



Chinese outbound tourism: An alternative modernity perspective

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ABSTRACT

Chinese outbound tourism has become of great interest to tourism scholars. This paper provides a brief review of the current theoretical discussion about modernity and alternative modernity and their connection to Chinese outbound tourism developments. The paper traces the progress of Chinese outbound tourism via the binary structure-agent approach. Its study integrates the institutional development of the Chinese tourism governing body over four decades as social structure, and as agents, analyzes the changing perceptions of Chinese outbound tourists. The study advocates that the Chinese outbound tourism sector has developed within the scope of alternative modernity. The paper indicates that the development of Chinese outbound tourism reflects a process of developing modern institutions and conceptual modernity over time.

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Introduction

Tourism, as a globalized phenomenon, has become an increasingly popular research topic in the social sciences. The importance of the sector is self-evident with its impact on most parts of society, politics and the economy. In essence, the tourism sector now provides a complex and interwoven system serving global tourist demands. Among the demands are those from China which has become one of the fastest growing market sources for outbound tourism and at the same time the Chinese tourism sector has developed on an unprecedented scale. This rapid growth in China's outbound tourists has become a focus of academic attention (Dai et al., 2017; King & Tang, 2009; Sun & Dong, 2003; Teare, 2007; Xie & Li, 2009). Outbound tourist departures increased from 10 million in 2000 to 130 million by 2017, and with expenditure at US\$115.29 billion (www.ctaweb.org, 2018), China ranks as the world's largest source of outbound expenditure (CNN, 2013; FlorCruz, 2015). The shifting ideologies of the citizens (Sheller & Urry, 2004), the emergence of a Chinese middle-class, the easing of travel regulations, destinations simplifying their visa policies and the low-cost charter flights have all contributed to this growth.

Multiple disciplines and approaches have been employed by academics to explore tourism, including Chinese outbound tourism (Gyr, 2010). It is well recognized that the Chinese tourism sector has developed through a unique Chinese style. This kind of phenomenal progress can be conceived as a fundamental element of modernity (Fotel, 2006). Witnessing such changes, this paper examines Chinese outbound tourism via a structure-agent approach. To be specific, the central-level and provincial-level governance, which administers the industry, can be seen as the structural forces, while the individual tourist, can be seen as an

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agent to the existing social structure. The prime focus and aim is to conceptualize the modernity debate in a Chinese context. Using the concepts of modernity and modern reflexivity the investigation relates these concepts to Chinese outbound tourism. Specifically, the focus is on the evolving Chinese political governance mindset and structural changes, as well as on the changes in the evolving performativity of Chinese individual tourists. Central to the study is the notion of modernity itself and the question as to whether the Chinese experience provides an example of an alternative modernity, with Chinese characteristics.

One element of this paper that has to be noted at the outset is that it was written before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. It is far too early to consider the likely consequences of this for the issues dealt with here. However, what is certain is that the transformation of Chinese outbound tourism and its analysis from the context of modernity will provide the starting point for the next stage of its development.

Conceptualizing modernity in tourism

The term “modernity” can be applied in many ways. Here, it is necessary to distinguish two key concepts - modernization and modernity. Modernization refers to a model of progressive development from a pre-modern to a modern society. It focuses on the variables that contribute to social progress, social development and revolution. This gained in popularity in the 1950s and 60s. It deals with the process of social change, as well as the responses to it. Modernization theories tend to push less developed countries to adopt the experiences and models of advanced countries. Rostow (1971) saw the political regime as the eternal triangle of competing imperatives - of security, welfare, and constitutional order, and divided economic growth into five stages in its evolution from pre-industrial society to economically mature society. Studies of this theory link modernization with the process of urbanization, rapid industrialization and the extension of higher-level education. There are several facets related to modernization, namely, population, living arrangements, rural-urban division and integration, labor specialization, technology innovation, deviance monitoring, social solidarity, and rationality (Gold, 1989).

In contrast to modernization, modernity is a contested conceptual term that is used to describe the present era in the humanities with distinctive cultural features. It is a philosophical or epistemological condition that serves as a reflexive mode of mindset analyzing people's changing knowledge and mentality about the world (Smits, 2016). According to Wagner, the concept of modernity - a term to represent the current social constellation - was barely identified in sociology theories before the 1970s. This terminology can be distinguished in two categories: modernity as a philosophical or epistemological condition; modernity as a distinctive historical and social instance (Smits, 2016; Wagner, 2001). From the former philosophical point of view, what is being classified as modern is the breakthrough from the traditional past, a brand-new interpretation of the present, a different type of society, and an expectation about the future of the world. It is a societal epistemological theory that serves as a lens to explore the emerging human conditions, or more precisely here, the current development and social changes in the tourism sector. Burden (2016) shows that tourism enables a novel consciousness of physical and psychological mobility in this modernist era. Chinese scholar Li (2019) has proposed that modernity could be manifested in the development of cultural tourism, which is in line with the Chinese practices of integration of culture and tourism sectors in recent years.

