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Gap time and Chinese tourists: Exploring constraints

Mao-Ying Wu[a]* and Philip L. Pearce [b]

[a]*Department of Tourism, School of Management, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310058, People's Republic of China;* [b]*Department of Tourism, College of Business, Law and Governance, James Cook University, Townsville, QLD 4811, Australia*

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This study emphasizes the intersection of two topics: the breaks or gaps in the life trajectory of Chinese citizens which may facilitate travel behaviour, and the analysis of forces which may constrain this activity. To understand the future possibilities for Chinese gap time tourism, the present survey expands on Wu, Pearce, Huang, and Fan's [(2015). Gap year in China: Views from the participants and implications for the future. *Current Issues in Tourism, 18*(2), 158–174] earlier netnographic work. The researchers document the demographic characteristics of Chinese potential gap time holiday takers, their preferred style and their perceived constraints. Respondents preferred relatively short breaks during their early career for their gap time. They were predominantly constrained by a culturally distinctive hierarchy of concerns that differed from those found in western studies. In order, the constraints were financial and time issues, lack of travel companions, social responsibility obligations, personal skills and safety concerns, and competing interests. The role of heuristics was suggested as further addition to the literature. Small increases in the percentage of tourists involved in gap time activities from China could have substantial consequences for preferred destinations. Implications to seize the market are thus offered.

Keywords: Gap time; Chinese participants; travel constraints; hierarchical leisure constraints model; heuristics

1. Introduction

This study introduces a new term, that of "gap time", in the understanding of holiday taking for the Chinese market. The term refers to breaks in time in the life trajectory of Chinese citizens. At these junctures they may take somewhat extended holidays. The introduction of the term gap time is seen as necessary to avoid academic confusion resulting from using the existing western terminology of a gap year. Both the timing and the duration of the Chinese gap time holidays have been shown to vary from the established gap year concept; in China, gap-based holidays are both shorter and mainly taken at a later age (Liu, Gan, & Liu, 2013; Wu, Pearce, Huang, & Chen, 2015). The two concepts do share a fundamental base; the holidays undertaken during the available time represent a break or disjunction in the regular flow of the educational and career trajectories of the participants. A gap year or gap time holiday is not a simple annual or summer holiday.

There has been some public and media interest in China in the gap year or gap time phenomenon. Wu, Pearce, Huang, & Fan (2015) noticed the rising trend and reported an

*Corresponding author. Email: maoying.wu@gmail.com

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increasing number of online blogs describing the experience and its benefits. They used a netnographic approach and suggested that holidaying during a break in the career trajectory is just beginning in China. Their study reported that the Chinese gappers are different from the western gap year participants and this finding, in part, prompted the need for a distinctive new term. Most of the Chinese tourists who take an extended holiday and travel time do so in their late 20s and 30s and sponsor this trip themselves rather than being dependent on parental resources. The duration of these trips has a mode of 2–3 months rather than a year as in the western gap year concept. Voluntary work and paid work have seldom been embraced.

Although Wu et al. (2015) identified the different and evolving characteristics of taking gap time in a non-western and specifically Chinese context, there remains much that is unknown about this topic. For example, there are broad questions about the familiarity and acceptance of the idea in Chinese culture and society. Furthermore, little is known about the constraints operating on potential Chinese gap time holiday takers. The interest in exploring a novel topic in China, as well as the calls in the literature to broaden and extend the relevance of constraints models, jointly drives the present work. These yoked fields of interest together address the following research aims: (1) to document the identity of and preferred style of the Chinese gap time takers; (2) to identify the factors which constrain the growth of the this activity in China; and (3) to offer insights about the western derived leisure/tourism constraints models by considering this special case in tourism study.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Gap year studies*

The research on the allied concept of gap years involves three themes of special interest to this study. A first issue is the way the concept has been spreading across continents, albeit with some variation as it has been adopted in different locations. A second theme of interest is why taking some time away from the trajectory of a career is valued by individuals and communities since these considerations may to some extent offset the power of constraints which are of special interest in this study. A third and final theme lies in the need to consider what is already known about the gap time holiday taking in China.

The development of a gap year, a concept which is sometimes also referred to as a sandwich year or a year off, originated principally in the UK in the 1970s. It was seen and promoted as a way to spend some productive and personal development time before beginning university (Jones, 2004). In many ways, the term is a more specific redefinition of extended youth holidays, including the term backpacking (O'Reilly, 2006). Unlike the backpackers, the first groups of gap year participants were often under 20 years of age, travelling internationally for the first time and often participating in quite structured programmes including volunteering. Over the last decade, the specific concept has also appeared in Oceania (Lyons, Hanley, Wearing, & Neil, 2012), North America (Qian, 2013) and then other parts of the world (Abdullah, 2017). A large number of education companies, travel agencies and associations are involved in serving the young gap takers, for example, Year Out Group (UK), American Gap Association (USA) and Real Gap (England and worldwide).

