

The TourX Project Visit to China: A Comprehensive Study on Tourist Perceptions

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Abstract: This study provides an extensive examination of tourist perceptions during a visit to China, conducted within the framework of the Erasmus+ TourX project. The project includes participants from Spain, Italy, Germany, Greece, Belgium, and Portugal. Tourism is widely acknowledged as a mechanism for cultural exchange, fostering intercultural learning and broadening global perspectives. This research aims to empirically analyze the experiences and behaviors of tourists within an unfamiliar cultural environment. The findings contribute to the broader academic discourse on the role of tourism in facilitating cross-cultural engagement and its implications for the tourism industry in China.

Keywords: Tourism, Cross-Cultural exchange, Smart tourism, Digital infrastructure, Tourist perceptions

1. Introduction and Background

Tourism is not solely about visiting foreign countries and observing differences but rather about engaging with diverse cultural landscapes. The essence of tourism extends beyond leisure activities to include intellectual engagement and cultural exploration. In the European context, China remains a subject of intrigue due to its rapid economic growth and distinct socio-cultural dynamics. The predominant media narratives often present China through a Western lens, which this study seeks to assess critically.

Given the prevalence of misinformation and oversimplified representations, this research aims to evaluate China's tourism landscape based on firsthand observations. A key aspect of this analysis is the digital infrastructure that facilitates tourism, including the integration of booking systems and crowd management solutions, which effectively mitigate over-tourism. Notably, the majority of tourists in China are domestic travelers, yet inbound tourism is steadily increasing.

The article continues with a definition of the research problem and questions, followed by a bibliometric analysis, and then an analysis of the literature on China. The methodology followed is then described. Four autoethnographic narratives (written by TourX participant members) are subsequently shared and discussed.

2. Research Problem and Research Questions

The discourse surrounding China in Western media frequently portrays themes of governmental control, lack of creativity, and limited freedoms. This research seeks to address the following core question: What are the actual perceptions and experiences of tourists in China, and how do they compare to the prevailing narratives? Prior studies have shown that negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can significantly shape tourist emotions and influence avoidance behaviors (Duong et al., 2025). In particular, the case of COVID-19 highlighted how crisis-related misinformation affected China's tourism sector (Wang et al., 2024). This study investigates these themes through empirical observation and analysis.

3. VOSviewer – a Bibliometric Analysis

Through VOSviewer we are able to reproduce research being done in certain areas and hence identify important keywords, research tendencies and trends. Image 1 is a VOSviewer depiction (Overlay visualization) (co-occurrence of all keywords, full counting, minimum of 3 occurrences per keyword) of a Scopus database search on 17-11-2024 using the search terms China AND development AND tourism AND technology (which resulted in 865 documents found).

Figure 1 shows more recent keywords in yellow. Words such as environmental protection, cultural industry, social media, e-learning, platform design, renewable energy, tourism economics, digitization, machine learning, rural revitalization and renewable energy.