In brief, modernity is not only a set of structural changes; it is also a shift in the perception of the world, which is strongly influenced by science and technology. To Habermas, modernity acts against the normalized function of traditions, and modernity is an incomplete project that has not yet been fulfilled (Habermas, 1981, 2007). Philosophers including Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Arjun Appadurai have contributed extensively to the current discussion of modernity. Bauman has identified the death of “solid” modernity with the transition to “liquid” modernity. The social theories of Giddens and Appadurai consider whether this transition has provided individuals with more freedom to choose how to posit themselves in their leisure time (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1990). It is argued that the time/space compression and time/space distancing both cause members of society to become exposed to a form of individual liberty, offering people more choices to travel, which is also reducing their feeling of security. The current transition leads to a need to re-articulate what tourism represents.

Subsequently discussions about modernity have also been joined by those about alternative modernity (Ashcroft, 2009; Gaonkar, 1999, 2001). The two concepts are equally important in understanding current societies and their diversified social structures. The relationship between the two concepts is provided in a comment by Ashcroft (2009) on Westernization which he compares with developments elsewhere. He makes the point that modernity had its origins in the developed west but that it is not just Eurocentric. As he puts it “to accept that modernity is not synonymous with Westernization, is not to abandon the fact that modernity as an epoch, a questioning of the present, an orientation to the future, and at the same time an ethic valuing the present over the past, emerged in the West” (p83). To understand alternative modernity is to accept that Western modernity is a historically plural trajectory and a culturally situated phenomenon in different societies and not just bound to the western experience. This interpretation of the concept of alternative modernity leads inevitably to defining an understanding of alternative modernity, to see the innovative, hybridized cultural trajectory that is unique, phenomenal and influential, leading to localized rationality and conceptual enlightenment.

After examining and distinguishing the concepts of modernization, modernity and alternative modernity, the discussion now turns specifically to the relationship between the tourism sector and the concepts of modernity and alternative modernity. In the modern context, the word modernity has been extensively discussed in relation to tourism and individualized freedom. One of the questions is how tourism casts an influence over society through the philosophical debates of “reflexive modernity” (Giddens, 1990), “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000) and the ‘contingency of society’ (Appadurai, 1996). Appadurai introduced the concept of ethnoscape, bringing with it the mobilization of individuals who appear to be shaping and reshaping the political spheres between different nations. Lai Kun initiated the pioneering study on tourism problemology and discussed the relations between

tourism issues and reflexivity (Lai et al., 2015), indicating that constant social change and tourist reflexivity constitute the concept of alternative modernity. Tourists, who are performing touristic actions, also experience a process of self-review, acting as reflexive actors, thus, while tourists are traveling out of the country, they recognize the gaps in sociocultural senses between the home country and the hosting destinations. In the process of analyzing Chinese tourists' reflexivity, we can refer to Cunliffe and Jun's (2005) assertion that tourists constantly and vigilantly examine their own lives and are engaged in a rigorous reflexive criticism of their own habitual practices (Cunliffe & Jun, 2005). As Giddens puts it, "the reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character" (Giddens, 1990, p38).

Both the institutional and the conceptual are important constitutions of Chinese modern lives. This paper examines modernity at both institutional and conceptual levels, in the context of Chinese outbound tourism governance and the performativity and mindset change of individual Chinese tourists. For the former the focus is on the institutions since these play a key role in the centralized state of China. For the latter, attention is given to the experience of the individual Chinese tourists as prominent agents in the tourism process.

Modernity and alternative modernity provide the conceptual framework to examine and seek to understand the changes that have been taking place in China. To this end, the paper presents not only an understanding of the development trends in outbound tourism in the new global settings, but also advances a conceptual and philosophical debate, specifically within the scenario of an emerging market (the Chinese) in global tourism development.

The interconnection between tourism and the concepts of modernity and alternative modernity

Pre-modern perceptions in the western-centric context were based on various religious faiths (Bruce, 1997; Luckmann, 1963; Von Greyerz, 1984). People's lives were driven by dogma, superstition, religion, etc. that was not to be questioned. Subsequently scientific development provided better answers to the questions of ordinary people. The so-called Enlightenment of the late 17th century gave rise to the notion of a scientific understanding. During the Age of Enlightenment, society experienced drastic changes, that brought forth rationality and scientific thought that attempted to govern the structure of society with universal law and at the same time dismantled the principles based on religion and superstition.

These substantial transitions gave birth to the modern social order, a period of seeking modernity. This continued into the 20th century. This era consisted of three distinctive features. The first is that the modern world is subject to alteration and transformation under human interventions. Secondly, the impacts and influences of mass-production, industrialization, and a market-centered economy for social prosperity promoted economic advancement. Thirdly, the political institutional reform is underpinned within the nation-state and democracy framework (Giddens, 1990). Scientific rationalities and legislative reasoning facilitate a common sense in the modern world: including the distinction between work and leisure, within the framework of changing time under the context of the changed time/space relationship (distanciation vs. compression). The consequences of this distinctive separation led to the changing institutional modernity. The mode of Fordism, mass and standard production, provided an efficient method, a bureaucracy similar to a machine and a state structure (Best, 2009). Consequently, institutional modernity facilitates the implementation of bureaucratic rationality, leaving individuals consigned to specific social positions of being aware of the modern infrastructure, and fostering a sense of conceptual modernity.