The concept has been broadened as it has moved locations. The gap year has also come to mean a year after university or tertiary education where the time taken predates entry into the work force. Additionally in some contexts, including Israel, it has been identified as following compulsory army service or as time out in the stages of one's career (Noy & Cohen,

2005). The term year is used loosely since often the time is less than 12 months. Nevertheless, the concept has been useful in distinguishing holiday travel times beyond the boundaries of short annual breaks or vacations.

In the western cultural context, the gap year concept has been endorsed both by source and host communities. The acceptance is derived in part from view that the experience builds the skills and capacities of those who undertake travel for an extended period of time. King (2011), for example, recognizes the participants' increased maturity and independence, while Simpson (2004) notes the acquisition of soft skills. In addition, taking a gap year before university may help develop a more positive interest in the world thus improving orientation to university life (Rose Birch & Miller, 2007; King, 2011). Further advantages include building self-confidence, boosting employability in the job market and offering status to the participants (Calkin, 2014; O'Reilly, 2006). Benefits to the society as well as to the individual are noted when paid and voluntary activities are undertaken (Hermann, Peters, & Van Trijp, 2017; Snee, 2014).

These positive appraisals are important in the context of considering gap time holidays in China. The concept of gap time is not yet integrated into the social institutions of the country; for example, universities and work places are not administratively set up to delay entrance to study or adjust to the needs of those who take time out from careers. The fierce competition for places in Chinese universities and the lack of administrative flexibility to deal with older age university entrants has shaped the way the gap year has evolved in the world's most populous country (Wu et al., 2015). The available evidence suggests that through social media and the books of some influential gap takers, the concept in China applies most readily to those taking a career break and often these individuals are in their late twenties or thirties (Liu et al., 2013).

If the concept of forging or utilizing a gap and taking an extended holiday moves from a peripheral to a central feature of Chinese travel behaviour, the sheer number of people who might be involved makes this topic of broad interest and import. The consequences here are of interest not only to international destinations but also to the management of educational and employment systems within China. The possibilities of a large and altered approach to Chinese work and career paths may of course be subject to key constraints. Existing work on the topic of constraints also requires consideration in building the framework for the present study.

2.2. *Travel constraints*

It is fundamental to understand that the literature on constraints distinguishes among the concept of constraints and terms such as lack of interest, ignorance or indifference (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991). In constraints studies, there must be a desire to enact the behaviour. Lacking interest in a leisure opportunity or knowing almost nothing about it are not conceptualized as constraints. The aim in constraints research is to study those factors that prevent people from undertaking a sought after, and at least partly understood, leisure choice (Crompton & Kim, 2004). Clearly, the origins of constraints research lies in leisure studies but the concepts and associated models have been quite readily adopted in a range of tourism research efforts (Chen & Petrick, 2016; Kazeminia, Del Chiappa, & Jafari, 2015; Kim & Chalip, 2004; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002). The ideas have also been adopted in non-western contexts, especially to understand Asian tourists' perceived constraints for outbound travel (Gao & Kerstetter, 2016; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Hung, Bai, & Lu, 2016; Lai, Li, & Harrill, 2013; Li, Zhang, Mao, & Deng, 2011). Two reviews of this field, spaced 22 years apart,

provide a number of key points which help frame the present study (Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2010; Jackson, 1988). These reviews establish that the consideration of constraints has followed a traditionally empirical and largely positivist route driven by a desire to organize and bring coherence to the understanding of why individuals do not participate in select leisure and tourism pursuits.

A review of the travel constraints work reveals studies about the measurement of constraints (Crawford & Godbey, 1987), the influences of travel constraints on travel intention or behaviour (Hung et al., 2016; Park, Hsieh, & Lee, 2017), and the negotiation of travel constraints among women, the disabled and seniors (Gao & Kerstetter, 2016; Kazeminia et al., 2015; Lee, Agarwal, & Kim, 2012; Wilson & Little, 2005). Only occasionally have younger cohorts been studied (Chen, Chen, & Okumus, 2013). The previous research of most relevance to the current study lies in building and organizing a list of constraints. Initially, this effort resulted in an ever expanding list of possible limiting factors as a range of different leisure types, contexts and participants were explored (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). This work developed into a search for convenient summary categories, either empirically through factor analysis or through conceptual organization of what appeared to be similar clusters of forces. The first well-defined and coherent achievement from this early work was the construction of an integrated overview, termed the hierarchical development model. The approach has proved reasonably robust and is widely used. At core, the model of Crawford et al. (1991) had two propositions: (a) leisure constraints are arrayed in a sequential hierarchical fashion (i.e. individuals encounter and negotiate through intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural constraints in a set manner), (b) this array reflects a hierarchy of importance (intrapersonal issues dominate, interpersonal issues matter and structural issues are relatively less important but may still constrain individuals in their leisure choices). As a point of clarification, structural constraints in this work refers to such factors as the availability of facilities in a community, time, location problems, and the challenges of crowding and access (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008).

