Chinese family tourism: Interactive behavior during tours

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to comprehensively study the interactive behavior of Chinese family tourism, including interactions inside and outside of the family unit. It conducts in-depth interviews with 24 Chinese travelling families. Then, the key event method has been employed to extract the structural dimensions of family tourism interaction. Results show that the interactive behavior of Chinese family tourism includes four dimensions, which are family interaction, service interaction, social interaction and conflicts. There are rich connotations within family tourism interaction. First, the interaction between family members during tours forms a type of ritual activity at a tourist destination. Second, the interactions inside and outside family tourism facilitate self-construction and social construction for individuals. Third, family tourism interaction is a process in which family tourists participate in the co-creation of tourism experience value. This paper bridges a research gap relating family tourism by considering the Chinese cultural context, and provides the basis for designing the scale of interactive behavior.*
KEYWORDS: *Family tourism, Interactive behavior, Chinese Confucian culture, Tourism experience, Happiness*

I. INTRODUCTION

Family tourism, as an important and emerging sub-market of the tourism industry, provides a unique context for communication and connection between family members (Schänzel and Yeoman, 2014; Wu and Wall, 2016; Yi and Wu, 2020). Different from the individual or group tourism, family tourism interaction is more complex as it includes interactions inside and outside the family. Current studies mostly focus on aspects of interactive behavior during family tours, such as family tourism decision-making (Samsinar et al., 2013; Niemczyk, 2015; Spiers, 2017). However, little is known about the entirety of family tourism interaction, as during family tours, interactions not only happen between family members but also occur between the family and others, including tourism operators, locals, and visitors.

Family interaction affects family function (Schänzel and Smith, 2014) and the various interactive behaviors that occur in family tourism will inevitably affect the experience of family tourists. The interaction between family members on a trip can provide positive energy to the family system (Olson, 2000; Li and Yan, 2021) and enhance family unity and happiness (Fountaina et al., 2015; Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel, 2016). However, some studies also found that intergenerational family travel is likely to cause intergenerational conflicts due to different intergenerational needs, breaking the expectation that family travel is always full of joy, and then affecting the satisfaction and subjective well-being of members, especially the elderly parents of adult children (Hu et al., 2023).

In addition, unlike the Western family travel, which is mostly the couple travel or the parents with their young children (Li et al., 2017; Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020), tours of adult children with their parents and extended families of more than three generations are also very common in China (Wang et al,2018; Fu et al., 2021; Qiao et al., 2022 ; Hu et al., 2023) , which makes the interpersonal relationship and interaction types in Chinese family tourism more complex. It is recognized that unique culture affects people's behavior and experience (Gyulavári and Malota, 2019). Influenced by the Chinese Confucian culture, people attach great importance to family, but due to a general conservativeness within the culture, individuals are not good at expressing affection towards their families in normal daily life. However, family tourism seems to create a special environment where family members may form stronger bonds and understandings through shared interactions.

With the growth of per capita income and the Chinese filial piety culture, family members are more likely to take a vacation as a whole unit rather than as individuals (Bai et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2023). Family travel can help individuals promote personal growth, broaden children's horizons (Lee and Lee, 2021; Miyakawa and Oguchi, 2022), improve the happiness of the elderly (Hu et al., 2023), and enhance the trust and

intimacy between families (Durko and Petrick, 2013; Li and Yan, 2021; Miyakawa and Oguchi, 2022). It is necessary for tourism industry practitioners to design and provide services according to these different interactive behaviors. Thus, based on the theoretic and practical background, it would be helpful to document and classify the interactive behaviors that occur during family tours to enhance our understanding of Chinese family tourism.