In this line of thinking, a series of essential literatures have provided philosophical discussions to conceptualize multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 2000; Schmidt, 2006), alternative modernity (Gaonkar, 1999; Nonini & Ong, 1997), modernities "at large" (Appadurai, 1996), and the multiple globalization concepts after colonialism (Cruz-Malavé et al., 2002), all dealing with the philosophical thinking about people's liquidation flow, cross-cultural and cross-border dynamism, as well as the debates on globalization versus localization.

Tourism has by no means been immune from the changing structural social order. Tourism cultivates a freer mobilizing population with the purpose of seeking entertainment and relaxation, providing an atmosphere of positive freedom to both the host and guest societies. The main focus of Giddens' argument relates to building the concept that society is both dis-embedded/re-embedded into a form of co-existence, especially under the circumstance in which the tourists meet with the hosts, mutually gazing at each other (Giddens, 1990; Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011). This process causes economic exchange within a more extensive scope between the mobilizing tourists and the local communities, which finally reconstitutes the time and space relationships. A number of scholars have explored this more recently: on issues of tourist experiences (Jiang, 2019), soft power (Kurlantzick, 2007; Xu, Wang, & Song, 2020; Zhang, 2017) and the symbolism of national identity (Yang et al., 2020), all of which are in relation to Chinese outbound tourism. According to Chinese scholar Wang (2000, 2005), tourism thus has much to do with the conditions and consequences of modernity and offers a clue to the existential problems of modern society. Arit (2016) has studied the history, current development and the future trends of Chinese outbound tourism. Tourism has become a metonym for personalized impersonality, a kind of social relationship characterizing modernity, an indicator of the ambivalence of modernity.

Based on this concept, Chinese scholars have summarized the connotation of modernity (under the tourism sphere) with three sub-disciplines: time/space, social sphere and spiritual sphere (Dong & Li, 2013). This perspective has broadened the horizon to explore the interconnectivity between tourism and the concept of modernity, which has pointed out the relevance of tourism-related research with modernity conceptualization. Thus, within the framework of modernity, tourism could be viewed as a contradictory situation: a domain in need of strict controls or a domain reflecting individual freedom.

As to the current research focus, tourism activities exist everywhere. One of the biggest misconceptions of studying tourism via the perspective of the western-oriented studies is that tourism originated from the modernity of Western societies or the

prosperous Global North. Cohen (2008) states that tourism has long been described as a modern Western cultural project, and that the tourism industry and its political and disciplinary frameworks were mainly defined under Western-centric values and paradigms. However, while it is true that Western modernity can be related to the emergence of mass production and labor divisions, other societies and cultures have also been taking part in tourism practices and activities (Spracklen, 2011), raising the question about a different or alternative modernity as pointed to by Dong and Li (2013).

In sociology, obvious changes in the modernity discourse, the growing similarity under globalization of different social sectors, the diversified sources of tourists including those not from Western countries have been increasingly studied (Cohen, 2008). The global picture of the tourism industry makes it a larger possibility to view the formation of modernity via “a less Eurocentric account” and “the production of new forms of politics, sensibility, temporality and selfhood in a variety of locations” (Mitchell, 2000, p2). Viewed from an historical angle, we can see the meaning of tourism from an alternative epistemology framework, different from the traditional Global North point of view, and recognize the ‘alternative’ ideas about the development of tourism. Chinese outbound tourism, with its unique development characteristics, can be proposed as an explicating example of an alternative modernity mode. Previous examples of this for instance include the study of the Chinese outbound tourists to South East Asia destinations via marketing angles (Cai et al., 1999), the state power to control the Chinese outbound tourists to Germany (Fugmann & Aceves, 2013), as well as the unique characteristics of the Chinese outbound tourists to seek independent travel experiences (Xiang, 2013). All these issues related to the current Chinese outbound tourism development deserve a thorough investigation via tourism research angles (Bao et al., 2014), to see their innovative governmentality, featured uniqueness and developing dynamism, which provide alternative modernity features. Thus, the words “alternative modernity” could provide the basis to examine the current modernity of Chinese outbound tourism development.

The research spectrum and methodology

Public policy analysis is the key analytical approach adopted here. Following the advocacy of Dunn (2015) that public policies reflect a sophistication of governance, this paper set out from the policy evolutions of Chinese outbound tourism governance and the change in its mindset. Focusing on central and provincial governments, the policy documents, regulations and governmental statements on the Chinese outbound tourism sector are sources of investigation. The governance model of Chinese outbound tourism and the individual Chinese outbound tourists' empirical values are examined to illuminate the structural criteria and the evidence-oriented agent's performativity. To investigate the Chinese outbound tourism policy and the governance evolution, this research also adopted what Xiao & Dai (2020) suggested as an institutional ethnography, to understand the national-level governance mindset and the individual agent's perception change. For the individual Chinese outbound tourists, the evaluative criteria relate to the changes and responses of the tourists.

The methodology is primarily inductive using documentary review, policy analysis on Chinese outbound tourism, and precedential literatures as well as historical archival materials, including the reports of international tourism organizations (UNWTO, 2013, 2018; WTTC, 2018), Chinese tourism ministerial statements, legislative regulations as well as published statistical reports. Reading and analyzing these documents with rationality contributes to the public policy analytical logics. In short, the work is based on rational theoretical discussion with reference to official reports and documents, supported by philosophy-oriented theoretical elaboration. For this, the research draws on works by leading scholars of modernity (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 2000; Wagner, 2001; Gyr, 2010), leisure studies (Best, 2009; Spracklen et al., 2017; Urry, 1990), Chinese national policy-making and developments (Airey & Chon, 2010, 2011).