As already noted, the model has been widely used and cited, but some issues challenging the approach have been raised. The objections include complaints that the model is overly deterministic since the sequences and relative importance of influencing factors have been shown to vary (Hung et al., 2016). For example, Kazeminia et al. (2015) emphasized the pivotal role of travel companions for Australian seniors, while Li et al.'s (2011) analysis of Chinese outbound tourists' travel constraints stressed the language challenges and cost concerns. Furthermore, inter-item correlations within each category do not relate well to one another (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001) and the approach needs further testing in other cultural contexts (Chick & Dong, 2005; Gao & Kerstetter, 2016). Rejoinders to these and related criticisms have been offered by Godbey et al. (2010) with suggestions that the early work was actually more accommodating to the issue of variability than some have supposed, that items within a category are not logically required to relate to one another (e.g. interpersonal constraints arising from friends may not be linked to the constraints arising from parents) and that cultural variation was always seen as an important topic for further testing.

A pre-eminent achievement of the model and associated discussion has been to recognize that there can be superficiality in providing only ad-hoc constraints items and seeking a quick check list style of responses. If research participants are not given very much time to consider their answers, then their views on simple response scales may mask deeper forces such as anxiety or an unwillingness to forego another behaviour. In this context, adopting qualitative methods or mixing research methods to obtain respondents' views is

recommended (Gao & Kerstetter, 2016; He, Li, Harrill, & Cardon, 2014). Furthermore, it is difficult but important to maintain the distinction between the formation of a constraint and the way the constraint operates. Survey work tends to address how the respondent views the constraint, such as an intrapersonal statement reporting a lack of skills to travel internationally, but the formation of that constraint may lie in structural forces including education and even internet censorship about other places. A contemporary position which can inform the research is that the model usefully frames a lot of constraints work but more macro cultural and social forces in particular could be studied more frequently, even though they may work through the individual's perception of the world, specifically the category of intrapersonal constraints and motivations (cf. Pearce & Packer, 2013).

In the broad array of studies on travel decision-making, the idea of short cuts or simple rules (heuristics) has emerged (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). In particular, the emergence of such heuristics as another pathway to understand how choices are made by human actors may be relevant to choosing a leisure or tourism activity such as a gap time holiday. The development of research in behavioural economics and psychology concerning decision-making offers a powerful distinction between slow and fast thinking (Kahneman, 2011). This approach introduces the view that one single constraint from any of the levels identified in the hierarchical model may be the "killer" heuristic preventing the choice of the activity. In this context, a heuristic may be identified as one simple decision rule or factor which overshadows all other considerations. For example, a single ("killer") objection to taking a gap time holiday from a partner ("my girlfriend would hate it") or obligations to the family ("I will not go if my family do not want me to do so") might be enough to shape the decision. If this view is accurate, then the sequential steps of considering constraints in the hierarchical model may represent an over-elaboration of the processes at work. Building on these contemporary concerns, the value of the present specific research can lie in considering a new leisure/tourism topic area – the gap time holiday in China – and pursuing the study of constraints, including killer constraints or heuristics, in this cultural and tourism space.

In summary, the primary implication for the present work of this succinct consideration of the 30-year history of leisure constraints studies lies in using the term in a manner congruent with previous researchers. Secondly, the current research adopts a range of items likely to embrace all three levels of constraints in the hierarchical model, and additionally assesses the relative importance of constraints when considering respondents' perceived set of influences on their participation (Godbey et al., 2010). Furthermore, it attempts to consider the cultural interpretations of constraints while being vigilant to the view that key heuristics or killer constraints may powerfully override slow, rational and carefully calculated decision processes.

3. Research method

3.1. *Study instrument*

A questionnaire-based survey was used in the study. The constraints instrument was developed in two phases. The first phase consisted of an in-depth literature review of travel constraints, which resulted in a list of attributes of travel constraints. The second phase consisted of conducting interviews with 10 gap time holiday takers and 6 potential gappers. They were invited to make comments on the list to ensure that the attributes were readily comprehensible and all important constraints were included. The gap time group was identified through the online community (mafengwo.com) used in Wu et al.'s (2015) study. The group of six respondents was contacted in a local cinema in a coastal

Chinese city, where there were many visitors waiting for their movies. The interviews greatly helped to finalize attributes through modification and elimination, and resulted in the final set of 23 travel constraints attributes that specifically applied to Chinese gap time holiday takers. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the attributes, with 1 representing no influence, and 5 indicating a strong influence. The process of building attributes follows the advice of Chen et al. (2013) in designing a constraints survey which makes making sense to research participants.

