

The Role of Chinese Green Tea and Tourism Development in Hunan Province

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ABSTRACT

Hunan tea is a famous type of Chinese tea that grown in the mountainous regions of the province. This research examines the role of green tea to tourism development in Hunan. This study explored the impact of brand of origin toward a tea culture tourism destination. A quantitative research method, an online survey was conducted in Hunan Province, China. There were 287 respondents answered the online survey based on their perceptions toward Hunan tea tourism that comprises of five aspects such as interpretation of tea culture awareness, tea culture characteristics of tourism products, consideration to developing tourist attractions, close collaboration between stakeholders, strategic marketing planning. The findings show that the brand of origin of the products has impact on the tourism development where it influences tourists' visit intention. This research provides the relationship between country of origin and the place where it is promoted provides valuable insight into the application of image of destinations analysis. moreover, this research employing a rating system for assessing Hunan tea tourism image and this research provides recommendations for tea tourism industry in Hunan province.

KEYWORDS: Tea Tourism, Hunan Tourism Development, Tea Industry, Tourism Performance.

INTRODUCTION

When exploring the explanations for why customers have such an emotional attachment to a certain brand or product, it is important for marketing managers to focus on the 'authenticity' into consideration as an important component of the holistic approach (Choi et al., 2015). In the customer purchase decision process, it is important for the marketing managers and businesses to aware that customers often make purchases based on the brand's reputation rather than the product itself, the significance of an authentic brand's appearance is immeasurable.

Cultural significance, unique tea categories, beautiful scenery, interesting tea-related activities, and economic impact significantly contribute to Hunan tea in the tourism industry. As a result, it strengthens the region's tourist possibilities and provides tourists a taste of Hunan's unique tea culture. The word "tea" defines variety of different things. In China, tea has evolved into a separate meal service in restaurants and hotels, with specialised tea menus that reflect regional tea customs. With a long and storied tradition of tea consumption, rural Hunan stands to benefit economically from increased tea production diversity and quality. Luxury hotels and teahouses in Changsha, Hunan Province's capital, have each established their own "Tea Appreciation Festival" to cater to the city's growing tourist trade.

The tea production in China has catch many attention from all around the world. The findings are both significant and interesting. One study found that (1) the level of education, the size of the family labour force, the location of the village, and the role of the government all had little effect on tea farmers' willingness to invest and (2) China's tea business attributes a lot of its achievement to technological and management developments (Zhi et al., 2018). Tea tourism is used to describe the practise of using tea's rich cultural history as a draw for visitors. This includes the rituals surrounding the beverage's cultivation and consumption as well as its place in history and science. This new tourism mode with tea as the theme is an innovative development mode involving the deep combination of the tea and tourism industries. The location value of tea in the traditional tea industry is primarily demonstrated by the tea garden and tea factory of the manufacturing and processing type or the tea house and tea house of the social consumption

type.

From the perspective of the tea business, the hotel sector offers enormous marketing and distribution prospects for regional tea tourism products. The growth of the tea culture to bridge the gap between the traditional field value and life value of the tea industry and tourism. Tourism and culture both play a vital role in image formation, offering a fundamental justification for landscape aesthetics and altering the environment to better reflect the demands of customers. This study aims to (1) to define brand of origin impact to tourism industry and (2) to analyse the influence of brand attachment, brand commitment, and brand loyalty in the context of worldwide products businesses from the perspective of a more comprehensive marketing strategy. The findings of this research will be useful in formulating comprehensive marketing strategies for the tea industry in Hunan Province in China that take into account the fundamental principles of brand of origin and long-term connections with customers. This paper presents the significant of Hunan tea industry to the tourism industry in China. Potential strategic marketing and product development opportunities that will be discussed in this paper that benefits to both academia and industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hunan is a province in south central China that is known for its rich culture, scenic landscape and tea production. Hunan had many tea plantations and tea processing facilities that are open to visitors. Tourist can visit these tea gardens and learn about their cultivation, harvesting and processing of tea leaves. They can also participate in tea ceremonies and taste different varieties of Hunan tea. In addition to its tea culture, Hunan is also a popular tourist destination for its

natural beauty and historic sites. The province is home to many scenic attractions, such as Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, which inspired the floating mountains in the movie Avatar and the Yangtze River. Hunan is also known for its rich history and culture heritage with many ancient temples, museums, and other historic sites. Tourist visiting Hunan can explore the province's natural and culture attractions while also experiencing its tea culture. They can sample Hunan tea, learn about its production process and can even bring home some of their favourite blends of souvenirs.

