



Investigating the motivation–experience relationship in a dark tourism space: A case study of the Beichuan earthquake relics, China



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Our study focuses on the motivation–experience relationship and the regulatory function of emotional reaction.
- Implications of dark tourism are identified.
- Tourists' emotional reactions influence more heavily emotional tourist experiences than cognitive experiences do.
- The curious visitors are likely to engage cognitively by learning about the incident or related issues.
- Not all tourists visit the dark tourism destination for dark tourism.

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies implications of dark tourism and describes how tourists and destinations, which are principal collateral cores, define what constitutes “dark” travel. The study also examines the dimensions of dark tourism motivation and experience and finds that the former partly affects the latter. The exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis aimed to examine why tourists approach and engage with disaster sites and how such experiences may affect tourists motivation and emotional reaction. It is the first paper that applies structural equation modelling to dark tourism research. We focus on the causal relationships between dimensions of motivation and experience, and the relationship that the emotional reactions effect on tourist experiences. We find that the curious visitors are likely to engage cognitively by learning about the incident or related issues and tourists' emotional reaction to the “dark” space influence more heavily emotional tourist experiences than cognitive experiences do.

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‘.....power over the natural environment does not automatically produce a sense of security. Likewise, the move.....does not necessary result in any significant abatement of fear. What may indeed change is the character and frequency of dread..... [Because] nature's behaviour [i.e. ways and moods] close to earth was wayward [i.e. fluctuated unpredictably]..... [as] the *Tao Te Ching* says: “Heaven-and-Earth is not sentimental; it treats all things like straw dogs.”.....stability must have seemed an illusion and chaos a constant threat.’

Yi-Fu Tuan

1. Introduction

Though the human fear of death may be worse than death itself, in contemporary society, tourists are increasingly visiting sites that commemorate natural or man-made disasters, such as sites of human death due to earthquakes, tsunamis, war, political conflicts and other macabre events (Stone, 2011). Visitors to the Auschwitz concentration camp, a historical Holocaust site in Poland, have grown from 0.5 million (2001) to 1.2 million (2009), and Ground Zero in New York attracts 3.5 million (Kang, Scott, Lee, & Ballantyne, 2012) visitors annually. While these sites serve as sites of remembrance, they also attract considerable tourist interest (Robb, 2009). Other sites such as the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana and the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall in China may invoke images of awe-inspiring landscapes. Attraction to spaces related to death can be dated back to the gladiator games of ancient Rome. Hence, the Coliseum may be recognized as the first site of dark tourism (Stone, 2005). Similarly, pilgrimages to the Holy Land to visit the site of

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Christ's crucifixion and medieval public executions have been identified as the first death-related forms of tourism (Farmaki, 2013; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). In ancient China, the public convened to witness acts of human sacrifice and the beheadings of condemned individuals (Lu, 1990). These behaviours may also be viewed as original forms of death-related tourism. In addition, Chinese intellectuals who claimed to 'bemoan the state of the universe and pity the fate of humankind' (Chinese idiom) described their reflections of ancient events that involved mourning the dead. For instance, in his poem, *Red Cliffs* (Wang, 2005: p.161), Du Mu stated as follows:

A broken halberd sunk in sand, iron not yet rusted away
 Cleaning it off, I recognize the sign of a former kingdom
 If the east wind had not favoured Master Zhou
 Tong Que's deep spring would've locked up both the two Qiaos

The *Red Cliff* was the battle site of the Battle of Red Cliff, which was a decisive battle fought at the end of the Han Dynasty, approximately 12 years prior to the start of the Three Kingdoms period in Chinese history. We can thus understand Du Mu's visit as a form of dark tourist behaviour. Confucianism considers death to be closely related to the value of life and doctrinally analyses death itself. The philosophy states that an individual will not dread death if he or she realizes the value of the self. For instance, Confucius stated, 'If a man in the morning hears the right way, he may die in the evening without regret' (Legge, 2010: p.82). However, for most Chinese, death is feared because it is considered to be bad luck, and the Chinese 'seek luck and avoid calamity' (Chinese idiom). Given this traditional perception, dark tourism sites are also associated with bad luck. Hence, both ancient and modern humans hold considerable interest in visiting 'dark' spaces.