Based on the multi-disciplinary interactive theories and the Chinese Confucian culture, this paper utilizes qualitative research methods to analyze the structural dimensions and connotations of Chinese family tourism interaction which includes not only the interaction within the family members, but also the interaction between the family and other external personnel such as tourism operators, other tourists and local people. Theoretically, through the Chinese cultural lens, this paper makes a comprehensive study of the internal and external interactions during Chinese family tours and enriches the family tourism research within the Chinese cultural context. Furthermore, this work also aims to provide the basis for designing the scale of similar interaction scales. Practically, it is suggested that an understanding of the key interactive behaviors affecting the experience of family tourists is of importance to tourism managers. The enhanced understand may help to provide suitable interactive situations, products, and services for family tourists.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Family tourism has gained the attention of many scholars, however, the literature mostly focuses on motivation (Miyakawa and Oguchi, 2022; Li et al., 2017; Kluin and Lehto, 2012), function (Fu et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2018; Schänzel and Smith, 2014; Lehto, 2009), decisions (Yang et al., 2020; Spiers, 2017; Barlés-Arizón et al., 2013), and experience and benefits (Li and Yan, 2021; Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel, 2016; Durko and Petrick, 2013; Lehto et al., 2012). Less attention has been paid to the family tourism interactive behavior. The existing studies into the interactive behavior of family tourism mainly focus on family tourism decision-making (Jia et al., 2022; Jamal, et al., 2019; Ashraf and Khan, 2016) and interaction between family members (Yao et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2019; Lehto et al., 2017), especially the parent-child travel activities (Koak et al., 2021; Li and Yan, 2021; Fu et al., 2019).

As an important aspect of family tourism interaction, decision-making has been intensely studied. According to the decision-making power of spouses, family tourism decision-making can be divided into three typical models, which are wife-dominant, husband-dominant, and joint decisions (Kozak, 2010). Family tourism decision-making consists of three stages, the initiation stage, the search for information, and the final decision, in which certain family members play decisive roles (Rojas-de-Gracia et al., 2018). The literature reflects that the initiation and final decision stage of the family decision-making process are mostly carried out jointly by the husband and wife (Koc, 2004; Samsinar et al., 2013; Kancheva and Marinov, 2014), in parent-child travel, parents play a relatively dominant role in the whole decision-making process, even if they fully consider the needs of children (Ren et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2020). Recent research shows that family tourism decision-making tends to be democratic, where children and the aged have a significant influence on decision-making (Schänzel and Yeoman, 2014; Spiers, 2017; Jamal, et al., 2019), especially in the intergenerational family travel, and intergenerational conflicts may exist in all decision-making processes of tourism (Yao et al., 2020; Jia et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2023).

Activities like taking pictures (Haldrup and Larsen, 2003), communication (Watne et al., 2014), shared exploration (Lehto et al., 2017), and interesting physical activities (Wu et al., 2019) are important interactive behaviors between family members, which have received attention from the literature. Li et al. (2017) argued that parents traveling with young children would spend a great deal of time creating family memories, learning, and playing with their children. Hu et al. (2023) believed that adult children should reduce their parents' tension during the travel and improve their parents' travel satisfaction by actively interacting with their parents and paying more attention to their parents' special needs. In short, through these interactive behaviors, family tourists can express their willingness of closing to their families, which may benefit and change the family relationship.

In addition to the interaction within the family, family tourism interaction also includes external interaction. Many scholars have studied the relationship between tourists and the host community (Capistrano and Weaver, 2017; Wengel et al. 2018; Papathanassis, 2012; Pearce, 2007; Pearce, 2005). The literature in relation to tourism service interaction mostly studies the influence of the interaction on tourist experience from the perspective of customer relationship and value co-creation (Chathoth et al., 2016; Morosan and DeFranco, 2019; Hollebeek and Rather, 2019). Tourists can interact with each other at an amazing speed and provide material or emotional support for each other (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Chen et al., 2017; Huang and Chen, 2018; Calza et al., 2020). These interactive behaviors of family tourism are different in depth and form. Behind these interaction behaviors, there are different connotations and essence, and the impact on tourists' experience is also different. However, there are few studies that assess the types of family tourism interactions. This creates a need to analyze the interactive behavior of family tourists from a theoretical perspective.