TEA CULTURE TOURISM

From 1986 to 2015, China expanded its tea plantation area. During the first phase, China's tea plantation area grew by just 70 thousand hectares (ha), and during a few years the area actually dropped. The total area of tea plants grew at quickly after 2001, with an average yearly rate of 7.11 percent (Zhi et al., 2018). The term "tea tourism" is used to describe the activity of using elements of tea culture, including as its tea history, tea production methods, drinking culture and tradition, technological developments, and others, as a tourist attraction (Haiyan et al., 2022). Many parts of China's rural tea industry have established tea garden tourism and relaxation in addition to tea museums and tea-related activities. Tourists from all over the world visit Hunan to experience the areas famous with tea traditions. It is the 'dream place' of tea-tourism areas that by combining the two industries such as tea landscapes and rural heritage that would be able to improve the local economy and provide better living conditions for the local population (Liang & Lai, 2022). The tourism industry in tea Hunan Province generally includes discovering about tea processes and participating in all aspects of the tea industry, from picking leaves to packing and shipping.

Moreover, famous Hunan teas include the yellow tea called as Huoshan Huangya that is known for its delicate flavour and scent. Tea farms in Hunan are accessible for the public, where tourists are able to see the entire process of making tea from planting to packaging. In addition to visiting tea plantations, tourists visiting Hunan can also participate in traditional tea ceremonies and tastings, and they acquire an appreciation for the tea drink while learning about the tea's cultural significance in Hunan. Across Hunan, the tourists may experience the traditional tea rituals and learn to appreciate tea at any tea shops. The Yuelu Academy is a prominent centre for the study of Confucianism and tea culture where it is only one of many historic places and landmarks in Hunan associated to the tea culture. Hunan is home to several historic towns

and villages, such as Fenghuang and Tongguan, that have preserved and still around their connection to the Hunan tea culture.

In general, tea cultural tourism in Hunan is an exceptional opportunity to learn about the uniqueness of Hunan tea and engage with the local people and communities who have been producing and enjoying tea for generations, as well as the rich history and traditions of Chinese tea culture. Sustainable livelihood has a significant positive impact on tea tourism satisfaction, and tea tourism satisfaction has a favourable effect on return intention, according to Yoopetch & Kongarchapatara (2021) research on Thailand's Chiang Rai area.

According to Zhou et al (2023), here are three categories for 'tea culture tourism' which developed in the 1990s, which are; (1) What is tea culture tourism: specifically focusing on the categories of tea culture and tourism, (2) How to develop tea culture tourism? and (3) What kind of tea culture tourism is developed?. The study focuses mostly on analysing the tourist and tea industries' growth patterns, classifying multiple kinds of tourist products that have been developed in response to specialised consumer needs and geographic factors (Zhou et al., 2023).

THE INFLUENCE OF ORIGIN BRAND IMAGE

Products with a strong country of origin label generally to sell better in international markets. A sense of confidence, dependability, and quality may be established among consumers when a product has a favourable brand image associated with a particular country or place. Therefore, international commerce can help stimulate economic growth by increasing the demand for items from that country. An individual's perception of the destination changes based on how that individual generally perceives the country. Therefore, the subject image will influence how its association to the image perceived (Liang & Lai, 2022). Few studies have investigated consumers' perspectives on certification labels and country of origin, despite an extensive amount of previous research on consumers' food preferences, purchasing decisions, and perceptions of food quality attributes. Food and tourism have a in depth connection with tourists since they need to eat when they are away from home, allowing them the opportunity to try local products (Marcoz et al., 2016). Moreover, Marcoz et al (2016) stated that holidays are usually viewed as occasions for spending and explore new food-stuffs; tourists are frequently experiencing such positive responses to these experiences that they return home with new eating habits.

Customer purchase intention refers to a customer's attraction to a product and his likelihood of making a purchase; this can vary widely from one product in one industry to another due to the fact that customer purchase intention is highly dependent on various moderators. Furthermore, it is believed that customer satisfaction and purchase intention are strongly related to each other, and that when customers are satisfied with their purchases, there will be a stronger connection between both of these factors (Afzali & Ahmed, 2016).

