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# Chinese consumers' brand personality perceptions of tourism real estate firms

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- We explored the salient brand personality factors as perceived by Chinese consumers towards tourism real estate.
- Five factors (humanity, excitement, status enhancement, professionalism and wellness) were identified.
- Three Chinese consumer segments (status/humanity consumers, wellness seekers and professionalism minders) were found.
- Differences of Chinese consumers' brand personality perceptions were not attributed to demographics.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined Chinese consumers' perceptions of brand personality of tourism real estate firms, and classified Chinese consumers based on their brand personality perceptions towards tourism real estate as a new consumption good. The study identified five brand personality factors: *humanity, excitement, status enhancement, professionalism* and *wellness*. *K*-means cluster analysis further identified three distinct Chinese consumer segments with differentiated brand personality perceptions: *status/humanity consumers, wellness seekers* and *professionalism minders*. Discussions regarding culture-specific factors of brand personality in the study were provided with considerations of China's significant socio-cultural changes. Managerial implications and suggestions for future research were also discussed.

*Keywords:*

Brand personality; Chinese consumers; tourism real estate; cluster analysis

## 1. Introduction

Competition among tourism brands is getting intensified (Chen & Phou, 2013); brand personality has emerged as a key component of an effective tourism brand and an effective tool of brand positioning and differentiation (Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007; Kim, Shim, & Dinnie, 2013). A strong positive brand personality that possesses distinctive and lasting traits will lead to relatively higher product evaluations (Freling & Forbes, 2005), tourist behavioural intention to return and loyalty (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Farhat & Khan, 2011; Xie & Lee, 2013), and sustainable competitive advantage (Freling & Forbes, 2005). However, in a highly competitive marketplace, merely informing utilitarian attributes of tourism products is not enough to attract customers (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). When product and service attributes under one brand are similar with other competing brands, brand personality can create a basis for differentiation and increase the brand's appeal (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000), as consumers often use brands as 'consumption symbols' to express themselves (Sirgy, 1982).

Brand personality reflects the values and beliefs of a culture, and there are significant differences among the meanings embedded in brands in different cultures (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001). Empirical evidence demonstrates that brand personality dimensions differ considerably in cross-cultural contexts and different settings (e.g. Aaker et al., 2001; Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001; Milas & Mlačić 2007; Smit, Van den Berge, & Franzen, 2003). As Milas and Mlačić (2007) noted, there is value in applying a culture-specific measure of brand personality, especially if researchers seek to understand specific local brands. In recent years, growing academic interest has been witnessed in non-western societies in studying brand personality (e.g. Chen & Phou 2013; Chu & Sung 2011; Sung & Tinkham 2005). China is emerging as a significant consumer market. As Chinese consumer psychology may be different from their western counterparts (Bond, 2008), it is important to investigate how Chinese consumers perceive brand personality and to what extent the understanding of brand personality can be applied in this context. However, there is little empirical research on Chinese consumer's perception on brand personality and its culture-specific factors in a service context.

The tourism industry has witnessed significant growth in China and generated US\$494.6 billion in 2014, a 15.4% increase over the previous year (The National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin, 2014). Growing consumer demands in tourism, together with decreasing business confidence in investing in the traditional property market are believed to have boosted the development of "*tourism real estate*" as a distinctive type of tourism-related consumer good in China (Yu & Zhao, 2003). Tourism real estate is an emerging sector in China which sees a combination of both the tourism industry and the real estate sector. Although tourism real estate, as a new form of consumer good, may take some resemblance to timesharing products in western countries, its scope has gone far beyond timesharing products (Pi & Du 2007). In this study, we adopted Shen's definition of tourism real estate as 'the development and marketing mode of real estate products for the vacation purpose, which realize all or part of tourism function' (Shen, 2001, p.1). Tourism real estate, as a unique industry sector overlapping both tourism and real estate, provides a wide range

of products and services for various consumer segments (Shen, 2001; Yu and Zhao, 2003). These include residential projects relying on the superior natural environment and good geographical location (e.g. landscape resorts or villas), timeshare hotel, property hotel, pension hotel, sport resorts (e.g. golf, hiking, skiing), tourism/leisure training center, and resort hotel. An exemplar firm of tourism real estate in China is the Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) Group. Relying on theme park tourism resources and superior ecological surroundings, the OCT Group has developed products like vacation real estate (e.g. upscale residential projects, villas and apartments), themed hotels group, commercial real estate like spa and golf course. The Group takes mid and high-end consumers from large state-owned and multinational companies as the target market for its tourism real estate products, aiming to create a people-oriented vacation lifestyle for consumers and achieve the harmony between human and nature. Although in China there exist many other tourism real estate firms like the OCT Group, very little research has been done to examine consumers' perceptions of these distinctive firms and their products/services.