Multiple interactive theories provide ideas for understanding these different types of interaction in family tourism. First, Collins's interaction ritual chain theory is very effective in understanding the emotional experience

of family members from the perspective of interaction. According to this theory, people's interactive behavior takes place in a certain situation, and through these interactions, the participants experience a sense of group solidarity and gain new emotional energy (Collins, 2004). Second, symbolic interaction theory provides a basis for understanding the meaning of interaction between family tourists and others. People can understand self and achieve self-development through interaction with others (Mead, 2012). Third, the theory of value co-creation provides a theoretical basis for understanding the interaction between family tourists and tourism enterprises. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) suggested that value is not created by enterprises alone, but also by the interaction between enterprises and customers. Service is the product of interaction between producers and consumers (Grönroos, 2009), and the practitioners in the tourism industry should increase the participation of tourists in value co-creation (Carvalho and Alves, 2023).

In summary, to our best knowledge, research has been relatively silent in drawing a complete picture of the various interactive behaviors which may occur during family tours. Moreover, much of the literature on family tourism has been conducted in the Western context. The multi-disciplinary interactive theories discussed above may prove helpful to classify the various interactive behaviors that occur in family tourism, and may help to explore the theoretical connotations of these interactive behaviors. It is also posited that by investigating this through the Chinese cultural lens is more conducive to understanding the nuances of interaction behaviors that exist in Chinese family tourism. Therefore, the innovation of this paper is based on the application of multi-disciplinary interactive theories through the Chinese Confucian cultural lens, using qualitative research methods, to study the structural dimensions and theoretical connotations of Chinese family tourism interaction.

III.   METHODOLOGY

Research design

This paper uses in-depth interviews to conduct a qualitative study of the overall interactive behavior during Chinese family tours. The in-depth interview method was highly targeted and can provide a deep understanding of the research context. Researchers may be able to understand the motivation, process, and results of family tourism interaction in detail, to explore information that might otherwise be ignored.

In view of the strong situational dependence of family tourism interaction behavior, the in-depth interviews gave full consideration to the specific situation of the family tourists' interaction. During the interview, the key interactive events affecting the quality of tourists' tourism experience under various tourism conditions were investigated in depth, such as the key interactive events between family members, with other tourists and so on. Since key event technology is an important classification method for small sample surveys (Anderson and Nilsson, 1964), the classification of key events can be based on existing theories or summarized from survey samples (Stauss, 1993). Then the key event method was used to classify the interactive behaviors extracted from the interview materials of family tourism.

Data collection

The interviewees were tourists with family travel experience in the past three months. In the first instance, the author interviewed acquaintances who lived in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province in Central China, an important source of Chinese culture. Utilizing the convenience of network technology as a means to gain, continuous introductions, online video interviews were used to interview family tourists from various other places. In total, 24 family respondents were selected.

The interviews commenced in February 2023 and were completed by the end of April. In most cases, not all family members could be present during the interview. Therefore, each family was represented by one interviewee. During the interview, the interviewees were asked to recall their recent family tourism experience. The main questions were what kind of interaction happened during the travel and how effective the interaction was. These talks ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. The author collected detailed audio recordings of each interview, and converted the recordings into text, which were used within the qualitative analysis.

In general, these samples included a variety of family tourism types. The interviewees included teachers, employees, retirees, and farmers, among others, who lived in various areas of China, including Zhengzhou, Wuhan, Jinan, Beijing, Shanghai, and other places. These family types include nuclear families, multi-generational families, and others. These families utilized self-service, travel agencies, family groups and other travel forms, and traveled to many places at home and abroad, including outbound travel to the United States, Japan, South Korea, and domestic travel to Beijing, Shanghai, Henan, Sichuan and other provinces. The profile of the 24 family respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.   Profile of the family interviewees in the research