THE CURRENT STATUS OF TEA CULTURE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Traditional Chinese culture is effectively represented by its tea culture, that is based on tea leaves and encompasses a wide range of related subjects such as tea people, tea history, tea events, tea technology, tea ware, tea cuisine, and tea art (Zhou et al., 2023). In addition, promoting the transformation and development of the local tea industry, it have massive impact to the development of China's ecological civilisation by integrating ecotourism and tea culture to provides advantages for engaging the ecological benefits of tourism activities and enhancing the quality of tourism. Furthermore, culture is the essence of tourism, and tourist activities without of cultural aspects fall prey to being superficial and mediocrity since culture is the foundation of tourism. (Zhou et al., 2023). There is clear differences between tea culture tourism and other types of tourism. These differences can be seen through tea culture tourism that includes characteristics typical of tourism aspects such as consumption, leisure, social, and aesthetic attraction. The symbolic meaning behind the tea can appreciated through the lens of the Hunan tea's beautiful landscapes and diverse culture.

There are many of feasible ways that tea garden owners and tour operators may employ to reduce the issue and increase awareness of the Chinese tea culture. Sustainable development is given priority by tourism organisers to enhance infrastructure development, develop new professionals, and create an effective management systems. Hotels, restaurants, souvenir stores, and other tourist attractions are frequently cooperate together with the tea tourism businesses. Many tourism places and economies are slowed down by a high number of unattractive tea brands and a lack of clear objectives for tea tourism development. Moreover, businesses and marketing managers may promote tea tourism products through social media as well. Many tea garden areas are struggle to attract tourists due to an excess of inadequate tea brands and a lack of consistency around tea development goals. Marketers may use social media to spread the word about tea tourism companies efficiently.

BRAND ASSOCIATION AND DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN BRANDING

Many consumers have come to identify particular nations or areas with producing superior goods in a certain field. Many people believe that Swiss watches, Italian fashion, and German engineering technology are the best in the world. Consumers may be more confident in the product's quality and prepared to pay a higher price if it carries the brand image of a country renowned for supremacy in a particular area of expertise. Products that are made in a particular place may also carry the name of that area. Consumers are more likely to place their confidence in and select products from a country or region that has a track record of consistently delivering high-quality, long-lasting innovations. Consumers may be driven by the image of a company if they identify it with low standards of quality or unethical business practises.

Consumer perceptions and decisions can be influenced by a country's or region's cultural traditions and values. Products that appeal to consumers on a deeper level may be those that reflect their own cultural identities or ideals. For instance, environmentally conscious consumers may be attracted to a product made in a country with a strong reputation for protecting the environment. The probability of a consumer making a repeat purchase is influenced by the level of satisfaction they are with the products they have just purchased. If a customer is satisfied with their purchase, they will have a more favourable impression of the company and will be more probable to purchase from them again (Afzali & Ahmed, 2016). According to Fournier (1998), commitment is the consumer's conscious decision to maintain engaging with a particular brand as time passes, and this commitment can be seen in the customer behaviours, and that commitment has made the active choice to maintain an important relationship viable (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Hunan is known for its high-quality tea production and has several brands and designations of origin associated with its tea products. Brand association and designation of origin branding are important for promoting and protecting the reputation of Hunan's tea industry and ensuring that consumers can trust the quality and authenticity of the products they are purchasing. One of the most well-known brands associated with Hunan's tea industry is Hunan Tea. This brand is used to market a variety of tea products from the region, including black tea, green tea, oolong tea, and yellow tea. The Hunan Tea brand is recognized both domestically and internationally for its quality and taste.

In addition to brand association, Hunan has several designations of origin for its tea products. Designation of origin branding is a legal protection that ensures that products from a specific region meet certain quality standards and are produced using traditional methods. In Hunan, the most well-known designations of origin for tea include Junshan Yinzhen, Anhua Dark Tea, and Huoshan Huangya.

The tea is typically made from larger, coarser tea leaves that have been grown in mineral-rich soil, and it is known for its earthy flavor and aroma. The production process for Huoshan Huangya tea is similar to that of green tea, but it also involves a unique yellowing step, which gives the tea its characteristic yellow color and mellow flavor. The tea is known for its sweet and nutty taste, with notes of chestnut and a smooth, silky texture.

By promoting its brands and designations of origin, Hunan is able to market its tea products as unique and high-quality, which can help to attract more tourists and increase demand for its tea products both domestically and internationally. At the same time, the legal protections associated with designation of origin branding help to protect Hunan's tea industry from imitations and ensure that consumers can trust the quality and authenticity of the products they are purchasing.

