



Vacationers in the countryside: Traveling for tranquility?

Jing Han*

School of Geographic and Oceanographic Sciences, Nanjing University, Nanjing, PR China



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ABSTRACT

Tranquility seeking is growing phenomenon in tourism. While tranquility has been frequently used in tourism motivation literature, it is unclear what it means in tourism and how to recognize it in tourism motivation. The study seeks to explore the forms of tranquility through a lens of motivational framework. Data collecting from Moganshan town, a well-known rural resort in China, revealed that vacationers acknowledged various forms of tranquility in holiday experiences in general. Specifically, the need of tranquil amenities rather than need of tranquil states was dominant trigger of the phenomenon; affective qualities of tranquility were the main source of information that influenced the destination choice. The inclusion of tranquility in tourism extends our understanding of tourism motivation and adds a new subject applicable to tourism.

1. Introduction

People since ancient times have been intuitively seeking nature, tranquility, restoration, and better health in places with natural amenities (Frumkin, 2013). The searches for tranquility appear to grow strongly within the 'noisy' modernity and urbanism (Ray, 2006), where human living surrounding is characterized as increasingly complex, highly organized, congested, and stressful. In (post)modern times, one's looking for a 'little peace and quiet' is a positive response to the sense of anxiety resulting from globalization and time-space compression (Massey, 1994). People desperately need periods of cognitive quiet to regain composure and recover sense of well-being (Pheasant, Horoshenkov, Watts, & Barrett, 2008, 2010). Tranquil areas are also required to be away from daily distractions and recovery from attentional fatigue and sensory overload (Herzog & Chernick, 2000).

Tranquility seeking is clearly ascendant in tourism. The global movement of tourism shows a trend focus on niche product (Marson, 2011), and tourists show a major concern on health, nature, self-growth, and authentic selfhood (Howard, 2012; Wang, 2000). Tranquility emerges as such niche area and tourists seeking for tranquility are much likely driven by enhancement of life quality and improvement of self. Indeed, tranquility exists extensively in new forms of tourism, such as nature-based tourism (Luo & Deng, 2008; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011), health and medical tourism (Tresidder, 2011), slow tourism (Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2014), spiritual tourism (Jiang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2018; Mofakkir & Selmi, 2018; Sharples & Jepson, 2011), and religious tourism (Albayrak et al., 2018; Andriotis, 2009; Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff, 2017).

Tranquility as a topic of research has received large attention across literature (Pheasant et al., 2008), while it has not been fully connected to tourism and few attempts have been made to confirm tourist seek it through tourism, because tranquility may be subconscious, intangible, and imperceptible that is difficult to articulate. Nevertheless, tranquility is an ever-present component in tourism. It is clear that people may travel because they want to be free from disturbance (tranquility), or similarly, to escape from mundane environment (Crompton, 1979). Vacation environment allows individuals to tranquilize the anxiety, release from excessive desires, stimulate creativity and obtain happiness and well-being (Kay Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Kirillova & Lehto, 2015).

The countryside, with its broad views, woodlands and heaths, wildlife, the sounds of nature, massive skies and open water, offers a space to experience deep tranquility (Campaign Protection Rural England [CPRE], 2015). Studies that seek insights into tourist segments or tourist experience consistently report tranquility seeking as a key motive visiting rural areas (Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010; Frochot, 2005; Hewlett, Harding, Munro, Terradillos, & Wilkinson, 2017; Kastenholz, Davis, & Paul, 1999). Tranquility as special, fundamental and preferred quality of rural areas (Molera & Pilar Albaladejo, 2007; Murphy & Williams, 1999; Park & Yoon, 2009), are now recognized as important indicators for recreation (Goossen & Langers, 2000).

Although tranquility is recognized in tourism phenomenon and the term is being used increasingly in tourism literature to characterize something tourists need, it is unclear what this vague term is meant by in tourism and how we recognize tranquility in tourism motivation. To address the problems, the study intends to clarify the concept in a

* Full postal address: School of Geographic and Oceanographic Sciences, Nanjing University, 163 Xianlin Ave, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210023, PR China.
E-mail address: jinghan@smail.nju.edu.cn.

motivational framework and identify the forms of tranquility in rural tourism. In doing so, it contributes an additional element to the understanding both of rural tourism in particular and of the tranquil dimension of tourism more generally, highlighting the need for and focus of further research into the subject. It would also provide new insights into multi-motivation markets of rural tourism and enable more effective market strategies and destination management.

2. Literature review

2.1. The concept of tranquility

The origin of tranquility rooted in philosophy is positive, described as “ultimate good” and “source of happiness”, and associated with a state in which the soul proceeds peacefully and is well-settled (Kim, 2013). Though not clearly defined, tranquility has been referred across literature of environmental psychology (e.g., Herzog & Bosley, 1992; Herzog & Chernick, 2000), acoustics (e.g., Ren & Kang, 2015; Watts & Pheasant, 2015b), landscape planning (e.g., Hewlett et al., 2017; Watts, Pheasant, & Horoshenkov, 2011), neuroscience (e.g., Hunter et al., 2010), and medicine, nursing and health sciences (e.g., Roberts & Aspy, 1993). These researches have presented tranquility a multiple and dynamic construct, while mostly involves two related judgments (Herzog, Gray, Dunville, Hicks, & Gilson, 2011). First, tranquility is conceptualized as cognitive quiet, which describes an affective state of low level arousal, such as peace, calm, relaxed, pleased, happy, satisfied, at ease, content, and serene (Russell, 1980; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1985). It is a personal construct that requires a complex array of sensory, experiential and emotional inputs (Pheasant et al., 2008).