Index	Attributes	No.	Index	Attributes	No.
Gender	Male	15	Travel family structure	A couple and minor children	6
	Female	9		Multi-generational family	5
Age	20-30	6		A couple	5
	30-40	7		Brothers and sisters	2
	40-50	5		Adult children and parents	3
	50-60	3		An adult and a child	3
	Over 60	3	Travel form	Self-service travel	16
Destination	Abroad	7		Organized by travel agency	4
	Domestic	17		Organized by organization	2
				Organized by multiple families	2

Data analysis

Through the in-depth interviews with the 24 families, 164 interactive events were extracted. Referring to Gremler (2004) and Baker (2007), these interactive events were classified and named by three tourism researchers. After classification, 164 Chinese family tourism interactive events were divided into four categories and 18 sub-categories. In terms of classification results, the first two researchers had a credibility of 0.817, and once the third researcher was added, a classification credibility score of 0.872 was achieved, and both credibility scores exceed the classification credibility standard of 0.8 (Perreault and Leigh, 1989). Therefore, this classification result was deemed reliable and credible.

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results in Table 2 demonstrate the interactions in family tourism being divided into four category types. This classification is in line with the basic behavior mode of Chinese interpersonal communication, that is taking oneself as the center, according to the close relationship, like ripples, one layer expands outward, the further away from the center, the weaker the emotional attachment (Fei, 2008).

Table 2. Classification of family tourism interaction events (N = 164)

Main category （or sub-category）	Percent	Main category （or sub-category）	Percent
Main category 1: Family interaction	41.2	Main category 3: Social interaction	20.9
A1:Making decisions together	6.4	C1: Social interaction among tourists	5.8
A2: Sharing and communication	10.7	C2: Socializing with residents	5.2
A3: Caring for each other	7.2	C3: Socializing with practitioners	4.1
A4: Joint activities	9.3	C4: Network platform interaction	2.7
A5: Creating memories	7.6	C5: Social continuity	3.1
Main category 2: Service interaction	22.6	Main category 4: Conflicts	15.3
B1: Service consultation	5.6	D1: Cheating and deception	3.2
B2: Service contact	5.2	D2: Mismanagement	4.8
B3: Travel transaction	6.3	D3: Unhandled problems	3.2
B4: Tourism shopping	5.5	D4: Etiquette violations	4.1

Family interaction

As Table 2 shows, 41.2% of the interaction events accounted for the first category named family interaction, which refers to the interactions between family members. Within this category, five sub-categories were found, including making decisions together (A1), sharing and communication (A2), caring for each other (A3), joint activities (A4), and creating memories (A5).

The interaction between family members in Chinese family tourism demonstrates that the Chinese attach great importance to the concept of family. Marcus and Kitayama (1991), undertook research on self-concept from a cross-cultural perspective, argued that individuals from different cultural backgrounds have significant cognitive differences in self, others and the relationship between self and others. Westerners emphasize the difference between individuals, while Easterners emphasize the connection between individuals and collectives. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory further proposes that individuals in individualistic society are more self-centered, while collectivist society focuses on intra-group relations, and it is recognized that Asians have a strong sense of community (Hofstede, 2005). Almost all the Chinese families surveyed made their travel decisions jointly and took full account of the needs of children or the elderly within decision-makings. Due to the high family status of Chinese women, women often hold various decision-making powers in the travel process, and men are the executives of the family decision.

Sharing and communication provides a good opportunity for Chinese people who are reserved and may not commonly express their love for their families. Family members are more relaxed during the tour, so they become more willing to communicate and share their emotions with each other. This is an accelerator to enhance mutual understanding and emotional exchange between family members. As one mother said in the interview:

My families are very busy and usually just say a few words during dinner, especially my child. Because of the great study pressure, she barely communicates with us. I'm afraid she has become dumb, but obviously she has changed a lot during this trip. She seems relaxed, and willing to talk to us. She actively talked about interesting things that happened in her class. And she even asked her grandma about the interesting things when I was in high school. It's rare that she held my arm. We were really happy at that moment. This was impossible in our family before.