A brief introduction about the gap time holiday concept was presented and displayed using three illustrated scenarios (see the full survey as an appendix). Three representative Chinese cases, rather than western cases were used. It was considered necessary to provide this explanatory material as the gap time holiday is only a recent phenomenon in China, and not necessarily familiar to large numbers of respondents. Nevertheless, the respondents quickly grasped the idea of the gap time holiday. The core of the survey began with a question to identify whether or not they were interested in taking such travel. This question was important since, as noted earlier, travel constraints refer specifically to factors that prevent people from undertaking a known and at least partly understood activity (Godbey et al., 2010). Thus, in constraints studies, there must be a desire to choose the behaviour **(**Jackson, 1988).

Respondents who indicated an interest in taking a gap time holiday were asked to continue the whole survey, including their preferred style of using this time, their perceived travel constraints influencing such an activity, as well as providing demographic and psychographic information. Those who viewed themselves as being unlikely to participate in a gap time holiday were asked to attend only to the demographic and psychographic sections of the survey.

3.2. *Data collection*

Inspired by Wu et al.'s (2015) study about the characteristics of Chinese gap time holiday takers, the key target sample of interest was young Chinese in big cities. In the work of Wu et al. (2015), middle-school and university students, the key groups for gap year in western context, were shown not to be the key players for gap time holidays in China. The survey work for the current study was undertaken in Hangzhou, a leading coastal Chinese city. It was conducted during the weekends of March and April, 2016. Places where young people enjoy spending their spare time or venues with intense tourist flow were selected as the study sites. In detail, four popular Chinese restaurants, two western food chains (a KFC and a Starbucks Coffee located in a world heritage designated tourism attraction site), two cinemas, a Karaoke site and a grand railway station (with a flow of more than 50,000 tourists arriving and departing everyday) were selected. During the survey, the research team approached younger looking citizens randomly and confirmed their willingness to participate in the study. In all, 600 copies of surveys were delivered in the above mentioned venues, 569 copies returned, with 515 copies as valid. Considering the number of constraints (23), 515 copies of valid surveys were viewed as sufficient for the planned statistical treatment of the data with factor analysis.

3.3. *Data analysis*

SPSS 20.0 was used to analyse the survey data. Descriptive analysis (e.g. frequency analysis, cross-tabulation analysis with chi square), methods for comparing means (e.g. independent samples *t* test, one-way ANOVA, and repeated measures one-way

ANOVA), and principal components analysis (PCA) with the Varimax rotation method were adopted.

4. Research findings

4.1. *Who are the potential gap time holiday takers?*

Among the 515 respondents, 70.1% of them suggested that participating in the survey was their first encounter with the gap time holiday concept. This descriptive result confirms Wu et al.'s (2015) claims that gap time holiday is only an emerging phenomenon in China. After learning about the meaning and style of the concept of a gap time holiday through the picture scenarios, and sometimes, further interpretation by the research team, almost

Table 1. Profiles of the research respondents (potential gap time holiday takers vs. non-gap time holiday takers).

		Potential gap time holiday takers (N = 311)		Non-gap time holiday takers (N = 204)	
Demographic items		Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	139	44.7	99	48.5
	Female	172	55.3	105	51.5
Age cohorts	Younger than 22	86	27.7	35	17.2
	23–25	99	31.8	53	26.0
	26–30	77	24.8	67	32.8
	31–40	42	13.5	34	16.7
	41 or older	7	2.3	15	7.4
Education background	Year 12 or below	26	8.4	56	27.5
	Diploma	54	17.4	45	22.1
	Bachelor	190	61.1	38	18.6
	Postgraduate	41	13.2	65	31.9
Job nature (working for)	Government or its affiliated organizations	27	8.7	33	16.2
	State-owned companies	40	12.9	45	22.1
	Private companies	125	40.2	66	32.4
	FDI companies	28	9.0	16	7.8
	Self-employed	91	29.3	44	21.6
Career stage	New graduates	98	31.5	56	27.5
	Worked less than 3 years	99	31.8	44	21.6
	Worked for 3–5 years	45	14.5	38	18.6
	Worked for 5+ years	69	22.2	66	32.4
Marriage status	Single	147	47.3	64	31.4
	In a relationship	92	29.6	67	32.8
	Married without children	23	7.4	14	6.9
	Married with children	49	15.8	59	28.9
Travel experience	Much more than my peers	18	5.8	13	6.4
	A bit more than my peers	96	30.9	38	18.6
	Similar with my peers	125	40.2	88	43.1
	A bit less than my peers	60	19.3	53	26.0
	Much less than my peers	12	3.9	12	5.9
Origins	Big cities	225	72.3	133	65.2
	Medium or small cities	63	20.3	51	25
	Towns or countryside	23	7.4	20	9.8

