-L11-15)

4.4. The Change in Gourmet Food Image

Figure 4 shows the consensus map of changes in gourmet food image of participants. The initial food image consists of Chinatown, fortune cookies, and other well-known Taiwanese food overseas. Overseas, people experience Chinese food in different ways, typically by going to a local Chinatown, or going to a Chinese restaurant. The cooking style or taste of this food may be related to the local cuisine. Therefore, for international tourists, the food experience in Taiwan is a special one. Through the actual experience, one can eat different tastes and distinctive food, and perhaps can subvert the Chinese food in their memory and replace the taste in their memory.

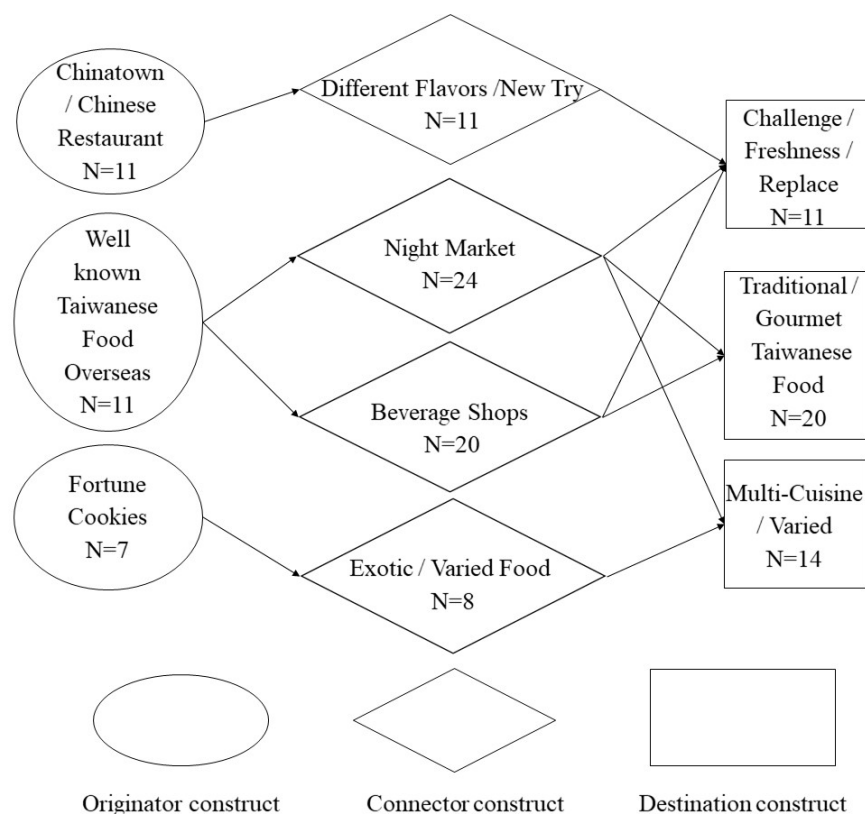


Figure 4. The consensus map of the change in gourmet food image.

Chinatown or Chinese restaurant is the place where we can eat or eat Chinese food, but the typical Chinese food in my country, the way of cooking, or the taste in memory seems to be different in Taiwan, very fresh and also a kind of challenge. (P04-S3-L18-21, P06-S3-L5-8, P07-S3-L2-3)

It is worth mentioning that for the typical Chinese food in the memory of international tourists, fortune cookies or other dishes that must be eaten after every Chinese meal are not seen locally, but are representative of Western food. This surprised them. That became a misunderstanding between cultures.

I like Chinese food very much, I always wanted to try real Chinese food, for example fortune cookies and Chop suey, that's always fun to see the words from the fortune cookies after meals, that let me believe that Taiwan must have fortune tellers everywhere. I'm really surprised that Chinese food in Taiwan doesn't offer any fortune cookies and what I thought the traditional food was, like Chop suey, the locals don't know anything about that. (P09-S3-L24-30)

In recent years, Taiwanese living overseas have been committed to promoting Taiwanese food culture, specialty snacks and flavor cores, to foreign countries. Therefore, international tourists may have eaten or heard of some Taiwanese delicacies such as bubble tea before coming to Taiwan. During their stay in Taiwan, international tourists are faced with a dazzling array of snacks, such as night market delicacies, beverage shops, and exotic delicacies, which produce images of varied, multi-cuisine, traditional, and gourmet Taiwanese food.