Chinese family tourists prefer engaging in interesting and meaningful activities together as much as possible. As travelling with families and due to the steady character of Chinese, most of these activities are not adventurous, and are typically activities such as visiting museums, theme parks, sightseeing in characteristic towns, and seaside leisure. Even if some activities are not suitable for all family members, such as children's amusement projects, parents will participate by way of watching to ensure the safety of children. In addition, many adult children regard tourism as a gift to their parents and a way to express their filial piety. The extended family wants the family to be together and enjoy the happiness of family union.

Taking pictures is an important collective activity for Chinese family tourists, and it is also an important way to create their own family memories. They like to take photos at the entrance of famous scenic spots or at iconic scenic spots. When delicious food is presented, sometimes they may eat only after taking a picture. If the hotel has special decorations or character, photos will be taken as souvenirs. Men often become the photographers on family trips, and of course, sometimes they also ask others to take pictures of the whole family. One interviewee said that he took photos of his dirty son on the beach and his shy mother dressed in local clothes, which was very memorable.

Service interaction

As Table 2 shows, the second category, named service interaction accounted for 22.6% of interaction events. This refers to the interactions between family members and tourism operators. These interactions are mainly related to travel deals and service. Four sub-categories were established, including service consultation (B1), service contact (B2), travel transaction (B3), and tourism shopping (B4).

Service consultation refers to family tourists who get useful information through travel agencies, travel e-commerce, travel apps and so on. Service contact refers to the process of obtaining travel services through contact with service personnel in the service places. Travel transaction refers to the process that family tourists obtain the required goods or services through transactional activities with tourism enterprises or local operators, mainly refers to various forms of purchasing behaviors. Tourism shopping strictly belongs to the category of tourism transactions, but since the purchase of local products and souvenirs is an important consumer behavior, it is different from general travel transactions, so it is classified separately.

For longer journeys, such as out-of-province and outbound tourism, Chinese families often choose to travel in groups. Due to their steady character, Chinese people often try to avoid unknown risks during the journey. Through group tours, family members can rely on professional services and enjoy a comfortable journey. Before traveling, family tourists may communicate with tourism enterprises many times. If the personalized needs of their families are met, it will greatly affect their evaluation of tourism services.

There are also differences in the consumption behavior of Chinese family tourists within the tourist destination in comparison with their place of residence. It is common for Chinese family tourists to make many purchases in the tourist destination and this includes the purchase of local souvenirs for relatives and friends. While thrift is a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation, it seems that Chinese family tourists are very generous while traveling. This contrastive behavior is related to the Chinese consumption concept of "To practice thrift but be amply provided while traveling", which advocates that people should be as economical as possible at home, but while going out, you must bring enough money to prepare for unforeseen needs.

Social interaction

As Table 2 shows, 20.9% of interaction events are accounted for by the third category, social interaction, which refers to the friendly interaction between family tourists and other individuals or groups except for the purpose of transaction. Within this category, five sub-categories were found, including social interaction among tourists (C1), socializing with residents (C2), socializing with practitioners (C3), network platform interaction (C4) and social continuity (C5).

Travel may change people's temperament, people will become more generous, cheerful, and more willing to make some friends, for example, traveling with other people or families, talking about each other's work, family, children, life, hobbies, etc. ,which will make the journey more interesting. Some family tourists prefer to communicate with local residents, local operators and employees. Through face-to-face communication and interaction, they can deeply understand the characteristics and culture of the locality, and then they may have the most realistic perception of the tourist destination.

Sending Weibo or Wechat moments is an important thing that many people like to do after traveling and through this they will share their travel experiences and feelings with their friends. Some families will continue their friendship with friends they meet during the trip after the tour, and people occasionally chat, eat together, or make an appointment to continue to travel together next time. The interactive behaviors in tourism have extended to the realistic living space of tourists and become part of the social interpersonal relationship of tourists, which integrates tourism and people's life.