60% of the participants (311/515) indicated that they were at least likely or very likely to consider taking part in a gap time holiday in the next one to three years. Table 1 presents the demographic differences between the potential gap time holiday takers and those who are not interested in this travel style.

In order to identify the characteristics of the potential gap time holiday takers, a comparison with those who were not interested in taking a gap time holiday was conducted. The analysis revealed that the groups were significantly different in age ($\chi^2 = 18.43$; df = 4; $p = .001$), job type ($\chi^2 = 17.27$; df = 4; $p = .002$), career stage ($\chi^2 = 10.64$; df = 3; $p = .014$) and marital status ($\chi^2 = 18.25$; df = 3; $p = .000$). Compared with the non-gap time holiday takers, the potential gap time holiday takers tend to be younger, and without marriage obligations. These results also indicated that the potential gap time holiday takers were more likely to be new graduates or those who were in the very early career stage, specifically having worked for less than three years. Potential gap time takers were more likely to be working for private companies or be self-employed (69.5%) and less likely to work for the government, its affiliated organizations and state-owned companies, which are considered as stable and prestigious in China.

4.2. *What are the preferred characteristics of a gap time holiday?*

The descriptive results from the survey were consistent with Wu et al.'s (2015) findings from netnographic analysis. When asked how long they are going to spend on such a holiday, two weeks to a month and a month to three months were favoured by 35.3% and 28.1% of the respondents, respectively. Additionally 20% of respondents would like to have a gap holiday from 3 to 12 months. These results again indicate that the concept of a gap time holiday in the Chinese context has to be interpreted as expressing a style of travel and time use rather than being equivalent to the western "year off" spent in undertaking the activity.

Seventy-five per cent of the respondents reported that they would be personally responsible for funding such a holiday. Family support (54/311) and travel loans (5/311) were only minor alternatives. For their travel style, sightseeing was chosen as the key activity by two thirds of the participants while relatively few reported a preference for voluntary work (11%) and a working holiday (13%). When considering the issue of companionship, travels with one's friends and relatives were selected by two thirds of the participants. One fifth of the respondents preferred travelling alone. Undertaking a gap time holiday with new friends identified through online contacts was welcomed by a small number of tourists (26/311). The use of a professional organization such as a travel agency or a gap time holiday business was not a common preference (9/311).

The researchers also examined the most preferred destinations for this potential market through open-ended questions. As many as 282 (out of 311) respondents replied listing their destination(s). Southwest China (94/282) and especially Tibet (61/282) were the most popular destinations, while 155 respondents were interested in overseas countries. Among the overseas destinations, European countries (especially Italy, France, Switzerland, UK, and Germany) (80/282) and South East Asia and islands in the Pacific (25/282) were seen as possible places for the time spent out of China.

4.3. *What constraints respondents from taking a gap time holiday?*

This section reports on what prevents these Chinese respondents from participating in a gap time holiday. The twenty-three constraints items, constructed from the literature and revised

by both gap time holiday participants and non-participants, were used. Those who did not evaluate any of the 23 items were omitted from the analysis. As a result, 308/311 sets of answers were considered as valid cases.

Descriptive analysis revealed that the mean values of these attributes were all above 2 (represents "a little influential"), except for one item, which is "concerned about it being hard to return to ordinary life after a gap time holiday" (mean = 1.73). Given the low score, which means most of the respondents did not view this issue as a constraint, the item was deleted from further analysis. The rest of the means varied from 2.08 to 3.60.

PCA with Varimax rotation was adopted to examine the dimensions of travel constraints in preventing Chinese youth from participating in a gap time holiday. An exploratory approach was used in this study because there were no clear precedents or previous studies of this specific group's constraints. The KMO (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy) (value = .847) and Bartlett's tests (df = 231, $p = .000$) of the 22 attributes suggested that factor analysis was appropriate for exploring the structure of the matrix. The further analysis revealed that there were six factors when using a scree test where the latent root was greater than one. The eigenvalues combined to give a cumulative percentage of 60.85. The six factors were chosen not just by their statistical scores but also because of the clarity of interpretation. The factor names and high loading items as well as the Cronbach's alpha values are presented in Table 2. Based on the content in the items, the six factors were labelled as "financial and time concerns", "social pressure", "social responsibility", "personal skills and safety concerns", "competing interests and effort" and "travel companions".

