

## The Novelty Space Exploration on RV Tourists in China

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**Abstract:** The current study aims on the investigation of Chinese RV (hereinafter referred to as RV) tourist's behavior, while many previous studies were mainly tried to provide strategical recommendations on the development of RV tourism in the areas of campground planning and related industry. However, RV tourist's travel behavior has rarely received sufficient attention in China. This study conducted the basic concept of *novelty space* to interpret the general behavior of Chinese RV tourists and provided an innovative conceptual idea for future tourism research on self-drive tourist behavior.

### 1. Introduction

Tourism has become the world's largest industry with distinct market segments [1]. One of the fastest growing market segments is the recreational vehicle travelers, or RV tourists [2]. This segment has attracted a growing number of tourism scholars to understand RV user's multifaceted demographics and notions [3]. The existing research shows that RV tourists are a group of highly mobile travelers largely motivated by a desire to experience freedom and escape the mundane routine life [4, 5, 6, 7]. In other words, the pursuit of freedom and the escape of routine life are seen as a combination embracing with mobility where RVs are used as "a complex amalgam of interlocking machines, social practices and ways of dwelling, not in a stationary home, but in a mobile, semi-privatized capsule" [8]. Therefore, RV tourism (hereinafter referred to as RVing) may defined as a form of long-haul drive tourism activity desired by those tourists who is willing to pursue freedom from daily constraints [9].

The notion of freedom and novelty has described as the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action. Therefore, RV tourists' intension for mobile life can also be treated as the intension for novelty experiences out of their familiar routine life. Mobile lifestyles offer such rewards, as sufficiently supported by social values, for people who are desired to forego their ordinary and conventional stationary life and are capable to afford the mobile alternative [10]. Among the research in tourist motivations, novelty space is closely linked to educational field trips where 'space' is not necessarily contributing its positive effect towards learning improvement [11, 12]. In fact, Orion argues that educational field trip informants (students) will eventually reduce their psychological novelty space as they progress through a variety of learning stages. Thus, the relationship between novelty space and field trip learning is an indicator of the contrary, which means less effective learning experience will occur due to the informants' unknown from a mental space of novelty [13]. Therefore, the current study therefore aims to provide a conceptual understanding which reflects the concept of *novelty space* is positively influencing the behavior of Chinese RV tourists.

#### 1.1 RV Tourism in China

While other countries in Asia are mostly experiencing an uninterrupted development of self-drive tourism as early as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainland China has just started to encourage

self-drive tourism to boom in the 21st century by the government. The booming growth of national economic and with-paid public holidays have stimulated the buying power of Chinese private car owners [14, 15]. RV tourism, which mentioned earlier as a subset of self-drive tourism therefore, has provided a whole new experience of drive-tourism attracted many Chinese tourists. However, the research of Chinese RV tourists is still in its infancy. The existing research undertaken by Chinese scholars who publish in Chinese language journals has revealed numerous concerns related to the self-drive phenomenon [16]. The majority of those studies on self-drive tourism in China have concentrated on the development of this phenomenon as a source of tourism product while the development of tourism industry in mainland China has experienced evolutionary changes throughout the past few decades, various ways of tourism activities among the Chinese have been created, adopted or imitated according to their needs of travel and leisure.

Although China’s RV industry has emerged much later than Europe, US and Australia, but it did not mean that it slowed down its tourism activity development in China, Table 1 below shows three main stages of China’s RV development. With the development less than thirty years of time, RV related industries started from none to recognizable and gradually become an option for tourists have demonstrated a healthy potential for its future development.

Table 1. Stages of China’s RV development

| Time Period    | Development   |
|----------------|---|
| The 1990s      | RVs emerged in China.   |
| 2000 - 2005    | Manufacturers of RV have started to boom, many automobile modification companies have stepped in to RV manufacturing.                         |
| 2006 - 2010    | RV manufacture technics have gradually matured, marketing campaigns have continuously explored among the Chinese tourism market.              |
| 2010 - 2015    | The Chinese government has introduced series of policies which correspondently promoted the development of RV tourism.                        |
| 2015 - present | Improvement of traffic regulations, increased highway coverage, Chinese owned GPS contributed to the diversified forms of travel and tourism. |

The first stage was 1990s. RV as a new-fangled automobile in a Chinese film called ‘Be there or be square’ has first walked in to Chinese sight. Later in 1999, Golden River Touring Car Co., Ltd. as the first ever RV manufacturer established mainly does business with RV research and development, RV renting and selling. Since the adoption of ‘Open-door policy’, China started its spectacular economic reform from 1978 to 1992 [17, 18]. Under this imported concept of policy originated from America, modernization is the word to describe as a milestone for China in that symbolic decade, the new establishment of trade relations with more than 180 countries and regions offers the whole nation with unprecedented opportunities to get to know the outside world [19]. The emerge of RVs in the late 90s has fully taken the advantage for its long-term development.

The second stage was from 2000 to 2005. In this stage, RV manufacturing was promptly developed. Many automobile and modification companies have put their feet in to RV manufacturing industry, including importing advanced technology from the US and indigenous innovation on RV manufacture. The first domestic RV tourism club was operated by one of the manufacturers in Yunnan province. As recorded in year 2000, total domestic tourism travelers have exceeded 125 million person-time. A sustained growth of tourist quantity and tourism expenses evoked ever after.

The third stage was from 2006 until present. When the RV manufacture technology matures, Chinese RV producers have begun to focus more on its interior design, more personalized and comfort. RV producers were actively exploring consumer market by using various marketing methods, including RV exhibitions, RV websites and RV tourism routes. Due to the positive development of RV industry and country policy in 2016 [20], RV campgrounds have become a burgeoning investment hot spot due to the increase demand of RV tourism market. The

earth-shaking improvements in infrastructure begun in the mid-90s, especially the development and popularization of road system, campgrounds and GPS, enable RVing as a subset of drive tourism feasible in major regions of China [21].