Family tourism organized by units or by several families also has social value. For example, for those families who participate in the organization of tourism, through interactions with colleagues outside of work, can enhance mutual understanding and friendship and enhance organizational identity. There are often instances where close friends travel together with children of similar age. They share travel expenses and help each other, making tourism more economical and safer. The children can play together, which provides the parents a certain amount of freedom, and both adults and children can relax.

Chinese parents also see tourism as an opportunity to ensure their children can increase their learning, cognitive and social abilities. Therefore, more and more families choose to stay in the tourist destination for a long while, which allows greater opportunity for contact with the local people, to deepen their understanding of the tourist destination and broaden their children's vision.

In addition to the enjoyment of travel, the social interaction of family tourism may also afford family tourists to gain social respect and expand interpersonal relationships after traveling. For example, a family interviewee said that when he returned home with his mother and daughter, his mother showed off to their relatives the wonderful place her son took her to, even though she might not have thought it was that good during the trip. His daughter had excitedly told her classmates of the meaningful souvenir she had bought. As for himself, he recommended good tour guides and landlords to his colleagues and friends through social platforms, as if he had a very good relationship with these professionals.

Conflicts

Table 2 also demonstrates that 15.3% of interaction events accounted for the fourth category named conflicts, which refer to the unpleasant interactive behaviors during family tourism. Four sub-categories were found, including cheating and deception (D1), mismanagement (D2), unhandled problems (D3), and etiquette violations (D4).

Cheating and deception refers to the psychological unhappiness or actual conflict caused by tourists' feeling of being faked or cheated. Mismanagement problem refers to the unhappiness or conflict caused by inadequate facilities or bad management, such as parking problems, toilet problems, safety problems, etc. Unhandled problems refer to conflicts caused by problems that cannot be dealt with in a timely manner. Some cases are caused by human beings, and some cases are caused by uncontrollable factors. If these problems are handled in time, tourists can accept them in most cases, but if they are not handled in time, conflicts may be intensified. Etiquette violation refers to uncivilized words, deeds and attitudes related to tourism norms and basic etiquette. This kind of behavior mainly occurs between family tourists and fellow tourists or other strangers, such as destructive disputes or conflicts caused by uncivilized behaviors, rude words, non-compliance with the rules of action, interest disputes, etc.

It was found that these conflict events can lead to dissatisfaction in family tourism, and these events mainly occur outside the family. "Harmony in the family and then everything will be thriving" is an important family ethic in Chinese Confucian culture. Although there are occasional disagreements among family members, these contradictions can be solved soon, and have no great impact on the tourist experience. Therefore, in the interview process, families seldom mentioned internal family conflict.

The time concentration of family tourism is the important cause of conflicts during Chinese family tours. There are relatively few public holidays in China, and paid holiday is yet to be fully implemented, so travel time tends to be relatively concentrated. Due to the large number of people on the same public holidays, management problems such as scenic area congestion, traffic jams, lack of food and accommodation supply, and lack of service personnel may detract from the experience. In addition, it appears emotions are contagious and once a family member has a bad experience, others may also be affected.

At present, high-quality family tourism products are still in short supply within the Chinese tourism market. Compared with the individual tourism experience, family tourism places high emotional expectations on tourism products, and has a higher expectation of product safety, and quality. However, the quality of products within the family travel market is uneven and product features are not attractive. Many conflicts stem from the lack of services for family tourists. For example, many scenic spots have no baby strollers, and some hotels are inconvenient for seniors.

The theoretical connotations of family tourism interaction

Based on the multi-disciplinary interactive theories, it was found that there are rich theoretical connotations within family tourism interactions. Specifically, it includes the following three aspects.

First, the interaction between family members during family tourism forms a type of ritual activity that promotes the emotional sublimation of family members in the context of tourism. Increasingly, families are making regular tourism plans and undertake family tourism as a means to express feelings to their families. Just as Graburn (1983) believes that the annual tourism vacation is like wedding and graduation ceremony. Ceremony can bring emotional comfort, promote interpersonal harmony, and spread group norms (Ran et al., 2018). Especially according to Collins' theory of the interaction ritual chain, interaction between family members provides family tourists with emotional energy, which enhances family relationships and cohesion.