Investigating the Chinese outbound tourism sector via an alternative modernity perspective

Thanks to China's rapid economic growth and favorable government reforms, it has become a major tourist-generating country. This process has taken place since the Chinese Reform and Opening-up Policy, matching economic modernization and conceptual modernity (both in its governance style and in individual emancipation). Chinese dynamic tourism development has been examined by Xiao (2013) who suggests that the most distinctive characteristic of China tourism is the coexistence of being government-led and market-oriented. However, tourism, with its critical role in economic modernization, institutional evolution and conceptual modernity, has long been understated. This section reviews the extensive social science literature and other documents related to Chinese outbound tourism through an alternative modernity perspective.

The previous argument in this paper is that the notion of alternative modernity could be one of the concepts to help understand Chinese outbound tourism development. As Ashcroft (2009) has pointed out, the term “alternative modernity introduces the plurality of modernity, and the agency multiplying its forms” (p 85). Such development exerts a critical role within the process of shaping modern institutions (at national level) and conceptual modernity (at individual level), and modernity itself is also shaping Chinese outbound tourism. The first focal point is the structural and institutional modernity. The discussion here is about the evolutionary change in governance from the very beginning of Chinese tourism development, with changes in governmental interconnectivity and between China and the tourist destinations. The second focal point is at the individual level. Here consideration is given to placing the individual outbound tourist's practices in the context of the emerging middle-class Chinese visiting overseas. Further, it examines the interconnectivity between their behavioral changes and national governance (governance here refers to the behavioral guiding advocacies and policies of national Chinese outbound tourism). Specifically, the following sections focus on the progress of Chinese outbound tourism governance reflecting both structural and conceptual modernity. In

this an attempt is made to conceptualize Chinese outbound tourism as a testimony of alternative modernity, at both structural (institutional) and agent (individual) levels.

Structure: Institutional modernity - The evolving governance

At an institutional level, China has experienced reform of the national tourism governing body and an evolving policy shift, both of which reflect progressive outbound tourism governance and a form of institutional modernity. According to [Chen \(2018\)](#) the emergence of modern science gave rise to innovation in bureaucratic administration. The foremost facet of this here is China's internal governance reform for the tourism sector. The Chinese government and national administrative agents applied tourism regulatory principles as guidance for Chinese tourists to select tourism destinations. It can be seen that the policy for outbound tourism was cautiously and prudently controlled during the era before the reform and opening up policy. After that, the evolving governance of China's outbound tourism and managerial policy have been progressed in a way that is reflected in institutional improvement and progressive transformation. These stages (interpreted from an alternative modernity angle even though they might not be new in themselves) can be divided as follows.

Sedentary isolation – A pre-modern stage

First, the strict control of outbound tourism from 1949 to 1982 limited the volume of outbound travelers. The China Travel and Tourism Administration was established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December 1964, co-located and in co-operation with the China International Travel Service, which functioned as a receptionist department to welcome the counterparts of national leaders from abroad. Before and during the Cultural Revolution, central government and especially the Chinese citizens were almost completely isolated from the international community, due to the reasons such as lack of monetary capacity and government restrictions. At this time tourism was seen as an 'unhealthy tendency and a harmful practice,' (*bu zheng zhi feng* 不正之风) and was prohibited since it was traveling for leisure. In the eyes of the Chinese Communist Party, this was considered to be reckless behavior representing a sign of bourgeois lifestyle against ideological communism ([Nyíri, 2011b](#)). Outbound tourism, together with other personal activities and private production was deemed as "reemergence of new bourgeois" or the "tails of capitalism" ([Airey & Chon, 2011](#), p91). Overseas tourists to China during this period were seen as invasive forces threatening cultural pollution. To view this from today's perspective, it was a pre-modern understanding to deem tourism activities as threatening forces to national institutional stability.

A time of enlightenment – an increasing modernized stage

The second phase from the early 1980s to the end of the 1990s, started when Deng Xiaoping identified the tourism industry as a comprehensive sector that benefits the overall economy. The State Council hosted the first National Tourism Working Group meeting in 1981 and recognized the important impact of tourism for the national economy and as well as providing for the leisure activities. China moderately opened up the "Visiting Friends and Relatives" model, and "border visits" between Mainland China and Hong Kong and Macao in 1984 ([Guang, 1999](#)). In August 1982, the China Travel and Tourism Administration was separated from the China International Travel Service and was established as the highest governing office, the China National Tourism Administration, directly under the supervision of the State Council. The tourism industry was then included in the Chinese national 5-year plan as an emerging economic sector to enhance national economic growth.