I drank Taiwanese bubble milk tea in Germany, but the price is much cheaper in Taiwan, and I am happy to be able to eat authentic local food, I am surprised that there are so many snack bars, food stores, fast food stores, convenience stores, and restaurants in small Taiwan. (P22-S3-L25-29)

The night market was an unforgettable memory, I think the night market food is very special, there are many choices, and the price is also very good. (P19-S3-L15-18)

I watched a documentary about Taiwanese night markets, and that was pretty much the only thing I did. I thought all food here would be night market food. That was just about the only preconception I had about Taiwan. (P20-S2-L15-17)

I am amazed that there are so many vendors, food stores, fast food restaurants, convenience stores and international chain restaurants and exotic food vendors such as those from Vietnam, Indonesia, etc. in Taiwan. (P18-S2-L2-5)

4.5. The Change in Aboriginal Image

Figure 5 shows the consensus map of changes in the Aboriginal image of participants. The initial Aboriginal image consists of mysterious, Indians, festivals, taboos, and traditional Aboriginal culture. For most respondents, their initial Aboriginal Taiwanese image was mysterious, similar to that of Native Americans (American Indians). There are also different traditional Aboriginal cultures and festivals for different tribes, as well as different taboos and ceremonies.

To me, the aborigines in Taiwan were very mysterious. I thought they should be similar to Indians, with some special traditional culture and characteristics, as well as some festivals or rituals and taboos. These cultures must be worked hard to preserve themselves. (P06-S3-L10-11)

Aboriginal culture is very unique; each tribe has its own characteristics such as culture, festivals, food culture, music, and handicrafts. Through activities, festivals, and ceremonies, tourists can learn more about the Indigenous culture or the diversity of Aboriginal cultures.