Second, the interactions inside and outside family tourism facilitate self-construction and social construction for individuals within the family. The Chinese culture, deeply influenced by Confucianism, pays attention to the family concept. The interaction between family members in family tourism shows the unique Chinese family concept is expressed in actions, such as giving consideration to the opinions of family members, respecting the old and loving the young, and a willingness to compromise for other family members. Through interaction with family members, they can construct their own family roles, and through interaction with others, cognitive ability can be improved, and interpersonal relationships are expanded, so people can realize self-construction and social construction.

Third, family tourism interaction is a process in which family tourists participate in the creation of tourism experience value. According to the value co-creation theory, the interaction among multiple subjects produces value and experience (Grönroos, 2009). So family tourism interaction is a process in which family tourists integrate their own cognition, experience, and knowledge to participate in value creation and create unique tourism experiences for themselves and their families through interactions with others, including family members, tourism service personnel, and local residents.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper draws a complete picture of the interactive behavior during Chinese family tours. In family tourism, apart from the interaction between family members, it also includes the interaction with other people outside the family, including service personnel, local residents and other tourists. Family tourism seems to create a special environment where family members may benefit a lot through the internal and external interactions during tours.

Family tourism helps Chinese family tourists to express their love for their families more directly. Chinese people are usually shy of verbalizing their love to their families during their daily lives, however, it seems that family tourism makes family members extroverted to some extent, and they are willing to express their affections for their families in the tourism environment.

Family tourists are also actively exploring interactions with the outside world. The interactions between family tourists and service personnel, local residents, and other tourists help family tourists to enjoy their travel, broaden their horizons and expand their interpersonal relationships. Of course, these interactions may also produce some conflicts, such as disputes caused by tourism destination management, fraudulent behaviors of tour guides or local operators, or uncivilized behaviors of other tourists.

In comparison with the existing family tourism literature, the theoretical contribution of this paper is to comprehensively study the internal and external interactions in Chinese family tourism, rather than just some aspects of the interactions. The paper enriches our understanding of family tourism and tourism interaction within the Chinese cultural context. In addition, this paper summarizes four types of interactive behavior during family tours, including family interaction, service interaction, social interaction, conflicts, and 18 sub-categories, which provides a reference for designing a similar tourism interactive behavior scale.

The practical significance lies in inspiring tourism managers to focus on the key interactions affecting family tourist experience and enhance the positive effect of interactive behaviors. First, this paper suggests that tourism managers should adopt the management of interaction with family tourists throughout the experience, including information consultation prior to the tourism experience, service during tourism activities, and feedback after the tourism experience. Second, this paper proposes to increase the interaction between the internal and external experience, and design interesting interactive projects for family tourists. Third, tourism destinations should improve management level to reduce conflicts and provide family tourists with personalized tourism products and services.

As qualitative research, this paper has some shortcomings. First, participants in the study were mainly from the central provinces and totaled only 24 families. Subsequently, the sample does not represent all regions of China. Second, the in-depth interviews were based on tourists' memories, however due to the time delay between the interviews and travels, the tourists' description of tourism activities and experiences may lack authenticity and reliability to some extent. Third, different family structures were found to have different interactive behaviors.

Although the family tourism samples in this paper include a variety of family types, the interaction of different types of families is not significantly distinguished in this paper.

Three research directions could be studied further in the future. First, future research could develop the scale of family tourism interaction based on this study. Second, future research would benefit from other methods of data collection, such as tourists' travel logs, interviews with tourism practitioners, or big data surveys to improve the rigor of this research. Third, According to China's current fertility policy, there are many more families with two children. In addition, many elderly people live together with their children because they care for their grandchildren. Therefore, there are many non-nuclear families in China. Future research may be conducted to analyze the differences in family tourism interaction between different structure families.

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