Conversely, tranquility is more tangible when it is emphasized as distinct qualities within undisturbed and peaceful settings. Normally oppose to noise, tranquility is benefit to our physical well-being and overall happiness (Watts & Pheasant, 2013). It has been recently recognized for its recreational and amenity value in places like villages, protected areas, city parks, town squares, gardens and open spaces (Hewlett et al., 2017; Watts, 2017; Watts et al., 2011). Altogether, tranquility defined here is a concept that recounts both a state of mind and a quality of experience in certain places (Hewlett et al., 2017). It is stressed that, tranquility as a psychological state is more likely to occur in the presence of environmental features that are associated with peace and quiet. Hence, subjective tranquil states can be reconciled with physically objective tranquil spaces (Hunter et al., 2010).

2.2. Tranquility, motivation and rural tourism

The idea of tranquility is not a new in tourism, in fact it is embraced by studies of newer categorizations of tourism, such as nature-based tourism (Luo & Deng, 2008), and religious tourism (Albayrak et al., 2018), spiritual tourism (Jiang et al., 2018). In essence, tranquility philosophy resembles the idea of ‘true self’ or ‘authentic self’ in tourism (Brown, 2013; Cohen, 2010). Tranquil periods allow people touch of inner self and a sense of oneself (Brown, 2013; Chen et al., 2017). It is the therapy of excessive desires and emotions (Kim, 2013), and the positive output of tranquility is a rested state of mind or true life (Jiang et al., 2018). In addition, the notion of spirit, meditation, mindfulness, wellness and happiness in tourism very well convey the idea of tranquility. Indeed, tourists seeking for tranquility focus on immersion in healthy life and evaluation of the self, and much of the tranquil experience are driven by the search for subjective well-being. Hence, body, spirit and mind become a focal point for them.

Tourists apparently need tranquility physically and psychologically. Tranquility experienced as pleasant and positive feelings is a desirable vacation effect (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015). It is often mentioned after a vacation or observed during a holiday (Molera & Pilar Albaladejo, 2007; Frochot, 2005; Kim, 2013; Silva & Prista, 2016). For tourists who have quest for a return to the self and nature, such as mindful tourists

(Jiang et al., 2018) and nature-based tourists (Kaplan, 1984), it is considered as preferred experiential quality. Vacation destinations with tranquil quality are considered ideal place for achieving vacation effect (Lehto, 2013). Tourism destinations, such as national park, have self-evident good environment and attractions and can set the scene for meditation, peace and tranquility (Raadik, Cottrell, Fredman, Ritter, & Newman, 2010). Tranquil experience is likely to occur in vacation environment that comprise the ingredients essential in facilitating a state of tranquility (Hunter et al., 2010; Pheasant et al., 2008).

The countryside is seen as an ideal place where visitors can enjoy peacefulness, simplicity and authenticity (Frochot, 2005). In fact, tranquility has emerged as a primary reason cited for visiting the countryside (Watts & Pheasant, 2015b). Searching for peace and solitude is reported as key motives of visitors to the countryside (Kastenholz et al., 1999). Segments of looking for tranquility are found to be the largest motivational cluster of visitors in the countryside Devesa et al. (2010). Recent study shows that rural tourists are searching for experienced quality, such as a rustic setting, tranquility, and the sense of hospitality (Dubois, Cawley, & Schmitz, 2017). Tranquility is often stressed as the positive feature that constitutes the principal attraction of rural areas (Jones, 2012; Ren & Kang, 2015; Watts & Pheasant, 2015b). The image of the countryside is strongly associated with a place of tranquility and peace, and represents the antithesis to modern and urban life (Frochot, 2005; Silva & Prista, 2016).

The motivation of rural tourists is explored within the context of mass tourism, little attention has been paid to vacationers' deep search in modern times (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011), especially under the general spiritual movement (Singleton, 2017) and emotional turn (Smith, Davidson, & Bondi, 2016) in tourism. As a rarely investigated market, little is known in the rural tourism sector about the niche market's interests, its needs, and whether they are satisfied with tourism products and services (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). Tourism motivation is the starting point that launches the decision process and understands broader system of tourism (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Pearce & Lee, 2005). It accounts for the subsequent analyzing of tranquility phenomenon in tourism, and how rural providers could satisfy this market segment's needs. Thus, identification of tourists' motivations must be the first step.

2.3. Theoretical framework for tranquil motivation

The basic principle to understand how motivation is active is the search for an optimum arousal level or the stable equilibrium state (Crompton & McKay, 1997). Everyone has an optimal level seek to maintain, ranging from a high level that is characteristic of arousal seekers to a low level that is characteristic of arousal avoiders (Lee & Crompton, 1992). The unacceptable simulation or break of equilibrium occurs when one's need arises, and leads one to desired stimulation level and restores equilibrium through satisfying the need (Crompton, 1979). The action ceases when the level of stimulation is considered best or equilibrium is restored as the result of the need being met, and if the need is satisfied, in turn, the simulation, disequilibrium or tension lowers.

Based on this underlying conceptualization, frameworks that delineate the motives into categories have been proposed in literature, for example, the Maslow's *hierarchy of needs*, Iso-Ahola's *escape-seek dichotomy*, and Dann's *push-pull factors* (Crompton & McKay, 1997). As Pearce (1982) argues, no single theory of tourism motivation could be expected to fully explain tourists' behavior, and therefore this study takes advantage of the three and use an integrated framework for conceptual base of tranquil motivation. Push-pull model has received sufficient operational and empirical support in tourism context. It depicts a picture of motivational process involving both sides of tourist demand (push factors) and tourist supply (pull factors) (Kim & Lee, 2003).

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