This institutional reform can be viewed as a tentative attempt to release the capacity and intention for greater mobility within China and increase outbound tourism. The economic reform advocated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 was the fundamental measure for economic growth, and within this China recognized tourism as one of the key industries to facilitate economic progress and modernity. Since then, the reforming Chinese central and provincial governments have started to view tourism as an important industry. In October 1990, the China National Tourism Administration promulgated '*Provisional Measures Concerning the Administration of Arranging Chinese Citizens to Southeast Three Countries*, which was followed by the a joint promulgation with the Ministry of Public Security of '*Provisional Measures Concerning the Administration of Outbound Travel of Chinese Citizens at Their Own Expenses*' ([Dai et al., 2017](#)). This was an attempt to encourage a moderate-level of cross-border mobility. The Chinese government tried maintaining centralized restrictions over people on trans-border movements. Adopting the principle of "government leads, industry supports, market-oriented, enterprises participate", the Chinese outbound tourism industry witnessed a leap forward in development.

The increasing diversified forms of population mobility reflected the national discourse of modernization reflected both in national economic improvement and cultural civilization. These changes provide a demonstration of a remarkable change from government-centered structure to a market-oriented structure, which could be deemed as a form of increasing modernity. [Siriphon](#) in a conference paper entitled "*Outbound Tourists and Policy Reforms under the Chinese Mobility Regime*" in 2018, suggested that Chinese outbound tourism had been initiated by the Chinese government as a national project in the making of modernity ([McDowall & Wang, 2009](#); [Ong, 1999](#); [Ong et al., 2003](#); [Siriphon & Zhu, 2018](#)). However, the Chinese government still endeavored to keep increasing domestic and international mobility subject to centralized authority, by exerting "hard" administrative instruments like district registration statuses (户口 *hukou*) and the state ownership of the tourism development projects. More importantly, the use of "soft power" was also very important. For this the central government also tried to keep the hegemonic representation of China's geography, history, and culture through a multiplicity of media discourses, the design and

disposition of public space, and active politics of transnational mobilization of and economic exchange with migrant organizations (Dai et al., 2017). This stage of Chinese outbound tourism is featured with an in-between concern both to encourage and to control, by which Nyíri (2008) has noted that China holds a both supportive and discouraging attitude towards tourist mobility – a kind of alternative modernity.

An evolution towards governmental modernity

The development of personal mobility and outbound tourism started to soar during the period from 1997 leading to the establishment in 2017 of the new Ministry of Culture and Tourism, replacing the former China National Tourism Administration. This phase can be divided into two. The first, from 1997 to 2005, saw the major growth in outbound tourism in a period of increasing national prosperity and development. The period could be termed as a 'proactive period', with encouragement of outbound tourism by the national level agencies. In 1998 tourism was designated as a new growth pillar of the overall national economy (*guomin jingji xin zengzhangdian* 国民经济新增长点). This in turn was followed by the proposal to introduce three weeks of annual public holidays – golden weeks (*Huangjinzhou* 黄金周): Labor Day in May, the National Day in October and the New Year's Holiday Break on the Chinese lunar calendar. This was adopted as a counter-measure to the ASEAN financial crisis and the need to increase domestic consumer demand. From 2005 to 2009 a second phase witnessed a strengthening of the quality of outbound tourism development. The State Council of China now prioritizes tourism as a key pillar sector to fulfill the people's growing need for leisure and tourism, to promote healthier development and governance to the industry and to build a modern Chinese-style governance system (UNWTO, 2013; Uysal et al., 2012).

A series of regulations, development suggestions, blueprints and outlines, as well as master plans were designed and published, catering for industry development. A better regulated market and an emphasis on the quality of tours and administration was propagated in this phase of development. For example, the Chinese government issued regulations and administrative methods, for instance, the *Provisional Methods on the Administration of Outbound Travel* (1997), as well as the *Regulation on Administration of Outbound Travel* (1997 and 2002 version), better to regulate Chinese outbound travel (Airey & Chon, 2011, p221 and p312). Since 2009, the emphasis on centralized governance and a quest for quality services have become the core of the governance. These phases have resulted in the great increase in outbound tourists as noted earlier. At the same time the formerly generalized motivation of 'sightseeing and shopping' travel patterns has shifted to the 'quality up-graded/catering individualized demands' pattern, by which the new generation of Chinese tourists are seeking for deeper experiences in the tourist destinations.

In this stage of the modern era, outbound tourism has become one of the indexes for measuring Chinese family social welfare and well-being. The mass outflow of tourists creates a sense of cosmopolitan ethics. These trends are ripe for investigation by philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists, since they carve out an explicitly imagined space in the boundedness of the nation-state concept, a manifestation of modernity (Sager, 2016). In the wave of new high-tech development, the outbound tourism industry is evolving and upgrading itself rapidly, pumping drastic changes into market competition. Thus, China's outbound tourism market has become one of the dynamic sources for international tourism development, also contributing significantly to regional tourism cooperation and China's inbound tourism industry in the future (Dai et al., 2017). To govern the Chinese tourism industry in the new era, the State Council proposed to initiate institutional reform of the current China National Tourism Administration. This was finally reviewed at the 13th National People's Congress in 2018 when the Ministry of Culture and the National Tourism Administration were suggested to merge into the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, responsible for cultural policies, activities and tourism industry governance (chinadaily.com.cn, 2018). The establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism reveals the policy emphasis and national concern of the tourism sector, by putting the tourism sector into a critical pillar position (*Xin Jing Bao* 新京报网, 2018). The adjustment of the State Council's institutions reflects the changes in the status and role of the tourism sector, and reveals a cultural turn in the national tourism governance model (Siriphon & Zhu, 2018).