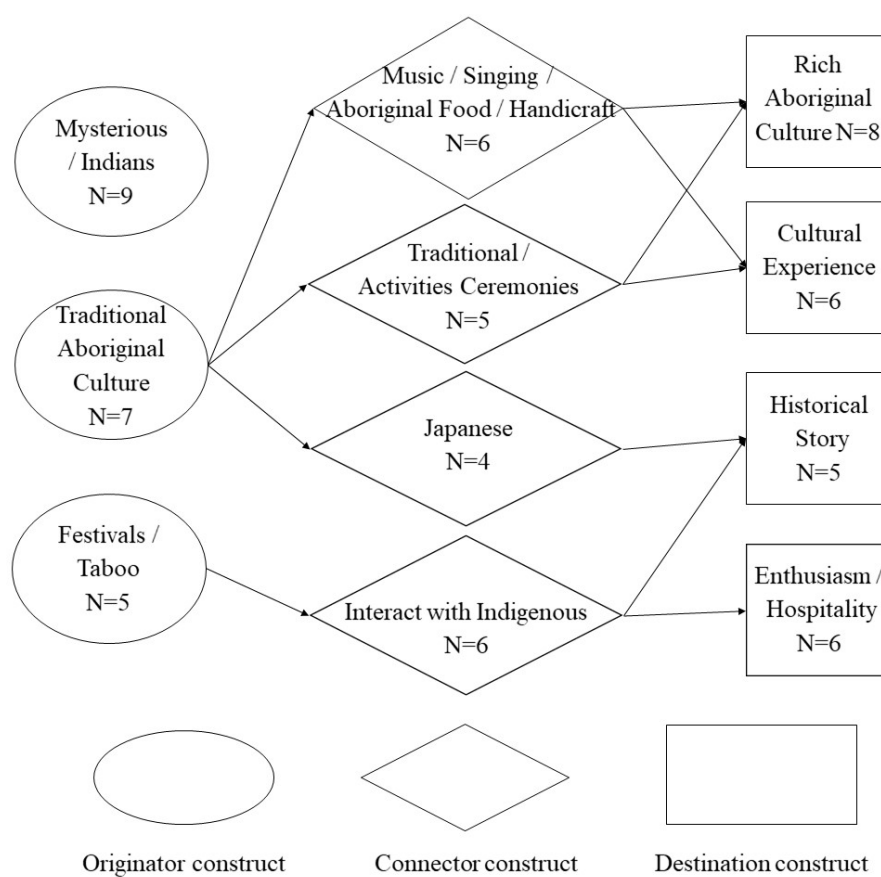


Figure 5. The consensus map of the change in Aboriginal image.

Alabulu is a traditional Aboriginal cousin use it to wrap meat, herbs and spices, millet, and some other ingredients. The food is delicious; I think I will miss it when I go back to my hometown. (P07-S3-L22-24)

Some seniors can use Japanese to directly interact with Japanese tourists. By interacting with Indigenous people, tourists can learn about historical stories and feel their enthusiasm and hospitality for tourists.

During this trip, I tried to interact with the aboriginal people, for the young generation (indigenous people) I used Chinese, but my Chinese is not so good, so I tried to understand them and also they tried to understand me. For elderly people, they can speak Japanese, apart from cultural learning, I felt their warmth and hospitality. This is an unforgettable trip. (P24-S3-L15-16)

5. Discussion

The tourism industry is one of the important indicators of economic development; it is also an important leading source of income for most of countries. However, international tourism trends have changed rapidly in recent years. Understanding international tourism trends is an important task to grasp development opportunities. Numerous studies have shown that tourism image influences tourists' choice of destination, as well as the antecedents of satisfaction, loyalty, and behavioral intentions, and then intention to recommend the destination or the country's products [44]. Therefore, it is important to understand the changes in tourism image.

This study investigated the changes in international tourists' tourism image before and after their visit by analyzing dimensions of tourists' consensus maps. The consensus maps were constructed according to the concept of originator, connector, and destination constructs. Five categories were identified, namely, natural image, social image, cultural

image, gourmet food image, and Aboriginal image. The findings lend support to cultural distance and recreation demand as discussed by Lee et al. [45].

Natural image is the imagery generated after tourists experienced activities related to nature. Natural resources are also one of the factors that attract tourists. Therefore, nature-based tourism and eco-tourism are more and more popular [46–49]. Gabriel-Campos et al. [50] mentioned that ecotourism is urgent because the effects of climate change are persistent and continue to damage the natural ecosystems of communities, and Tsai et al. [51] reported the threat of exposure to typhoons and floods in Taiwan. There are many international tourists in Taiwan who came for eco-tourism, because Taiwan has a rich and diverse ecological environment, many unique species and landscapes from the deep sea to plains to mountains, and many national parks, which focus on eco-tourism [52]. Cheng et al. [53] showed that visitors are highly satisfied with the natural scenery of the park. Consequently, this study represents the destination construct of biodiversity and rich natural resources. Taiwan is an island located in the subtropical region, with diverse terrain such as mountains, oceans, plains, and hills, and has a natural ecology nurtured by tropical, subtropical, alpine, and frigid climates. There are many ways to attract tourists to nature sightseeing. This study found that international tourists experienced biodiversity through ecological activities such as bird watching, whale watching, and monkey watching. There are unique leisure trails all over Taiwan, connected by convenient transportation, and the trails include riverside trails, coastal trails, forest scenic trails, rail trails, mountaineering trails, and ancient trails reclaimed by ancestors. It has become one of the leisure places for tourists.

However, in addition to abundant natural resources, natural disasters (such as earthquakes and typhoons) are also quite frequent due to its location on the boundary between the Eurasian plate and the Philippine Sea plate. Rosselló et al. [54] studied how natural disaster or hazard events affected international arrivals and indicated that different types of events change the flow of tourists to varying degrees. This study found that natural disasters only appeared in the original construction for international tourists, and it may be that they did not encounter these disasters in the process of tourism.