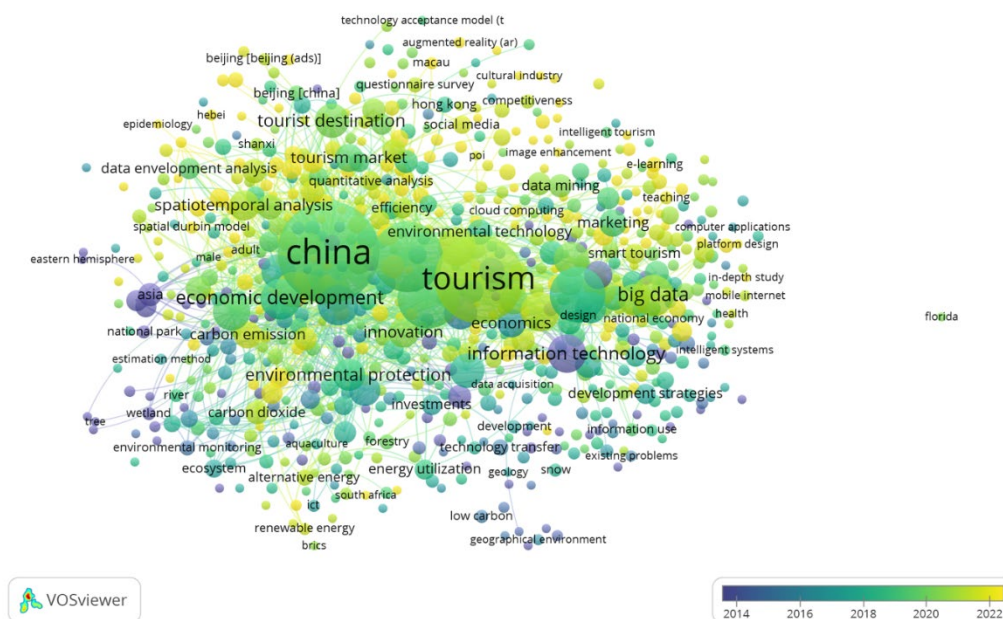


Figure 1: VOSviewer depiction of research on China AND development AND tourism AND technology

Our most current emphasis for TourX (according to extensive research which led to the TourX proposal being approved by the European Commission) is on being sustainable, as well as on cultural and digital issues. Sustainable tourism is essential nowadays and tourist destinations must avoid as much as they can the negative aspects and costs of tourism, especially regarding over-tourism. The growing digitization of the global economy contributes to sustainability in so far as some trips may be done virtually, hence saving resources. Cultural differences still fascinate us at TourX due also to the culturally diverse TourX project team and culturally diverse systems and countries worldwide. Figure 2 shows what perspectives we sought out in our China Visit.

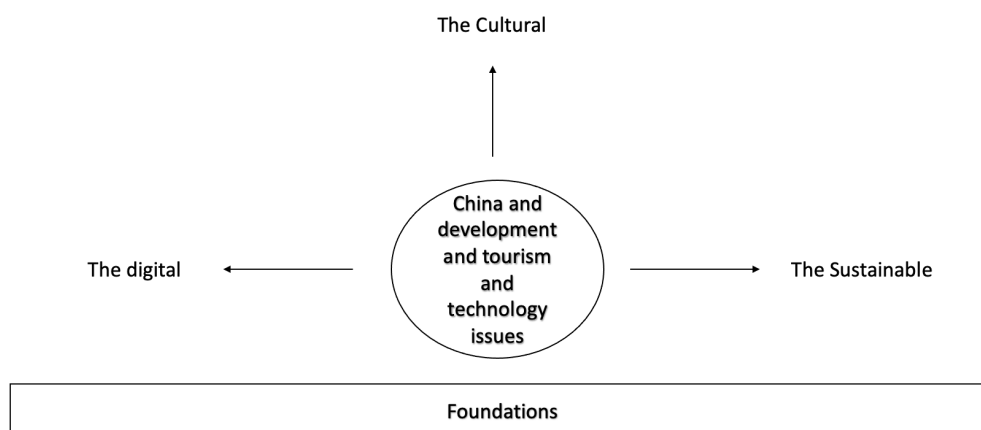


Figure 2: The most current emphasis regarding our research perspective on China

4. An Analysis of the Literature on China

4.1 The Cultural

To write about China is to write about a myriad of cultural influences – incoming and outgoing (Amaro, 2024). This article's focus is on urban experiences and not rural ones (Zhu et al., 2024). We are in agreement with "the prosperity of this country and its hardworking and courageous people" (Wu, 2024, p.1). We see a nation that has learned from its past. Namely, "that dishonest behaviours by local governments in the past can lead to lasting adverse effects on an individual's behaviour in the form of mistrust and subsequent lower frequencies of cooperative behaviour, providing new insights on the origins of cultural differences and human behaviours by investigating the role of governments in shaping social and economic interactions." (Qiliang & Shanming, 2024, p.1061). Qiliang and Shanming (2024) explore "the long-term impact of China's Great Leap Forward (GLF) on current differences in cooperative behaviour across Chinese regions and the underlying trust channel of causality. Combining the current firm-level survey with grain yield over-reporting during the GLF era, we find that past government dishonesty regarding over-reporting in the GLF period has long-term negative consequences on people's behaviours" (Qiliang & Shanming, 2024, p.1061). Recognizing this, China is perhaps the place where foreigners may feel most safe – finding tourist lovers there rather than tourist haters (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018). Corruption is minimized in an environment where meritocracy reigns and where the best people are systematically promoted. Effective and classic economic principles are followed for added efficiency.