From the previous discussions, we can see that outbound tourism policies were adapted to the social, political and economic changes as a form of institutional modernity, one of the key sectors in the social structure. However, some scholars have argued against the idea that Chinese outbound tourism provides a simple illustration of the endeavors of the Chinese national project of pursuing the nation's modernity (Ong et al., 2003), commenting that the Chinese nation is still constantly making efforts to control the general citizen's capacity for mobility. Notwithstanding the tourism policies regarding the planned economy and the political agenda that indicated relaxed restrictions and greater international mobility, Ong rejected the simplistic binary opposition of pre-modern and modern. She introduced the concept of 'alternative modernity' to describe the significant effort of China to forge a new form of geopolitics and dynamism of global capitalism. Applying this principle in reality, it is well noted that China's unique ways of modern governance over the outbound tourism sector well fits the principle of alternative modernity. The Chinese nation made efforts to discipline Chinese citizens, urging a spiritual and behavioral civilization to guide the outbound tourist's disordered behavior in the modern time, requiring them to behave as a modern subject of China in the new era (Nyíri, 2011b). This demonstrates the mixture of state guidance and market mechanisms that are typical of today's PRC resulting in a remarkably uniform understanding of what it means to be a good member of the Chinese nation, to help to build the Modern China (Siriphon & Zhu, 2018). In this way, the Chinese state intended to order and control the Chinese citizens' exposure to areas beyond its territory, considering that international tourism involves cultural consumption and provides a social and cultural meeting between Chinese citizens and destinations' cultures.

The social evolution and modernization of China reveals the process of a pre-modern non-traveling culture changing to a travel-welcoming culture. These changes are also reflected in China's economic context and international political relations. Each new development stage and policy breakthrough in Chinese tourism governance has demonstrated an escalating scale of

integration with the globalizing world. What's more, the process also witnessed the Chinese outbound tourists being accommodated, justified, institutionalized, and permitted to flourish in this socialist country (Tse, 2011). Although the generalized and centralized national policies still dominate, the gradual release and decontrol of individual mobility has also been having a great impact. Thus, the Chinese outbound tourists become modern subjects, as the following sections will discuss.

The evolving changes of Chinese individuals as social agents: A form of conceptual modernity

Chinese outbound tourists have also witnessed a process of becoming modern, a process of welcoming the enlightenment of conceptual modernity. Adopting the concept of the second facet of modernity from Wagner (2001), it appears that the Chinese outbound tourist has been undergoing a process of philosophical shift towards being an outbound tourist. Giddens (1990) has pointed out that the construction of the self as a reflexive project, is an elemental part of modernity. Thus, the Chinese individual tourist, who is referred to here as agent, will be taking the opportunity of practicing outbound tourism to alter their perceptions and mentalities, provided by the abstract system or the structural change. They will be able to associate their tourist practices with their changing identity, such as their individualized consumption practices. Their traveling and consumption choices will help them clarify and escalate their identity and mentality.

The stage of emerging change

Chinese outbound tourists since the 1980s have started to reflect an emerging Chinese modernization process. The structural change has been evidently leading to agent change. In the era of ideology chaos, scarcity, rationing, controlling and extreme poverty between the 1950s and 1970s, there was little opportunity for Chinese citizens to visit abroad. The changes only began after Deng Xiaoping initiated the well-known notion of "let's allow some citizens to be rich" and started enacting the "four modernizations" (agricultural, industrial, national defense, and scientific modernization). Influenced by American sociologists like Talcott Parsons and Alex Inkeles in the 1980s, modernization theory started to gain popularity in China. Max Weber's rationality principles were applied in the comparison of the modernization process between Japanese society and China (Zhang, 1989). The major impetus for a social consensus to modernization theories originated from the central government and gradually prevailed all over China. Keeping China's political structure as a premise, modernization theory started to offer a conceptual resource to satisfy the country's predominant demand for economic progress and nation-state governance, as well as to encourage individuals to pursue family prosperity and individual pleasure (Wang, 1989). The notion of cultivating a "socialist new man" started to appear as a sociological terminology, referred to as "individual modernity", followed by further research of "modernization for the people" (Ye & Xu, 1992). However, during this period Chinese individuals who applied to travel abroad were strictly scrutinized to include the genealogy of family members, as well as the history of their political ideology. National policies were governed by a prohibitive mindset and strict censorship. This was a period when leisure was seen as an ideological concept, rather than as an industrial and economic one (Wang, 2005). However, isolation of China from the outside world had long been a national problem for the Chinese people, making it hard to define the individuals who traveled out of China as clear-cut tourists. A lot were students who were sponsored to study abroad. The image of the tourist as self-educating explorer, self-bettering sportsman, or romantic flâneur, characteristic of the Western evolution of tourism was not part of Chinese cultural history and was not accessible to fledgling Chinese tourists in the 1990s (Li, 2015a, 2015b). Within this period, Chinese outbound tourists had to undergo a form of political censorship. Yet still, there was a positive trend to see Chinese people going out to explore the outside world even though obedient to authority.