It is evident that the six constraints factors overlap with the three layers of travel constraints in the foundation model. These links will be discussed subsequently. Additionally, the findings also highlighted other issues, for example, social responsibility towards family and working units. In the next section, statistical analysis will be conducted to assess whether a hierarchy of the travel constraints exist in the current data, and if so, whether or not it is consistent with the foundation model.

4.4. *How influential are the constraints?*

In order to assess the relative power of the forces influencing taking a gap time holiday, the 22 attributes were re-organized by transferring them into the six identified factors, using their mean values. Repeated measures one-way ANOVA analysis, which identifies differences among multiple correlated group means, was undertaken. The approach operates through a series of tests (e.g. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, Mauchly's Test of Sphericity, Tests of Within-Subjects Effects, *F*-test and the multiple comparisons of means) confirming the adequacy of the sample and examining the critical mean differences. The sampling size was assessed as adequate but the probability value of Mauchly's Test of Sphericity (.000) indicated that the variances between the six sets of scores were not equal. Under the scenario of a lack of homogeneity (equality) of variance, a statistical correction for Tests of Within-Subjects Effects was carried out to provide an appropriate adjustment. The results of the adjusted repeated measures one-way ANOVA analysis revealed significant differences among the six factors ($F = 36.89$, $p = .000$). Moreover, the large partial eta squared value (.120) indicated that there was a relatively large effect because it explains 12.0% of the differences in the data.

A post hoc analysis (through Pairwise Comparisons) was then conducted to locate the differences (see results visually in Figure 1). The attributes falling in the same dashed circle were considered to be equally important as constraints at the probability level of 95%. Two

Table 2. Travel constraints Chinese to take a gap time holiday tour – factor analysis (varimax rotation method).

Factors	Items	Mean[a]	Factor loading	% of variance	Reliability
F1: Financial and time concerns (3.04)[b]	The financial loss during the tour	2.57	.392	11.45	$\alpha = .732$
	Short of financial support – trip preparation	2.94	.817		
	Short of financial support – on the road	3.06	.792		
	Lack of leave/time	3.58	.466		
F2: Social pressure (2.44)	Hard to get a visa to overseas countries	2.66	.491	11.17	$\alpha = .740$
	Family's objection	2.90	.459		
	Peers' misunderstanding	2.15	.816		
	Social prejudice towards uncommon activities	2.03	.804		
F3: Social responsibility (2.93)	Interruption of one's career trajectory	3.52	.546	10.47	$\alpha = .728$
	Obligation towards family	2.64	.736		
	Obligation towards the working unit	2.65	.816		
F4: Personal skills and safety concerns (2.86)	Confidence of travelling long distance/unfamiliar places	2.57	.645	9.96	$\alpha = .691$
	Personal safety issues	2.95	.793		
	Safety in the destinations	3.05	.603		
	Lack of skills (e.g. communication, language and financial planning)	2.86	.529		
F5: Competing interests and effort (2.33)	Lack of interest in travelling	2.15	.750	9.35	$\alpha = .671$
	The considerable preparation work	2.56	.670		
	Committed to a local activity	2.23	.544		
	Personal health status	2.36	.432		
F6: Travel companion (2.98)	Lack of a gapping companion	2.92	.792	8.44	$\alpha = .648$
	Difficulty in negotiating time with the travel companion	3.42	.798		
	Short of organized options for gap time holiday	2.62	.499		

[a]The mean values were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a great deal*.[b]The score here indicates the mean values of each factor, measured in the previously mentioned 5-point Likert-type scale.

layers of constraints with significantly different degrees of influence. F1 (Financial and time concerns), F3 (social responsibility), F4 (personal skills and safety concerns) and F6 (travel companion) were found to play a bigger role in limiting Chinese youth's gap time holiday participation compared to the other two factors.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. *Principal points*

This study emphasizes the intersection of two topics – the emerging gap time holiday in China and the analysis of constraints. It was found that the potential Chinese gappers