"Economic and political changes prioritizing economic growth and individual wealth have increased the shame associated with poverty, manifest as loss of face, low *mian* (status) and lack of *lian* (integrity)." (Yang et al., 2020, p.655). Face continues to be an important facet of Chinese society. "Chinese concepts of face can be differentiated into social face (*mianzi*) and moral face (*lian*)." (Hwang, 2012, p.265). "An individual may feel losing, maintaining, or increasing face based on recognizing others' evaluation of his/her behavior in a certain situation. Thus, it can also be called "social contingent self-esteem" (Hwang, 2012, p.270).

4.2 China's Digital Technology

As the world grapples with the rapid advancements in digital technology, the trajectory of China's evolution within this dynamic landscape deserves careful examination. From its humble beginnings to its present-day dominance, China's digital ecosystem has transformed remarkably, shaping global trends and challenging long-held assumptions (Hussain et al., 2023). Delving into China's digital technology past, present, and future offers a unique lens to understand the country's societal, economic, and geopolitical landscape (Chen et al., 2022).

Rewind to the early 1990s, when China's digital revolution was still nascent (Jin et al., 2022). Marked by limited internet access and a nascent technological infrastructure, the country's digital landscape was a far cry from today's vibrant, interconnected ecosystem. However, the seeds of innovation were already sown, as the government recognised the strategic importance of embracing digital technologies to drive economic growth and modernisation. Spearheaded by visionary leaders and bolstered by a burgeoning tech-savvy population, China's digital transformation gained momentum, laying the groundwork for the remarkable achievements that would follow (Zhang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021).

The turn of the 21st century ushered in a new era of digital dominance for China. The advent of the internet and the proliferation of mobile devices catalysed a profound shift in the country's technological landscape. Fuelled by a vast domestic market, Chinese tech giants like Alibaba, Tencent, and Baidu emerged as global powerhouses, redefining the parameters of e-commerce, social media, and search engine technologies. These companies not only dominated the domestic market but also expanded their reach globally, challenging the hegemony of Western tech giants and establishing China as a formidable player on the international stage (Hussain et al., 2023; Jiang & Murmann, 2022).

Alongside the rise of these tech behemoths, China's digital ecosystem has witnessed the rapid development of cutting-edge technologies, from artificial intelligence and robotics to blockchain and quantum computing (Liu et al., 2023). Driven by strategic government initiatives, such as the "Made in China 2025" plan and the "Digital Silk Road" project, China has invested heavily in research and development, fostering an environment conducive to innovation and technological breakthroughs (Hussain et al., 2023). The country's embrace of emerging technologies has not only transformed domestic industries but also positioned it as a global leader in shaping the future of digital innovation (Wang et al., 2022).

As China looks towards the future, its digital landscape is poised to undergo even more profound transformations. The continued expansion of 5G networks, the widespread adoption of the Internet of Things,

and the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into various sectors are just a few of the developments that will define China's digital landscape in the coming years (Li et al., 2021). Moreover, the country's commitment to developing a robust, secure, and self-reliant digital infrastructure, exemplified by initiatives such as the "Cyber Superpower" strategy, suggests a future where China's digital dominance is further consolidated, with far-reaching implications for the global digital order (Hussain et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021).