The enlightenment stage

In this period, outbound tourist travels still remained as the right of privileged people (Lee & Cho, 2012). Since China had become more prosperous after the Reform and Opening-up Policy, China's mix of flexible capitalism and national-strategic economic policy (Nonini, 2008; Santasombat, 2019), generated higher economic development and the Chinese started to be open to the world, both welcoming tourists visiting China, and by reaching out to the world. This is a period of drastic change, shaping and reshaping the Chinese people's worldview. The most popular practitioners of middle-class tourism in this period were wealthier families (Gyr, 2010). International travel became popular and an answer to the desire for relaxation among large sections of the population. Chinese outbound tourism also bore unique characteristics: highly organized package tours, rather poor in English language, minimum interaction with local communities, tendency of take-photo-and-go, looking solely for Chinese food. These features were extensively discussed, scrutinized and even criticized by the media as showing prejudice and preconception, as well as by tourism scholars all over the world (Li, 2015a, 2015b).

At this period, Chinese tourists were constantly put in the spotlight by a variety of media sources. The behavior of some Chinese tourists was extensively criticized as "improper" or "uncivilized". Some blamed the overpopulated country with limited resources for creating a self-oriented mentality; others considered the one child policy that fostered a generation of children who manipulated their parents' attention, and without opportunity to share with siblings; the grouping of Chinese tourists also attracted extensive silent angry gazing, due to their loudness, massive food grabbing, dirty toilet practices and the over-occupation of the popular public spaces and attractions (Fuller, 2014; Wong & Lau, 2001). The Chinese tourists at this stage, both mass and individual, had particular characteristics somewhat different from those of western travelers. These Chinese tourists were indeed in need of a great deal of social support and regulatory education to develop the necessary competences to be

high-profile tourists. Therefore, there are seemingly legitimate reasons for the Chinese tourists to be criticized with their apparent uncivilized and appalling manners. Li (2015a, 2015b) suggests that Chinese outbound tourists would collectively experience a civilization curve, in which the host communities' inconvenience and feelings of discomfort would be replaced by improved and civilized consumption patterns.

The modernity wave

The third wave of Chinese outbound tourists also shows a form of modern features: the new generation of outbound travelers from China. This period is what Alrt referred to as "the second phase" and Li and others discussed as the "Chinese outbound tourism 2.0" (Li, 2015a; Li, 2015b; Wolfgang, 2013). Bao et al. (2019) proposed a turning phase of 3.0 in Chinese outbound tourism development via studying the middle-class elite tourists. The rapid growth and socio-economic transition within China facilitated a series of trends regarding the merits and values of China's outbound tourism as a modern subject. Modern subjectivity, as Oakes commented, arises within a terrain saturated with power (Foucault, 1979; Oakes, 1998). Being modern subjects, Chinese tourists tend to enjoy more freedom in destination selection, they are seeking and consuming cultural diversification and highly valuing quality-of-life concepts. Some of these features result from the mega forces that were shaping Chinese outbound travelers, including the consumerism economy; the urbanization process; altering demographics, as well as the innovative digital environments (Sethi, 2019). New generations of Chinese outbound tourists are interacting more with local communities, immersing themselves into local trajectories and lifestyles, and communicating much more with their improving language proficiencies. As Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) and Adey (2014) argue, modern tourism is more concerned with locality, ecology and quality of life, seeking for less carbon-intensive travel and less commoditized tourist experiences. The new term 'Donkey Friend Travelers' (*Lvyou*驴友 in Chinese, similar pronunciation to the Chinese character 'Tourism', *Lvyou*旅游) exemplified the famous shift from Chinese collectivism to individualism in Chinese youngsters, who prefer more in-depth experiences in overseas destinations acting independently (or grouping randomly) with much higher levels of personal freedom. One research study on hitchhiking tourism and social trust by Zhou (2020) suggests that the novel forms of tourism reveal an increasing independence in younger generation Chinese tourists, showing their pursuit of existential authenticity, increasing transient social interactions and trusts, as well as meeting the uncertainties and seeking for proximity via virtual and physical mobility. The political culture that used to be alienated from the outer world was overtaken by the changing concept of individualized pleasure-seeking practices.

According to Ding (2002), Chinese youngsters are taking the lead in changing the cultural norms in China from a collectivist society that supports "the highly centralized power of the state" to one that embraces liberal individualism (Ding, 2002, p10), by which the increasingly independent Chinese outbound tourists pose inter-cultural host-guest challenges to the host communities through modern technology facilitated travels (Cheng & Zhang, 2019). Against this backdrop can be viewed, outbound tourists' food preferences (Chang et al., 2010), tourism expenditure patterns (Lin et al., 2015), attitudes, constraints and information sources (Lai et al., 2013; Sparks & Pan, 2009), the new forms of Chinese backpacker tourism with harmony rules (Cai et al., 2019), Chinese hitchhiking tourism (Zhou, 2020), as well as tourist mobility.. The imagination and consumption of these tourists generate intensely contradictory configurations of the struggle between the tourists and the hosts, simultaneously pushing tourists towards the pursuit of inner freedom under the whirling complexity of modern lives (Su, 2014). Conceptual modernity is becoming an evident principle guiding these modern Chinese citizens.