As a burgeoning industry sector valued and supported by the Chinese government, tourism real estate presents utilitarian traits and symbolic values to consumers. This study investigates Chinese consumer's brand personality perceptions of tourism real estate firms in China. Specifically, the study has two objectives:

(1) To identify the salient brand personality factors as perceived by Chinese consumers with regards to tourism real estate as a new consumption good; and,

(2) To understand the current tourism real estate consumer market by segmenting Chinese consumers based on their brand personality perceptions towards tourism real estate consumption.

In this emerging tourism related sector, creating and managing a positive and distinctive brand personality is of great importance to the survival and success of tourism real estate firms. Thus, this research has both theoretical and practical implications. First, investigating the cultural specific dimensions of brand personality as perceived by Chinese consumers expands on the existing brand personality literature which is often limited to Western context. Second, research on consumer market segmentation based on Chinese consumers' brand personality perceptions towards such a novel and distinctive type of tourism-related consumer good enriches the tourism and marketing research. Thirdly, by achieving the above two research objectives, very useful industry implications can be derived. Tourism real estate industry practitioners can be informed to develop effective marketing programs and brand positioning strategies.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Brand personality*

Brand personality is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p.347). This definition assumes that a wide range of human traits can be applied to describe a brand. Aaker's conceptualisation of brand personality has been widely accepted by researchers (e.g. Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Murphy et al., 2007; Sung & Tinkham 2005). However, this definition has also been criticized for being too broad and unspecific (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) argued that brand personality

should include “the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands” (p.151). The perception of a brand personality can be formed by any direct or indirect experiences that customers have with the brand (Plummer, 1985). Direct sources of brand personality formation are person-based (Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004), which include all the individuals associated with the brand, such as users, company employees and chief executive officers (CEOs). Demographic characteristics such as age, gender and social class are also regarded as contributing to the formation of brand personality (Aaker, 1997). Indirect sources of brand personality formation involve all the product-related attributes, such as product category associations, brand name and symbol, price, distribution, and advertising style.

Brand personality plays an important role in the “for me” choice, or “I see myself in that brand” choice (Plummer, 2000, p.81). It reflects how consumer sees the brand and thereby indicates the relationship between the brand and the consumer. Considering the interpersonal relationship between the customer and the brand, Sweeney and Brandon (2006) emphasized the interpersonal features that might characterize the brand, by advancing a model in understanding the brand personality concept; The model depicts brand personality on two prime axes (dominant and friendly) and two alternative orthogonal dimensions (extraversion and agreeableness). Brand personality can be incarnated from the relationship between the brand and the customer. The customer plays an active role in forming brand personality through evaluating what is received from a brand. On the other hand, the brand is also believed to have an active response toward its customers through marketing actions, which in turn affect customer’s perception (Dall’ Olmo Riley & de Chernatony, 2000). In other words, the customer and the brand are active partners in the customer-brand relationship. Therefore, in this study we follow the definition specified by Sweeney & Brandon (2006) where brand personality is regarded as “*the set of human personality traits that correspond to the interpersonal domain of human personality and are relevant to describing the brand as a relationship partner*” (p.645).

## 2.2. Brand personality measurement and cross-cultural studies

Aaker (1997) developed the Brand Personality Scale (BPS) to measure the extent to which a brand possesses any of the personality traits, identifying five core dimensions that are believed to underlie brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Later, Aaker et al. (2001) investigated how symbolic and expressive attributes associated with commercial brands are structured and how the brand personality structure differs across the United States, Spain and Japan. Aaker et al.’s (2001) study found three common dimensions (excitement, sincerity, and sophistication), one shared dimension between Spain and Japan (peacefulness), and one culture-specific dimension for United States (ruggedness) and Spain (passion), respectively. Since then, there has been growing academic interest in verifying and refining the BPS, especially across different contexts and cultures (for a series of such studies see Table 1).

The BPS is the most widely employed brand personality measure across different brands and product categories (Parker, 2009). As shown in Table 1, the BPS has been examined across cultural contexts and different settings; studies have demonstrated that brand personality traits may differ in one or more dimensions across cultures and settings (e.g.

Caprara et al., 2001; Chu & Sung, 2011; Ekinci & Riley, 2003; Milas & Mlačić, 2007; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). For example, Venable, Rose, Bush, and Gilbert (2005) examined the structure of brand personality in nonprofit organizations by using Aaker's (1997) BPS. Their findings revealed four dimensions of brand personality of nonprofit organizations: integrity, nurturance, sophistication, and ruggedness.