4.3 The Digital and the Sustainable

That which is digital (Martins et al., 2024) is good for the environment. Less paper, less travel, less use of scarce resources. "Recent research has empirically verified the beneficial impact of digital technology applications on environmental performance" (Ji et al., 2024, p.1). However, according to a study on China, "SMEs are not as suited to the broad adoption of digital technologies as large firms; instead, they should focus on the deep application of specific digital technologies to promote environmental innovation." (Ji et al., 2024, p.1).

Such digital technologies are already being used in tourism, in China, to avoid the negative effects of over-tourism. Digital management software systems which monitor the affluence to certain locations where previous booking is also prioritized (a good management concept).

Analyzing Chinese firms between 2011 and 2020, Wang et al. (2025, p.1) "investigate how geographic factors influence enterprise digital transformation (EDT) [...] Our heterogeneity analysis shows that compared to non-provincial dual-core cities, proximity to major cities has stronger influence on enterprise digital transformation in provincial capitals and first-tier cities." The modern part of cities such as Chengdu have certainly shown a miraculous evolution in the last 40 years and show how - with the proper planning - the digital transformation may be capitalized on.

The digital transformation is also supporting a better connection between the population and local authorities. Hence people are becoming more sustainable and less and less litter may be seen in the streets and modern China is now one of the cleanest modern countries one may visit. China's electric vehicles are also contributing to a smaller carbon footprint and to the aim of meeting sustainability targets set for China.

5. Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining bibliometric analysis, literature review, and autoethnographic narratives (autoethnography = autobiography + ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011)). "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience." (Ellis et al., 2011, p.1).

The bibliometric analysis, conducted using VOSviewer, identifies key research trends in tourism and technology. Autoethnographic narratives provide a qualitative dimension, offering firsthand reflections on the experiences of researchers and participants during the TourX project visit.

The study adheres to qualitative research principles, with thematic analysis applied to the autoethnographic narratives. These narratives are analyzed iteratively to extract key themes related to technology, cultural adaptation, service quality, and sustainability. Furthermore, empirical insights are triangulated with existing literature to enhance the validity of the findings.

6. Autoethnographic Accounts

Four autoethnographic accounts follow below.

6.1 Autoethnography 1 - Feelings and the General Experience of Being in China – Manuel Au-Yong-Oliveira

I had been to China before, in late 2019 (November-December), on another business trip, with my colleagues (directors of organic units, or faculties) from the University of Aveiro (in central Portugal). My previous trip had lasted around ten days, just like this most recent trip I was experiencing. I had expected to see a lot of confusion during my first trip and was surprised when I did not. I then realized that everyone was working during our time in China, it not coinciding with any holidays that they have. Certainly, the factories we saw on the horizon, one after the other, had smoke coming out of their chimneys, showing a lot of activity. I suppose to make super-power status, as the Chinese certainly have, one has to work hard, up and above what the rest of the world is perhaps working. Even my trip to the Great Wall was one where we were left alone to ourselves.

My second and current trip had again shown how docile a people the Chinese are. We foreigners were pretty much left alone to do what we wanted to, though I coming from a Chinese ethnic background myself had been

approached amicably by an older Chinese lady who spoke to me in Chinese and was probably expecting a response... I do not speak Chinese and can only understand a few words. I obviously look Chinese...

The quality of the Chinese-made electric cars struck us as being extraordinary (up and above anything we were seeing coming out of Europe; certainly, at a par). Upon talking to a local Chinese official, he said that the strategic option had been to move away from what other countries were doing well – combustion cars – and moving towards innovation and sustainability with electric cars. Hence the low carbon-emission objective of 2030 could be reached, as was obviously a concern for the Chinese government.

We saw no repression. We saw instead a people content with going about their own business and with living their own lives amicably and without any fuss or confusion.

Civil servants, having worked for the State, could expect a good pension. This was as I perceived it should be, being a civil servant myself, in Portugal. With less holidays than in the West, the Chinese apparently want to enjoy their retirement as soon as possible and the retirement age is lower in China than in the West, more so for women, according to one of our tour guides for our latest visit. Women retire at around 60 years of age and men five years later at around 65 years of age, in China.