## **2. Literature**

This study provides an innovative perspective to the Chinese RV tourists to present a fully comprehensive understanding of their behavior. The following section focuses on a solid theory of novelty space which provides a fundamental knowledge for insights of basic reasons for RV activities and the long-haul journeys. The author has also provided evidence to link with the novelty spaces and its possible connections with the Chinese RV tourist's behavior.

### **2.1 Chinese RV Tourist**

Within the discovery of these symbolic characteristics, many researchers made synergies with the concepts. Wu and Pearce recently identified spontaneity and flexibility is one of a significant attraction plays as a pull factor enhancing the enjoyment of Chinese RV tourists to travel in Australia [22]. The concept of freedom represents freedom from pressures of life [23], they agreed that one of the push factors for Chinese to travel with RV is in pursuit of relaxation and escape upon intensive work back at origin. Many Chinese set their dreams or rewards as to realize a long-distance journey within or outside of China, drive tourism has become popular in the choices of travelling styles. With the advantages offered by the 'mobile home' [24] and its economical [22], RV has become a decent choice for travel. Therefore, self-fulfillment as one of a significant factor is meeting the demand of Chinese RV tourists.

### **2.2 The Novelty Space**

In the discipline of education and pedagogical research, the concept of 'novelty space has made both positive and negative impacts on student's educational field trips due to the impact of various learning stages and the environment [25,26]. During student's educational field trip, informants supposed to learn and absorb proposed knowledge in the process of changing environment. Nevertheless, educational field trips normally contain sets of planned travels, and the travel itself has no significant differences with variety forms of travels in tourism, especially RV travels. In a similar vein, Mitas and Bastiaansen extended their study by employing the novelty theory into tourism, they suggested 'novelty is somehow fundamental to the experience of tourism' [27], it creates positive emotions which function as a 'mechanism of enjoyment' in tourism experiences. Therefore, RV travel embraces multi-sensory practices worth further research on in regard to its tourist behavior.

The novelty experience RVing offers is by far an impressive perspective perceived by the Chinese RV tourists. RVing in China links with social status, success, adventure, encouragement and many other positive social identities which admire by others [22]. RV tourism has gained its reputation from the Chinese impacting the desire to strive an opportunity for the joy of luxurious travel experience. However, in spite of the vanity and novelty experience which RVing could bring, different voices were echoed by economists, sociologists and other academics [28, 29, 30]. They argued that the automobile (RV itself is a form of automobile) is imposing a heavy transportation expense on human life, furthermore, it has been ecologically unfriendly and suburban environments unsustainable. Similarly, Zhuang stated that because many RVs with better quality and reliability are not manufactured in their used country, the purchase price for end-users is undoubtedly costly [31]. In addition, the rise of petroleum price globally has become a barrier for existed and potential RV tourists [32].

### 3. Methodology

In this section, the chosen research method to conduct for the discovery of Chinese RV tourists' behavior against novelty space was pioneer, the finding will mainly focus on contributions to conceptualization of the proposed research target. Qualitative method was approached to review the contemporary findings in order to identify the existing behavior among RV tourists [2]. The review encompasses essential knowledge in respect to understand the multi-faceted behaved RV tourists, in which provides a solid support for the study.

### 4. Findings and Conclusion

The study of RV tourist's behavior has received non-homogenous attention is the broad sense of drive-tourism market [9], besides, Chinese RV tourist's behavior study was rather limited. It is possibly the reason due to its juvenility in the Chinese tourism market, hence resulting a limited academic contribution in focusing the Chinese RV tourists. Surveys on Chinese RV tourists conducted by Wu and Pearce have shown that RVing is perceived as a tourism activity which with luxury camping life experience and this form of tourism is understood as a few private business owners' way to show off their lifestyles and tastes [22]. Therefore, a preliminary review of international RV travelers is essential to mirror the Chinese RV travelers, because it is common that they all have the same characteristic when traveling along with a RV.

Jobes conducted an early investigation on the elderly RV travelers, he proposed a disengagement theory on RVing as a new style of retirement life [10]. According to Cumming and Henry, "the most crucial step in the disengagement process in life is finding a new set of rewards" [33]. Jobes stated that mobile lifestyles are capable to fulfill the disengagement gap, because of its societal values, people are more willing to abandon their former conventional stationary life [10]. Adjustment during the progress of disengagement includes alternative values and flexible leisure lifestyles, innovative and rebellious preadaptation to the aged new lifestyles and the need to replace work group social interaction with other meaningful substitution is essential [34, 35, 36].

The concept of novelty space is probably the first systematic approach to interpret tourist behavior and building a bridge between motivations and perception, especially in the context of Chinese RV tourists. RVing is indeed a novel form of tourism experience in China, RV tour operators (or recreation professionals) and RV manufacturers tend to focus more on the aspects of destination planning, campground experiences and functionality and facilities of RVs in their market campaigns, while neglecting the authentic behavior which actively pursued by the RV tourists. The findings of this study suggest that the attentions on RV tourism should focus more on the behavior characteristics of the potential RV tourists. Furthermore, the concept of novelty space has been successfully conducted and portrayed the characteristics of travel behavior in Chinese RV tourists. RV tour operators and manufacturers, therefore, should be able to design the RV trips and the functions of the vehicles emphasizing the enjoyment of novelty space exploring in order to strengthen a reasonable market share and market segmentation.

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