METHODOLOGY

The influence of Hunan green tea to Hunan tea tourism was employed using quantitative descriptors in this research. Therefore, data for this research were collected from local as well as international students at City University Malaysia in Malaysia. A total of 287 respondents were selected for this research using probabilistic random sampling methods. The data was gathered using a closed-ended questionnaire. There were a total of 20 questions in the questionnaire used for this study, and the respondents can choose from the following response options: Agree, Disagree and Not Sure. This questionnaire distributed to investigate the characteristics of tea culture and its impact to the Hunan tourism.

DISCUSSIONS

Tea culture tourism activities are increasing popularity in recent years, and to date, many tourists are choosing to visit tea plantations, although there seems to be no established model for developing premium tea tourism, and the industry as a whole is still stagnant. The findings from questionnaire indicated that the role of Chinese green tea and tourism development in Hunan Province and five recommendations to enhance Hunan local tourism strategy through tea tourism.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF TEA CULTURE ON A FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL

The increase in the number of tea tourism as one of the popular tourist attractions allow greater understanding the significance of tea culture. In this early stage on the utilisation of tea resources, it is significant to understand that the transformation of the beautiful natural tea plantations can change into beautiful natural tourism environment that will impact to the tourism products that do not possess unique characteristics of tea culture and tourism projects that are lacking originality and uniqueness (Cheng et al., 2010). Tea science, tea art, tea painting, tea storytelling, and tea events should be extensively integrated into the tourist project in order to advance the ideology of tea culture for the future growth of tea culture tourism. The unique selling points of products associated with the tea culture tourism industry based on the needs and preferences of the target market.

UNIQUENESS OF TEA CULTURE AS TOURISM PRODUCTS

In order to make tourism more appealing to tourists, it is crucial for the businesses to construct and promote appealing Hunan tourism products (Xu, 2010). Development of tea culture tourism, and its following assessment, reflect on the quality of the underlying resource environment. Hunan in China is a popular tourist destination known for its tea, offers the perfect growing environment for tea plants. This provided a strong basis to establish the special characteristics of Hunan tea culture.

The ecological and cultural significance of China's traditional tea culture is high. Ecotourism is a relatively new type of tourism that focuses on minimising negative impacts on the natural environment. It emerged as a response to the conflicts between industrialization, environmental impact, and the need for a better quality of life (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). The performance of tourism attractions is a key indicator of success for the quality areas of tourism. Therefore, it is significant for the local government to focus on the top destinations or areas that consistently perform in the through increasing number of visitors and a transformation in tourism image.

CONSIDERATION TO THE DEVELOPING TOURIST ATTRACTIONS NEAR TEA PLANTATIONS TOURISM

There are two main components to consider when developing a tourist infrastructure which are the transportation and facilities that benefit tourists (Werthner & Ricci, 2004). In order to ensure the steady growth of tourism activities at places of interest, an efficient journey is important, and tourism-supporting infrastructure provides the essential foundation for tourism development. The quality of a destination's tourist infrastructure may be directly attributed to its thorough planning and development. Facilities including tourist centres, parking lots, signs, paths, overlooks, benches, and bathrooms are all part of the package. Because of these facilities, visitors may feel secure and relaxed while exploring the tea beautiful locations. Moreover, access to these beautiful places is facilitated by well-developed infrastructure. This includes access to transport alternatives and well-kept roads and paths. Increasing the area's ease of access attracts more tourists, who spend money at area establishments. It also makes the tea beautiful areas accessible to individuals of many ages and physical capacities.

In addition, another factor that can enhance tea tourism is access to reliable and fast network connections is an essential for contemporary independent travellers (Li et al., 2017). The growing adoption of AI by the hotel and tourist industries, the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, cloud computing, speech recognition, and facial recognition to social media, VR/AR, intelligent service desks, and service robots, the hospitality and tourism industry is adopting smart technologies for their benefits in reducing the cost of labour and increasing service efficiency (Li et al., 2021).

Websites should more organised and structured to enhance the usability of technical devices, specifically smartphones, facilitating the speed with which tourists may acquire relevant information throughout their travels. As a result, data, files, and media may be stored, accessed, and shared not just on personal computers but also, with the help of cloud computing, on servers made available to businesses and individuals by service providers (Pencarelli, 2020). The security of tourists is an important consideration in every infrastructure development. For instance, lighting, emergency alarms, and well-marked walkways of preventative safety measures. This ensures that tourists have a pleasant and relaxed time in the tea beautiful areas, which in turn boosts the area's reputation and brings in more tourists.