Tourism has become an important indicator of the connection between localization and globalization. No matter what the country's image is in terms of politics, diplomacy, and so on, it is imperative for the country to devote itself to managing the image of tourism. Based on this study's findings, we propose the following management implications and practical recommendations. First, natural resources are advantages; Taiwan has rich beauty, a rich ecology, and many unique natural landscapes, combining different ecology, culture, and special famous products. Cultural resources are essential for developing synergies between tourism and culture [55]. Thus, cultural resources need to be protected and conserved. Second, Lin et al. [56] showed cultural historical value in cultural tourism is a high priority in the criteria, while cultural assets and preservation of historic buildings are important sub-criteria.

Gourmet food image is the enjoyment of food, which affects the sense of sight, smell, and taste through the color, aroma, and taste of the food. Food culture includes the way the dishes are arranged and exquisite utensils used to induce appetite, which increases satisfaction of tourists. Food sightseeing requires actual experience and cannot be replaced by photos or videos. Martin et al. [57] reported that iconic food is what represents and identifies a destination and inspires visitors to visit. Therefore, destination marketers should plan and enhance the cuisine of each region, and cooperation with international activities will be more conducive to the promotion of international tourism.

This study contributes to the literature and fills gaps in the literature, due its focused on international tourists and use of qualitative interviews to understand the image differences before and after their visits. However, there are still a few limitations. First, this study interviewed international tourists who came to Taiwan for the first time on site. However, this is the era of digital technology. After traveling, tourists shared their travel videos or photos on their personal websites and social media in order to interact with

other relatives, friends, or users. Thus, we could conduct interviews with members of social media clubs related to international destinations to travel (such as the Facebook group called the Best Destinations To Travel—as of October 2022, its membership reached 1.078 million) to understand the establishment of action image and its influence. Second, affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, Taiwan's international tourism market has been restricted for two and a half years. Taiwan officially lifted its travel ban on 13 October 2022 for international tourists to visit Taiwan [16]. Thus, follow-up research can discuss the image of international tourists visiting Taiwan after the pandemic. At the same time, while the world works to promote tourism, there may also be problems such as overtourism and global warming [58]; therefore, follow-up research can be based on the sustainable development of international tourism.

6. Conclusions

Taiwan's government and related tourism units promote international tourism activities [16]. As an island-type country, it has a unique climate, a good geographical location, rich natural species, ethnic integration, special cuisine, and well-protected historic sites, as well as excellent conditions for diversified mountain, forest, and marine activities. It would be a pity if the number of international tourists was not substantially increased. This study conducts qualitative interviews with international tourists to gain an in-depth understanding of the changes in international tourists' natural image, social image, cultural image, gourmet food image, and Aboriginal image of Taiwan, which will help government units, tourism operators, event organizers, and relevant tourism associations plan to attract international tourists to Taiwan, and contribute to the current progress of Taiwan's tourism towards international and sustainable development.

Due to the estrangement between different countries, most international tourists are unfamiliar with Taiwan and do not understand it. Thus, we need to create a friendly environment for international tourists and bring in the concept of sustainable management, so that international tourists can also be friendly to the local area and use local tourism resources to strengthen the interaction between international tourists, government departments, and tour guide associations. Other suggestions include providing explanatory documents for various international tourism activities, educating international tourists to better understand local culture and customs, and improving the image of Taiwan to increase tourists' willingness to return in the future.

Although so far, the number of international tourists visiting Taiwan has not been able to increase due to the impact of the pandemic, this study shows that international tourists traveling to Taiwan show different travel preferences. Therefore, the application of cultural promotion strategies and planned tour packages may improve the image of nature, culture, society, food, and Aboriginal people in Taiwan, thereby improving the overall satisfaction of international tourists, building an online image, and forming e-word-of-mouth.

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