In the field of tourism, investigations and applications of brand personality are relatively new. Brand personality could be applied to tourism contexts. It is commonly conceived that tourist destinations have personalities and can be marketed as brands (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). The importance of destination personality has been acknowledged (Farhat & Khan, 2011). Many studies have examined tourism destination personalities (e.g. Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2014; Chen & Phou, 2013; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Kim & Lehto, 2013; Klabi, 2012; Murphy, et al., 2007; Pereira, Correia, & Schutz, 2014; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011; Upadhyaya, 2012; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Xie & Lee, 2013) and restaurant and hotel brand personalities (Ekinci & Riley, 2003; Lee & Back, 2010). In summary, these studies came up with rather different destination personality dimensions, specific to the destinations under examination (Table 1). For instance, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) applied the BPS to tourism destinations in Europe, and identified three dimensions of destination personality: sincerity, excitement, and conviviality. Murphy et al. (2007) applied BPS in the study of two Australian tourism destinations: Whitsundays and Cairns. While four dimensions (i.e., upper class, honest, exciting, and tough) of destination personality were found with Whitsundays, only three dimensions of brand personality (i.e., sincere, sophisticated, and outdoorsy) were identified with Cairns. They also concluded that, although respondents could rate the destinations by the personality traits of BPS, these pre-set personality traits were less frequent than the destination attributes identified through open-ended elicitation of destination descriptors. In another study, Usakli and Baloglu (2011) found five dimensions, namely *vibrancy*, *sophistication*, *competence*, *contemporary* and *sincerity* that can best describe the brand personality of Las Vegas. In the case of Istanbul, Sahin and Baloglu (2011) identified five dimensions of destination brand personality (i.e. *originality and vibrancy*, *conviviality*, *competence and modernity*, *sincerity*, *cool and trendy*) and found statistically significant differences across different nationalities for brand personality perceptions. In addition, consumers may interpret the communicated brand information based on their own perceptions and respond differently to a brand than was intended. Taking South Korea as a case, Kim and Lehto (2013) revealed significant discrepancies between projected and perceived destination personality; they suggested that tourism authorities should reevaluate their current branding strategies based on consumers' perceived destination personality. Pereira et al. (2014) extracted promotional texts in golf-related websites to identify brand personality traits, and found that there was not a strong presence of human characteristics. These studies suggest that brand personality dimensions perceived by consumers vary across contexts and the generalizability of any brand personality measurement may be confined to the context where the measurement was developed.

Concerning the generalizability of Aaker's (1997) framework, Caprara et al. (2001) applied the Big Five Model (BFM) of human personality to study brand personality and found that human personality descriptors convey different meanings when applied to brands, and the latent factors of the BFM could not be replicated in describing brands. Austin,

Siguaw, and Mattila (2003) also argued that Aaker's (1997) framework clearly has boundaries when applying to different research contexts. Measurements of individual brands cannot be generalized when aggregating data within a specific product category. It is noteworthy that in different cultures, the meaning embedded in commercial brands shows significant difference (Aaker et al., 2001).

Despite the growing brand personality research in non-western societies (Aaker et al., 2001; Chen & Phou, 2013; Sung & Tinkham, 2005), little research has been done to examine brand personality perceptions of Chinese consumers. China has been the fastest-growing economy in the world for the past decades (Sin, Ho, & So, 2000) and emerged as a significant consumer market. Therefore, it is important to understand consumers' brand personality perceptions in this emerging market. Consumer beliefs, attitudes and values can significantly influence consumers' perceptions of the symbolic meanings of brands in a specific cultural context (Guzmán & Paswan, 2009). Culture also plays a role and Chinese consumers may hold different brand personality perceptions than those from the West (Bond, 2008). Research on brand personality in Chinese context remains limited and is therefore the focus of this study.

**Table 1**

Brand Personality Measurements.

| <b>Author(s)</b>          | <b>Country</b>  | <b>Settings</b>   | <b>Dimension</b>                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aaker (1997)              | United States   | commercial brands | Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, Ruggedness                                                                                   |
| Aaker et al. (2001)       | Japan and Spain | commercial brands | Sincerity, Excitement, Peacefulness, Sophistication, Competence (Japan)<br>Sincerity, Excitement, Peacefulness, Sophistication, Passion (Spain) |
| Kim, Han, and Park (2001) | Korea           | commercial brands | Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, Ruggedness                                                                                   |
| Caprara et al. (2001)     | Italy           | commercial brands | Agreeableness and Emotional Stability, Extroversion and Openness                                                                                |
| Huang and Lu (2003)       | China           | commercial brands | Benevolence (仁), Wisdom (智), Courage (勇), Happiness (乐), Elegance (雅)                                                                           |
| Smit et al. (2003)        | Netherlands     | commercial brands | Competence, Excitement, Gentle,                                                                                                                 |