Being in the West, and living in Portugal, I have come across many perhaps biased accounts of unhappy Chinese people, and stories of a repressive regime. I saw none of that while in China. Nor during my first visit, nor during my most recent visit. Yes, I saw a lot of order and respect, but these are good things to see in a society, especially one with so many people. We also saw no litter, and everything was very nice and clean. Remarkable, when compared to some large Western cities.

Most of the tourists we saw were locals, Chinese, and a Chinese official said to expect more than 90% to be Chinese (Figure 3).

A unique event that I experienced and that define the Chinese culture and approach was related to me having lost my weekly agenda (4 pages long, printed in colour) for the week-long visit in Chengdu. “May I have another one please?” I requested of an official. The Chinese official was very clear and gave me a sustainable answer: Everyone was given a copy... no extra copies. Lesson learned - take better care of your things especially if given as a work gift by the host organization.

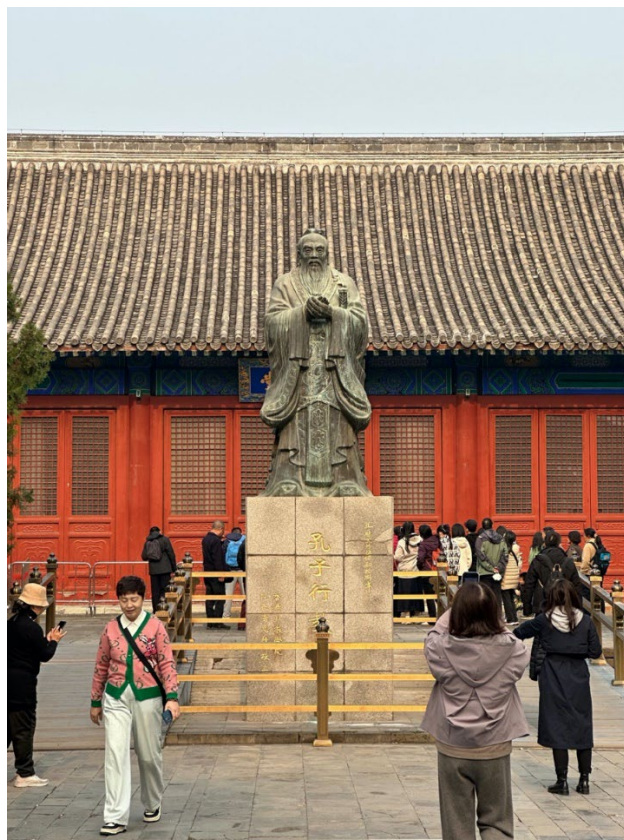


Figure 3: The Imperial College – Beijing – More than 90% of the tourists in China are Chinese (domestic)

Fast-train trips in China are a reality. Easy on- and off- boarding, with the train doors at the same level as the platform – no climbing up and down high steps with heavy luggage – all is facilitated. But most of all what was impressive was that one of the trains actually left a little early – as everyone was seated already, no rushing on the platform, no stressful, last-minute boarding by travellers. All was calm and collected and so the whole trip was comfortable and well within the timetable as disseminated. Impeccable organization.

There is plenty to see in China – for example, the Terra-cotta Warriors and Horses of Qin Shihuang (Figure 4). A breathtaking view of history and of the vision of one particular prince who became known as the first emperor of China. This location, in Xi'an, is known as the eighth wonder of the world.



Figure 4: Museum of the Terra-cotta Warriors and Horses of Qin Shihuang - built 2,200 years ago by 720,000 people and over a period of 38 years

6.2 Autoethnography 2 - from Roger Heinzl (Germany)

In the West, we hear a lot about it and have a general sense of how we compete with China. Popular media publications have emphasised that ‘the US innovates, Europe regulates and China imitates’. The common opinion at home is that China lacks creativity, independent and strategic thinking. We see here that this is not the case. The main tenor of the discussion at home does not reflect the intelligence, the creative atmosphere and the perfect organisation that we find here. The exchange of ideas, the openness and the friendliness are so interesting for us, including for the Germans here, that we ask ourselves: ‘How can we develop such a service orientation?’