Conclusion and discussion: Chinese outbound tourism as an expression of alternative modernity

The concept of modernities is a proper framework to understand the development of Chinese outbound tourism development. This is a period of modernization as well as a process of accepting modernity. At a structural level, the Chinese outbound tourism sector has witnessed the change from sedentary isolation to an era of enlightenment, up to a period of modern governance, which emphasizes the integration of culture and tourism, referred to here as institutional modernity. At agent level, the individual Chinese tourist also chronologically evolved in their mindset from their first emergence eventually to the realization of more freedom of choice to go for independent outbound touring, referred to here as conceptual modernity.

Following the previous discussion, attention turns to the alternatives to the modernity principle in the Chinese outbound tourism sector. Chakrabarty (2000) has the idea that modernity is a process of European capitalism being transferred into non-Western countries. Modernity represents a multiplicity of political and cultural changes (Eisenstadt, 2002). There is a distinction between cognitive and social transformation on the one hand (increasing scientific consciousness, secular outlook, doctrine of progress and instrumental rationality) and cultural modernity (cultivation and care of the self) on the other (Gaonkar, 2001). This notion consists of a multiplied outcome that the notion of modernity does not necessarily end up in market economies, the nation-state governance or sheer individualism (Gaonkar, 1999). With a post-colonial and development concept in mind, it is necessary to decenter the interpretation of the Global North and the implementation of modernity, instead paying attention to the historically marginalized, indigenous people in the extensively populous Global South. Alternative modernity stresses the ambivalence of modernity, which cannot be reduced to a single dimension (Delanty, 2007). Taking the concept "alternative" into consideration, scholars are open to possibilities related to the sociology of a new world order that is free from any privileged prejudice or causal directionality (Tsing, 2011).

From the macro perspective, alternative modernity provides the background to view Chinese outbound tourism within the realm of the current modern development. Within this line of thinking, there are some scholars who have studied the unique characteristics of Chinese tourists' gazing (Li, 2015a, 2015b), the Chinese tourists and the influences of Confucianism (Kwek &

Lee, 2010) and the world renowned Chinese authoritative administration over Chinese outbound tourism, directing, guiding, controlling and administering, etc. (Fugmann & Aceves, 2013; Nyíri, 2011a, 2011b). These scholars' pioneering works reflect the alternative vision of Chinese outbound tourism. Currently in the ongoing radical restructuring of its superstructure and infrastructure, the governance of Chinese outbound tourism and its policy-making practices have become an obvious search for a roadmap of alternative modernity development. Examining the unique features of Chinese outbound tourism governance and the characteristics, motivation, preferences and satisfaction of Chinese individual tourists presents a golden opportunity to examine the Chinese-specific issue – the alternative modernity of Chinese outbound tourism, within both its infrastructural and conceptual domains.

This paper makes a start on the exploration of alternative modernity in a number of ways. Above all, it provides a pioneering effort to contribute to the current literature, linking the concept of alternative modernity to the Chinese outbound tourism sector. It applies the concept of alternative modernity to discuss the structural-level of Chinese institutional evolution, and the agent-level relating to Chinese outbound tourists. In this way it facilitates an insight into the overall social structure and agent relationship, illustrating the ways in which both at structural level and at agent level they are heading in similar directions in relation, for example, to the links with culture. In this way it contributes to a better understanding of the social spheres in Chinese outbound tourism. This conclusion summarizes the structural and conceptual modernity of Chinese outbound tourism, providing an alternative modernity approach. In so doing it lays a basis and provides a framework for future understanding of the characteristics of Chinese outbound tourism.

In providing this view of Chinese outbound tourism as a form of alternative modernity the work reported here has focused on specific aspects and approaches and omitted others with inevitable consequences for limitations. Notably for the structure, the examination has mainly been of Chinese outbound tourism based on the institutions of central government, based on an assumption of positive development. There are of course other levels of government and operation that warrant future study and other forms of tourism, notably domestic. Similarly, and especially given the COVID-19 pandemic, the reverse trend of declining tourism may be the more appropriate context for later studies. For the agency perspective, the paper studies the individual Chinese tourists via a theoretical discussion, rather than conducting an empirical study of the tourists and it concentrates on tourists themselves rather than on other agents. Again, these omissions set a clear direction for future research using empirical methods and of other agents. However, notwithstanding these limitations, the approach that has been taken here has provided a contribution to understanding the development of Chinese outbound tourism development from an alternative modernity perspective and it is hoped that this will provide the setting for further explorations to allow a fuller and richer understanding.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

The paper is of critical importance to the current tourism academy for several reasons. The paper provides a pioneering effort to contribute to the current literature, linking the concept of alternative modernity to the Chinese outbound tourism sector. It applies the concept of alternative modernity to discuss the structural-level Chinese institutional evolution, and the agent-level Chinese outbound tourists, so as to facilitate an insight into the overall social structure and agent relationship. In this way it contributes to a better understanding of the social spheres in Chinese outbound tourism. The conclusion summarizes the structural and conceptual modernity of Chinese outbound tourism, providing an alternative modernity approach. In so doing it lays a basis for future understanding of the characteristics of Chinese outbound tourism.

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