|                                                        |                        |                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                        |                        |                        | Distinction,<br>Annoyance,<br>Ruggedness                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Rojas-Méndez, Erenchun-Podlech, and Silva-Olave (2004) | Chile                  | automobile brands      | Excitement,<br>Sincerity,<br>Competence,<br>Sophistication                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Sung and Tinkham (2005)                                | United States<br>Korea | commercial brands      | Likeableness,<br>Trendiness,<br>Competence,<br>Traditionalism,<br>Sophistication,<br>Ruggedness,<br>White collar,<br>Androgyny (United States)<br>Likeableness,<br>Trendiness,<br>Competence,<br>Traditionalism,<br>Sophistication,<br>Ruggedness,<br>Western,<br>Ascendancy (Korea) |
| Milas and Mlačić (2007)                                | Croatia                | commercial brands      | Extraversion,<br>Agreeableness,<br>conscientiousness,<br>Intellect,<br>Emotional stability                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Bosnjak, Bochmann, and Hufschmidt (2007)               | Germany                | commercial brands      | Drive,<br>Conscientiousness,<br>Emotion,<br>Superficiality                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Grohmann (2009)                                        | –                      | commercial brands      | Masculine,<br>Feminine                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Chu and Sung (2011)                                    | China                  | commercial brands      | Competence,<br>Excitement,<br>Sophistication,<br>Traditionalism,<br>Joyfulness,<br>Trendiness                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| d'Astous and Lévesque (2003)                           | Canada                 | stores                 | Enthusiasm,<br>Unpleasantness,<br>Genuineness,<br>Solidity                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Ekinci and Riley (2003)                                | United Kingdom         | restaurants and hotels | 1 dimension                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Helgeson and Supphellen (2004)                         | Sweden                 | retailers              | Modern,<br>Classic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Davis, Chun, da Silva, & Lowe (2004)                   | United States          | corporate brands       | Agreeableness,<br>Enterprise,<br>Competence,<br>Ruthlessness,<br>Chic ,<br>Informality,                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                           |                                                                             |                              | Machismo                                                                                      |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Venable et al. (2005)     | United States                                                               | nonprofit organizations      | Integrity, Nurturance, Sophistication, Ruggedness                                             |
| Kim et al.(2013)          | Egypt, Italy, Korea, Japan, United States, Singapore, Sweden, China, Brazil | nation                       | Leadership, Excitement, Sophistication, Tradition, Peacefulness                               |
| Ekinici and Hosany (2006) | Europe                                                                      | Tourism destinations         | Sincerity, Excitement, Conviviality                                                           |
| Murphy et al. (2007)      | Australia                                                                   | Tourism destinations         | Upper class, Honest, Exciting, Tough (Whitsundays) Sincere, Sophisticated, Outdoorsy (Cairns) |
| Lee and Back (2010)       | Southern region, United States                                              | Upper-upscale business hotel | Competence, Sophistication                                                                    |
| Sahin and Baloglu (2011)  | Istanbul, Turkey                                                            | Tourism destination          | Originality and vibrancy, Conviviality, Competence and modernity, Sincerity, Cool and trendy  |
| Usakli and Baloglu (2011) | Las Vegas, United States                                                    | Tourism destination          | Vibrancy, Sophistication, Competence, Contemporary, Sincerity                                 |
| Upadhyaya (2012)          | Rajasthan, India                                                            | Tourism destination          | Modern, Youthful, Ruggedness, Vibrant, Sincerity, Contemporize                                |
| Klabi (2012)              | Tunisian, North Africa                                                      | Tourism destination          | Conviviality, Masculinity, Unpleasantness                                                     |
| Kim and Lehto (2013)      | South Korea                                                                 | Tourism destination          | Excitement, Competence, Sincerity, Sophistication, Ruggedness, Uniqueness, Family             |
| Xie and Lee (2013)        | Beijing, China                                                              | Tourism destination          | Competence, Excitement, Sophistication, Ruggedness                                            |
| Chen and Phou (2013)      | Angkor temple, Cambodia                                                     | Tourism destination          | Excitement, Sincerity,                                                                        |

|                                            |                |                        |                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                            |                |                        | Sophistication,<br>Ruggedness,<br>Contemporary                                                                        |
| Apostolopoulou and<br>Papadimitriou (2014) | Patras, Greece | Tourism<br>destination | Excitement,<br>Sincerity                                                                                              |
| Pereira et al. (2014)                      | Algarve        | Golf<br>destinations   | Famous,<br>Natural,<br>Unique,<br>Beautiful,<br>Best,<br>Challenging,<br>Different,<br>Fine,<br>Great,<br>Spectacular |