Numerous scholars have noted and identified various characteristics of the phenomenon of dark tourism. Dark tourism products are believed to occupy a rather 'fluid and dynamic spectrum of intensity' (Stone, 2006: p.145). Along the spectrum ranging from 'darkest' to 'lightest' (Miles, 2002; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Stone, 2006, 2011; Stone & Sharpley, 2008) tourism, distinctions can be made between them and their characteristics vary with respect to educational or commercial ethics, spatial affinity, political influence, and ideology (Stone, 2006). Dark tourism products are thus multifaceted, complex in design and purpose, and diverse in nature. These various products of dark/disturbing past events generate interest and fascination (Sharpley, 2005), following the effects of the media and the commercial market (Seaton, 1999). Moreover, in many studies, dark tourism production is characterized by broader political and cultural meanings (e.g., Amujo & Otubanjo, 2012; Brin, 2006; Stone, 2009).

Despite growing academic attention on dark tourism, which holds considerable social and economic significance, the relationship between dark tourism motivation (DTM) and dark tourism experience (DTE) is not well understood (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Drawing upon contemporary consumption theory related to death and disaster, this study aims to address this gap and focuses on the aspects of DTM and DTE. The study attempts to develop a dark tourism conception through the perspective of geographic consciousness and to establish a context for review studies referring to contemporary perspectives in DTM and DTE. Meanwhile, this study also seeks to examine the reasons why tourists visit dark tourism sites. In addition, the dimensions of DTE are tested through quantitative analyses aimed at expressing tourists' feelings about special, frightening landscapes. Furthermore, this study also attempts to clarify the relationships between DTM, DTE and the emotional

reactions (ERs) of tourists when they are exposed to dark tourism space. Exploring these research objectives will potentially contribute to a better understanding of the psychology and anthropology of dark (disaster) tourism as well as the management of such sites. Particularly, this is the first time to apply structural equation modelling (SEM) to study of dark tourism.

This article has six sections. After the first introductory section, section two reviews the definition of dark tourism and its extension in the interactive process of host (i.e., tourist) and object (i.e., destination). Previous studies on DTM, DTE and ERs are summarized to explore their internal structures, i.e., their underlying dimensions. Section three introduces the Beichuan earthquake relics (BER) as the study area as well as the data-gathering methods and the data-analysis techniques. Section four presents the results of the data pre-processing and the analyses for empirical study via exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Observed variables are used to construct the causal relationships between latent variables, which are estimated via SEM. Section five mainly discusses the probable reasons for the results of the research hypotheses presented in section four. The last section includes conclusions, the implications of the current study and suggestions for future research.

2. Dark tourism and the desire for dark tourism sites

2.1. The definition of dark tourism

Due to a growing fascination among tourists, numerous researchers have focused on the conception of dark tourism, regarding it as a special social phenomenon. However, as opinions vary, no unanimous conclusion can be drawn regarding the definition of dark tourism based on the existing literature. Alternative terminologies have been applied to this phenomenon, including dark tourism (Lennon & Foley, 2000), war tourism (Bigley, Lee, Chon, & Yoon, 2010; Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011), politically oriented tourism (Brin, 2006), thanatourism (Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012; Slade, 2003), penal tourism (Welch, 2012) and atrocity tourism (Ashworth & Hartmann 2005; Podoshen & Hunt, 2011). Nonetheless, the term 'dark tourism' has been most widely applied in the academic literature and is conceptualized as behaviour that involves visiting sites associated with death, disaster and tragedy for remembrance, education or entertainment (Lennon & Foley, 1999). It has also been defined as 'visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continues to impact our lives' (Tarlow, 2005: p.48). Drawing upon the approach of societal perceptions and reactions to death and dying (Stone, 2010), a number of scholars further identify dark tourism as 'a new mediating institution...to construct contemporary ontological meanings of mortality and to contemplate...through consumption of the Significant Other Dead' (Stone, 2011: p. 685). Moreover, considering that death invokes fundamental social and cultural values (Stone, 2012), dark tourism must be a behaviour involved in tourism, society, politics and economy that allows individuals to strengthen their historical consciousness (Henderson, 2000; Lennon & Foley, 1999; Seaton, 1999; Walby & Piché, 2011), remember the past (Wilson, 2008; Rivera, 2008), and experience death (Stone, 2010, 2011; Wight, 2006; Podoshen, 2013). Obviously, by drawing on the aspects of functions and motivation, previous studies fail to describe the DTE and, in particular, the ERs affecting tourists' perception of post-disaster tourism spaces.

The tourist experience mainly stems from unscrambling the symbolic meaning (MacCannell, 1976) in tourist destinations. Concerning this view, Xie (2005) supplements the emotional elements and identifies the processes of the tourist experience that

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