For example, modern Chengdu has been created over the last 40 years, a city with 22 million inhabitants today. A lot of thought has certainly been given to what this high-tech city should look like, and a lot of urban planning has been done. What is special, however, is the speed of implementation, the obvious parallelism of planning and implementation.

My perspective has changed, and I have realised that to understand another country, you have to travel there and experience the culture and environment first hand.

You have to focus on understanding and not just travelling as a tourist, but being open-minded when travelling (and researching as a participating observer). This opens up new horizons and results when done this way.

6.3 Autoethnography 3 - "VET Impressions from China" - Antonio Gennarelli (Italian, Based in Belgium)

In terms of international collaboration and exchanges in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET), Europe finds itself in between two emerging continental realities. From one side, the heterogeneous African context, ruled by the principle of informality in the provision of training as well as partnership dealing and collaboration. From the other side, the close-to granitic Chinese system - whose study and observation has been the objective of the Study Visits organized in the context of the European Union-funded project 'TourX - Centres of Vocational Excellence in Tourism'.

Upon interacting with more than 30 educational institutions from the southwestern province of Sichuan, centred in the almost-futuristic city of Chengdu (whose name means 'established capital') as core hub of the region across strategic borders for China, and visiting 5 colleges over the course of 5 days thanks to the invitations of local educational leaders, we are then able to collect some interesting insights on the Chinese approach to VET.

Referring back to the previously mentioned concept of formality, it is indeed impressive to note the maze of structural partnerships underpinning the provision of VET in China. Accredited colleges are by the largest extent public (approximately on a ratio of 5 to 1 according to the Sichuan Education Association for International Exchange) and jointly run by both political & educational leaders. In Europe, where CoVEs strive to engage public authorities for network governance, the Chinese way may appear as an interesting paradox. Colleges regularly cover education up until higher VET, which may be loosely referred to as Level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework; an important achievement, aspiring to provide an ever-higher education technical workforce. It is under this lens that we can understand the strive towards the achievement of 'university' status for many of the institutions we have encountered. Not to create threshold with their technical provision but rather providing clear, qualitative pathways to higher education for a workforce always more engaged in challenging the current state of the art in technological innovations vis-à-vis the rest of the world. In this sense, it remains even more impressive the slogan written in cubital letters outside one of the Chengdu Industry and Trade College campuses – '*Machinery changes the world*' (please see Figure 5).

International business courses over the course of the last 20 years may have juxtaposed the American way of doing business to the Asian one (or ones, if we consider the larger East Asian context): from one side, a transparent, contract-based approach to collaboration on this side of the Atlantic; moving towards the East, collaboration protocols remain more blurred, established on long-term relationships of trust and commonly agreed values. The situation may appear more complex than what it looks like. It may be true that the myriads of Memoranda of Collaboration do not carry legal value per se; however, it is also considerably reductive to consider them as a truly informal approach to collaborations. As now such Memoranda, especially in CoVE establishment, prove the strength of one's network, in China they enshrine the preferred - if not only one - way to collaboration, be it nationally or internationally. Whoever has attended conferences in countries such as China, but also Malaysia, would have surely noticed the true protagonist of such occasions: the protocol!

Specifically for VET, exploring the formality of such education becomes an interesting exercise to better understand the tendency of the system. And if then transforming from a college to university appears to be a matter of indicators (campuses' square meters, number of students enrolled or majors offered) according to the vice principal of one of the institutions visited, then the approach may not be so distant to certain traditions also in Europe (specifically German but also others) in terms of development across the board.