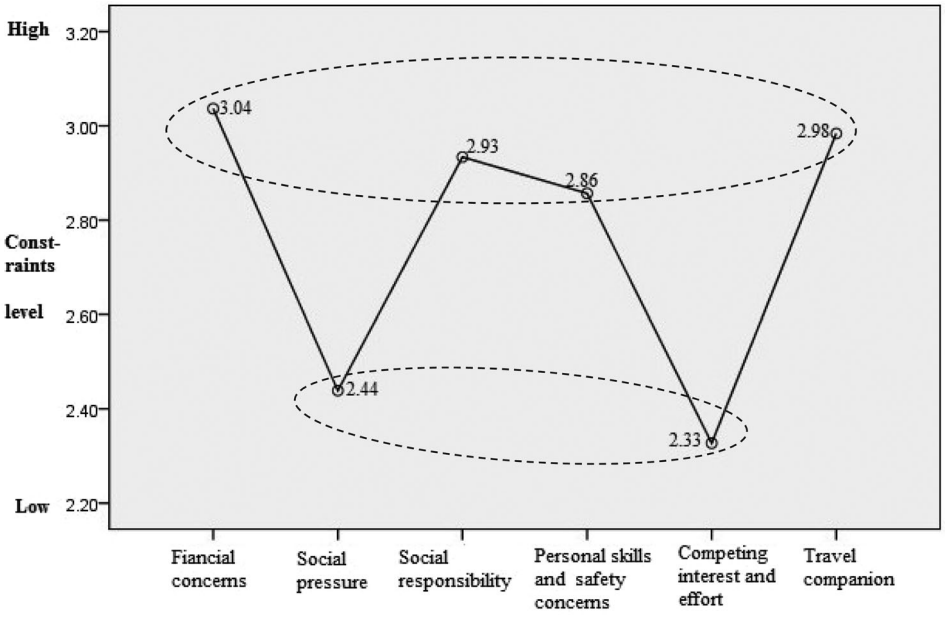

Figure 1. The levels of importance of the six gap time holiday constraints factors.

and the non-gap time holiday takers were significantly different in age, job type, career stage and marital status. The potential gappers tended to be younger, in their early career stage and without marriage obligations. They were more likely to work in private companies and be self-employed. Those with stable and well-paid jobs (e.g. working for the government, its affiliated organizations and foreign direct investment firms) showed significantly less interest in gapping. Indeed, leaving these sorts of jobs risks losing one's prospects and is accompanied by strong social pressure to remain in a quality job role (Liu, Lam, & Loi, 2014). Young people's travel decision is not simply individual decision. Rather, they are shaped by existing conventions, normative expectations and facilitated or constrained by available resources (Luzecka, 2016). The wider issues, for example, the highly competitive job market, the distinctive payment system within various industries, the relatively conservative social environment, as well as the strong sense of family responsibility, are all related and influential forces in their decision-making.

The core part of the survey study sought to address the more conceptual aim of the research effort and identify the factors inhibiting the younger Chinese from taking a gap time holiday.

Factor analysis of the 22 potential constraints suggested that there are six factors preventing them from taking a gap time holiday break. These six factors are "financial and time concerns", "social pressure", "social responsibility", "personal skills and safety concerns", "competing interests and effort" and "travel companions". These categories do coincide with the three dimensions, intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints and structural constraints described in the core literature. For example, "financial and time concerns" is a typical structural constraint, while "social pressure", "social responsibility" and "travel companions" are representatives of the interpersonal constraints. Personal skills and safety concerns, and competing interests and effort are more about intrapersonal concerns.

Further analysis through repeated measures one-way ANOVA indicated the hierarchical nature of the influences within the six constraints factors. "Financial and time concerns", "social responsibility", "personal skills and safety concerns", and "travel companions" were found to be similarly powerful, and significantly more influential than the other two factors (e.g. "social pressures", and "competing interest and effort"). This finding varies from other travel constraints studies in the western context (Crawford et al., 1991; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002) and also studies in the Asian contexts about outbound travel (Li et al., 2011; Zhang, 2009). Some of the powerful constraints identified in the present study, for example, financial concerns (He et al., 2014), personal skills and safety concerns (Lai et al., 2013; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002), and travel companions (Kazeminia et al., 2015) have been acknowledged as very influential in previous studies.

Social pressure and social responsibility, however, are less commonly observed in the studies undertaken in western contexts. In studies of young European travellers, one of the most common themes is about being away from parents, even forgetting that they exist (cf. Pearce & Maoz, 2008, p. 37). By way of comparison, the current findings once again highlight the cultural issues operating on and through tourism (Sun, Zhang, & Ryan, 2015). Indeed, in the Chinese collective culture, it appears that the youth are still deeply influenced by the traditional values involving enduring and frequent family connectivity (Fu, Cai, & Lehto, 2015; Gardiner & Kwek, 2017; Hsu & Huang, 2016; Mok & Defranco, 2000).