CLOSE COLLABORATION BETWEEN ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN HUNAN PROVINCE

The residents of and visitors to tea-growing areas are important to this tourism industry. Their participation and support are essential to the long-term success of the tea tourism industry. Collaborating together with local communities has the potential to enhance tourist experiences by including their knowledge, customs, and their points of views. Local communities' involvement and continued support for tea tourism efforts may be ensured through giving them an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, providing them with employment possibilities, and sharing in the profits. The tea companies depend significantly on the hard work of its farmers and manufacturers. It is important for farmers and manufacturers working together to illustrate how tea is produced, explain the processes involved in manufacturing tea, and provide tourists an opportunity to participate in the process. It is also possible for businesses to work together to support local farmers by purchasing tea from them to sell in tourist shops (Cheng et al., 2012).

Gunasekara & Momsen (2006) explored on how the tea industry contributes to attracting tourists to Sri Lanka from outside. Tea tourism is considered as luxurious and exclusive, or communitybased and pro-poor and is associated with eco-tourism, historical tourism, wellness tourism, and rural and farm tourism. It has been shown that small-scale development may be more effective in connecting tea with tourism, leading to beneficial economic outcomes for local populations.

Black tea, green tea, and jasmine tea all originally in Hunan, making it one of the most significant tea-producing areas in China. Nevertheless, tea culture tourism in Hunan is restricted in several ways. For instance, Hunan has poor infrastructure, travelling to the many tea farms and factories in Hunan areas can be a challenge. This is often difficult for tourists from other countries who are not familiar with the public transportation system. Getting to Hunan's tea fields and factories require a taxi or a flight, depending on their

respective locations and ease of access. There may be logistical difficulties in reaching some tea farms and factories because of their location in outlying or rural locations.

STRATEGIC MARKETING PLANNING

Moreover, tourists may experience challenges travelling in rural Hunan since local people cannot speak English. This makes the tourists difficult to learn about the history of tea in Hunan and the role it plays culturally and traditionally. It is true that English may not be widely spoken in less tourist areas of rural Hunan. The primary language spoken in Hunan is Mandarin Chinese.

The increasing global tourism must have greater proficiency in languages to accommodate tourists from all over the world. All employees in the hospitality and tourism sectors must be fluent in English since it is the universal language of communication.

Hunan is extremely dependent on the seasons for tea culture tourism, just as other tea-producing regions in China. Tourism opportunities are limited because the ideal times to visit are during the spring and fall harvest seasons only. Economic, social, and environmental factors should all be integrated into a development strategy. The transition to sustainable tourism development can potentially be supported, for instance, by integrating national energy and environmental regulations and the capacity for sustainable tourism development.

The primary objectives of tea culture tourism is to gain information about tea, try new types of tea, travelling, and relax. Tea culture tourism is an aspect of cultural tourism that also includes activities like doing business, getting an education, and harvesting own tea. Based on these definitions, it seems more appropriate to describe tea tourism as "tea-driven" or "tea-related tourism" (Yan et al., 2021). This findings concur with Guo et al (2019) that how the tea industry benefits the surrounding agricultural, industrial, and service sectors while additionally working as an important tourist attraction.

The aesthetics, entertainment, and other cultural features of tea are demonstrated through the integration of activities such as poetry, paintings, sculptures, and musical instruments are all examples of cultural symbols in the construction of tea cultural space, allowing tourists to develop an awareness of cultural identity. As a result, cultural space provides ontological meaning within cultures. Humans are essential to cultural life because they both participate in and shape the cultural activities through their behaviours and expressions. Overall, while Hunan offers a unique and fascinating tea culture tourism experience, there are several limitations that must be considered before planning a trip.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research found that the country of origin was one of the most significant factors considered by consumers across all product types. This factor in just as significantly more than the price and the brand name on the packaging. The focus of this research has limitations. Hunan is used as an example, but it is not meant to be representative of all teas or tea-tourism locations. Asia is home to a wide variety of tea producing countries. The findings of this study need more investigation before they can be generalised to different types of tea. The samples were also limited to the province of Hunan, therefore the findings may not be generalizable. It is recommended that future research consist of brands in a variety of popular tourist locations. The tea brand image and its elements have been changed based on what had been discovered in the previous literature. Cross-cultural validity may be a challenge with particular items such as how to educate or engage people about other cultures. It is recommended that further research should be carried out in other countries to validate the measuring scale. Although the destination image has several aspects, the purpose of this research does not intend to investigate each aspect as a mediator. This may be considered into consideration for future research.

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