Although not specifically contemplated in the scope of this visit, the training of adults remains a fascinating topic for a population whose reaching more and more higher levels of wealth and prosperity. Negotiations of labour demands are overall centralised and the whole-of-company cultures pushes the workforce to give nothing but the most to the organisation - a remembrance of corporatists approach almost. While in Europe syndicates and trade unions have advocated and do provide training in the form of reskilling or upskilling, there is still space to explore how this is carried out in China, especially beyond the example of large companies which may offer, to some extent, in-service training or internal career pathways.

Since 2017, China has been deeply invested in the improvement of their vocational training system. Understanding the crucial importance of technical occupations, which have made the fortune of the proud Asian giant, allowing it to catch up in terms of technological advancements to the rest of the world. In this perspective, how do China and the rest of the world, or more appropriately for our discussion - Europe, look at each other? For Europeans, China represents still an untapped market at least in the educational sector. Experiments in earlier years, from the year 2000 onwards and until the real true halt of COVID, have only resulted in partial achievements if at all. It is possible that the openness of the country in the post-pandemic era, enshrined by the

visa-free policy of up to 15 days for many European countries and the overall great interest of institutions in international collaborations beyond the perhaps more strategic and regular arena of South East Asia, may provide a renovated opportunity for education-oriented collaboration also at the vocational level. Furthermore, the solidity of this approach may now enjoy a crucial enabling factor represented by the general consensus of Chinese policymakers in terms of strengthening vocational training not only in terms of quantity (the aforementioned KPIs) but also in terms of quality. It is in this context that even before its launch, three Chinese colleges have signed international collaboration agreements at the time of writing for the benchmark of their curricula against the European Qualifications Framework. In an ever more competitive environment for technological advancements and staff shortages across Europe, it will be crucial to understand the strategic stance of the European Union with its continental counterpart in Asia. It remains without doubts though that an impressive interest and commitment to better understand each other can truly represent the foundation of a long-term international partnership for VET at the highest of levels.



Figure 5: The slogan written in cubital letters outside one of the Chengdu Industry and Trade College campuses – ‘Machinery changes the world’

6.4 Autoethnography 4 - An Objective Look at Chinese Culture – Contribution from Emanuela Vizzarro (Italy)

Autoethnography, a research method that blends autobiography and ethnography, allows for a deeply personal exploration of cultural experiences. By examining my own experiences during 8 years of living in China as a western individual, I aim to shed light on the complexities and nuances of Chinese culture, challenging stereotypes and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Through this autoethnographic lens, I would like to delve into the significance of family and collectivism in Chinese society, exploring how these values shape individual identities and social interactions, but for doing so

I would need one entire chapter. I would also examine the concept of "face" and its impact on communication and interpersonal relationships, because during our one-week study visit in Chengdu we attended many meetings with Chinese local authorities, colleges, schools and universities.

Additionally, I would discuss the role of tradition and modernity in contemporary China, highlighting the tension between preserving cultural heritage (historical places in the city, Museums, Opera) and embracing technology globalization and control (biometric measurements, digital payments, phone applications).

By sharing my personal stories and reflections, I hope to foster empathy and critical thinking about Chinese culture. This autoethnographic approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of cultural identity and challenges the notion of a monolithic Chinese culture. It encourages readers to question their own assumptions and biases, promoting intercultural dialogue and respect.

China is a country you cannot imagine, you have to come and visit its cities and experience its culture even if only for a few days, in order to change your perspective. I lived there for eight years and despite the long period, I cannot claim to have fully understood it.

7. Analysis and Discussion of the Autoethnographic Narratives

The coauthors of the autoethnographic narratives shared insights into what they saw and also commented on each others' perspectives. One coauthor knew China particularly well and loved it, having lived there for eight years in the past. The perspective was unanimous, in fact. China was a nice place, despite what may be said in the media, and it was even better to visit. Tourists were treated with great respect and otherwise left alone to 'do their own thing' and enjoy themselves. Let it be noted that, currently, the vast majority of tourists in China are China-nationals.

Table 1 shows key contributions from the autoethnographic narratives following a thematic analysis of the content of each narrative. Themes such as technology, service orientation, formality, consensus, and organization can be seen in table 1 – describing what we saw in China.