The profile of the potential gap takers and their perceived constraints are underpinned by the values of family and work obligations in the Chinese society. Indeed, due to the cultural influence of Confucian teachings, a patriarchal clan system, Buddhist teachings, and the long agricultural history of Chinese society (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004), Chinese youth often continue to keep close ties with their family and seek family support in their endeavours, even though they are active in the outside world (Wu & Wall, 2016). Several "thick" interpersonal nuances which reflect the realities of life in contemporary China help explain these broad cultural forces. Many young and successful Chinese couples still take responsibility for their elderly parents. Often a single parent lives in the apartment with a young couple or family. At the very least, frequent visits are common if the elderly parents remain in reasonably close proximity (Wu & Wall, 2016). This parental care and responsibility is mostly a willing duty, but the consequences of taking a gap time holiday could be an interpersonally complex and potentially divisive family issue for many young adults (Jin, Pearce, & Hu, 2017).

The traditional views towards a career matter as well. The contemporary western concept that you work to live well is more likely to be inverted in China: you live to work well and be respected. The concept of face is pivotal here. The idea of being given respect by others, and making sure it is returned, is a long standing and fundamental principle in understanding the life of Chinese people (Lin, 1935). Although face is intangible and abstract, it acts as a key norm that Chinese still consciously or unconsciously follow in social interaction (Gao, Huang, & Brown, 2017). Face can be gained or lost through others' positive evaluation or negative evaluation in any uncertain social situation (Ting-toomey & Kurogi, 1998). A gap time holiday is not yet a well understood or main path for a young Chinese man or woman. Indeed, it is relatively uncommon and even deviant compared to the straight line, devoted career trajectories of so many peers. The constraint of others' expectations and the potential loss of face in pursuing an unusual career bypass or time out are reflected in the results and are embedded in the drive for respect and public views of worthiness.

Furthermore, a focus on the concept of heuristics can add to our understanding of the way the constraints concept function. As noted in the literature review, the substantial and relatively recent development of ideas about heuristics as determinants of choice behaviour is widespread in behavioural economics and psychology (Kahneman, 2011). It is also apparent in some aspects of economic behaviour research and beginning to have an influence in tourists' destination choice studies (Pearce & Packer, 2013). In this scenario, the existing model where participants work through a range of decision steps is not required. In the Chinese gap time holiday context, any of the first layer constraints (e.g. financial and time concerns, social responsibility, personal skills and safety concerns and travel companion) can be heuristics, preventing the individual from further contemplation about taking a gap time holiday. The study has not been able to directly identify single heuristics as all powerful short cuts in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the concept remains plausible and through more open-ended interview-based processes. Additional research can explore the full applicability of the idea. Some preliminary evidence that key items matter more than others is supplied by those responses to constraints with the highest single mean scores. Adopting this approach, there is a strong possibility that definitive decisions may rest on such factors as the high mean score items of lack of leave/time, interruption to one's career trajectory, disagreement from family members and lack of a willing partner appear to be major single issues with the power to make individuals reject the gap time option.

5.2. *Research and practical implications*

Apart from the inherent interest in exploring a new topic, and the significance globally of all rising trends in Chinese tourism, studying the gap time holiday tourism in China can be especially valuable for its potential insights about the future.

This phenomenon of pursuing a gap time holiday and the indications of interest in the topic provided by this study do begin to offer implications for many destinations to pursue this developing market. The survey-based study of the potential gap takers indicated that these tourists have some preferred destinations and travel styles. Their most favoured destinations are southwest China (e.g. Tibet, well-known for ethnic tourism), Europe (familiar through formal education), and Southeast Asia and Pacific islands (well-promoted as exotic, easy to access and friendly destinations). These destinations as well as others can package their products for the Chinese gap takers' extended trip. They can also tailor their promotion through various social media channels where the Chinese gap time holiday takers exchange information and encourage each other. The opportunities to reach this emerging group through these channels represent a significant promotional opportunity for the favoured locations.

Overall, this study enriches our understanding of the gap time holiday phenomenon by considering its form China. Though peripheral at the present time, the gap taking phenomenon is expected to grow, and may even be accepted as a central activity in the near future. Three reasons prompt this view: there is considerable social media promotion of the travel style, Chinese society is becoming more affluent, and further, there is some growing flexibility in the work and education environments. There remain, however, several limitations in our knowledge of this topic area. A convenience sample in one part of the country builds the information for the present work. The consolidation of these initial findings is needed. In the present work, there was the further difficulty of sampling likely behaviours towards an unfamiliar style of tourism. Additionally, little is known about Chinese community and family support for the gap time holiday concept. Studies of the influence of these social

forces may be more powerful than would be gap time holiday participants realize or appreciate. Rapid change, though, is a characteristic of modern China and it may be the case that the practice of taking a gap time holiday reflects the dynamic nature of travel in the world's most populated country.

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ORCID

Philip L. Pearce http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3829-4449

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