Table 1: Key contributions from the autoethnographic narratives (thematic analysis)

Coauthor	Contributions / quotes	Theme(s)
Manuel Au-Yong-Oliveira	"Fast-train trips in China are a reality." "How docile a people the Chinese are". "Everyone was given a copy... no extra copies." "No stressful, last-minute boarding by travellers".	Technology; docile culture; sustainability; organization.
Roger Heinzl	"The discussion at home does not reflect the intelligence, the creative atmosphere and the perfect organisation that we find here" "The exchange of ideas, the openness and the friendliness are so interesting for us". "My perspective has changed".	Surprise and acknowledgement; service orientation; change in mentality.
Antonio Gennarelli	"It is indeed impressive to note the maze of structural partnerships underpinning the provision of VET in China". 'Machinery changes the world'. "The general consensus of Chinese policymakers in terms of strengthening vocational training not only in terms of quantity (the aforementioned KPIs) but also in terms of quality".	Formality; technology; consensus.
Emanuela Vizzarro	"The significance of family and collectivism in Chinese society". "The concept of "face" and its impact on communication and interpersonal relationships". "China is a country you cannot imagine, you have to come and visit".	Family values; interpersonal relationships and 'face'; surprise and acknowledgement.

8. Findings and Discussion

8.1 Tourist Perceptions of China

The data reveals a stark contrast between media portrayals and actual tourist experiences. Contrary to common assumptions, respondents noted a high degree of safety, efficient public transportation, and well-organized tourist facilities. Fast-train networks, for instance, were described as punctual and technologically advanced.

Moreover, interactions with local communities indicated a strong emphasis on hospitality and service quality. While language barriers were occasionally encountered, technological solutions, such as translation apps, effectively facilitated communication. Respondents were particularly impressed by the integration of digital technology in everyday life, including cashless transactions and AI-driven customer service.

8.2 Cultural Insights and Social Dynamics

Observations indicated a cultural ethos centered on collectivism, respect, and efficiency. Chinese society places significant value on social harmony, which was evident in public interactions and institutional practices. Tourists expressed surprise at the widespread use of digital platforms for governance and civic engagement. Notably, urban cleanliness and environmental consciousness were frequently cited as positive attributes.

8.3 Technology and Digital Infrastructure in Tourism

China's emphasis on technological innovation was evident in its smart tourism infrastructure. Digital reservation systems optimized visitor flow at major tourist attractions, reducing congestion and enhancing the overall experience. The country's digital transformation has streamlined tourism logistics, allowing for seamless transitions between different modes of transport.

8.4 Final Remarks

According to research by The Culture Factor Group (2025) (based on research by the late Geert Hofstede and colleagues), China's low uncertainty avoidance score (of 30) may explain why rapid change has occurred in society there. This, coupled to an above-average motivation score (of 66), a high long-term orientation score (of 77) and a low indulgence score (of 24) support our findings regarding tourist perceptions of China. Finally, according to the same source, China is indeed more collectivist with a below-average score for individualism (of 43).

9. Conclusion

China is an example of what can be achieved in a very short period of time by a focused leadership with a vision for the country and its population. We have sought herein to spur the discussion on China having visited the country in November 2024 for the TourX Erasmus+ funded project.

This study highlights the discrepancy between Western media narratives and the lived experiences of tourists in China. Findings suggest that China's tourism sector is characterized by advanced technological integration, strong safety measures, and a high standard of service quality. The research underscores the importance of firsthand engagement in forming accurate perceptions of global destinations.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of China's digital tourism ecosystem and its implications for global tourism development. The findings presented herein contribute to a nuanced understanding of China's tourism industry and its role in fostering cross-cultural exchange.

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ChatGPT 4.0 was used for text optimization only and to make the flow of the text better and more formal. This study was financed by the European Union / Erasmus+ Programme - TourX international project funds [official project name: CoVEs for the Tourism Industry].

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