### *2.3. Tourism real estate development in China*

The concept of tourism real estate took its origin from “resort timesharing” or “vacation ownership” in western countries. Timeshare industry first appeared in Europe in the 1960s, and was quickly adopted in the United States (Upchurch & Gruber, 2002). Timesharing is the general name for the purchase of shared recreational property for a prescribed interval of time (Upchurch, 2000). The timeshare industry developed rapidly in size and sales volume, and formed a mature timeshare exchange network in western countries. When timesharing was introduced to China, it was first presented as ‘property hotel’ in a transitional form, and then developed as “tourism real estate” in the industry. Tourism real estate is an emerging cross-industry sector in China with both tourism and real estate industry features. Due to the growing demand for tourism and increasing risk of traditional real estate market investment, tourism real estate has been valued by developers and investors from both tourism and real estate industry, and thus has witnessed rapid development. Consumer demands of tourism real estate are displayed as group needs and personal needs (Zhou, 2006). For group needs, tourism real estate products could be second home for senior managers, resorts for employees, and fixed asset investment. For individual needs, tourism real estate products could serve as places for vacation and leisure, second home for the purpose of improving living condition, and real estate investment.

### *2.4. Understanding the tourism real estate consumer base by market segmentation*

Tourism real estate emerges as a new cross-industry sector in China, and firms in this sector are confronted with increasing competition from traditional real estate firms. As a new tourism-related sector, it is important for the sector to develop better understanding of its current consumer base to ensure its sustainable development and expansion. To this end, effective market segmentation seems to be one way to understand the sector’s customer base.

Psychological factors such as consumers’ perceptual and behavioural differences are believed to be necessary and useful for market segmentation (Hassan & Craft, 2012; Wang, Chan, & Chen, 2001). Morwitz and Schmittlein (1992) noted that forecasts based on consumer purchase intention can be made more accurate by identifying intenders and non-intenders. Clear delineation of market segments was also made based on consumers’ preferences for price, quality, and food safety attributes (Baker, 1999). Reimer, Rutz, and

Pauwels (2014) segmented online consumers into four segments according to their responsiveness to the marketing mix. In the field of tourism, psychological factors such as travel motivation, travel needs and tourist attitude were employed for tourism market segmentation (e.g. Chen, Bao, & Huang, 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2012; Murphy et al., 2007; Uriely, Yonai, & Simchai, 2002). Furthermore, demographic and psychological factors were integrated to segment consumer market. For instance, Wang et al. (2001) employed psychological variables such as consumer sentiment and attitude to debt, and demographics to differentiate intenders from non-intenders in China's emerging property market. Chen et al. (2014) identified three distinct Chinese backpacker segments with different travel motivations and socio-demographics.

Among different approaches of market segmentation, market segmentation by consumers' perceptions towards key industry players' brand personality seems to be a practical method to contribute to both better brand management and marketing practices of firms in an emerging sector. With the growing homogeneity of consumer needs across different regions in the marketplace (Hassan & Craft, 2012), just promoting the utilitarian traits of products is not enough for a firm to attract consumers, the symbolic functions or values of brands perceived by consumers are crucial in marketing practices (Belén del Río, Vazquez, & Iglesias, 2001; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). Brand personality perception could be a tool for marketers to target their desirable consumers, which helps firms segment their consumer market and develop brand positioning strategy. Although there are a considerable amount of research on brand personality and consumer market segmentation, to the best of our knowledge, few studies have been conducted to segment consumers based on their perceptions on brand personality (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2004), let alone the emerging Chinese consumer market.

Taking this into consideration, this study aimed to fill such a research gap by segmenting Chinese consumers based on their brand personality perceptions towards tourism real estate. It is worth noting that, as a new consumption product and service sector emerged in the rapid socioeconomic transition of China, tourism real estate consists of large numbers of tangible and intangible attributes, which are rich in utilitarian functions and symbolic values. However, Chinese consumers' perceptions and behaviours towards tourism real estate remain less clear. Therefore, it is particularly meaningful to investigate Chinese consumers' perceptions towards brand personality of tourism real estate firms, and further understand this emerging consumer market by market segmentation based on consumers' brand personality perceptions.

### **3. Methods**

#### *3.1. The brand personality measure*

The current study investigated local tourism real estate firms in China. As Aaker et al. (2001) and Milas and Mlačić (2007) suggested, to ensure the accuracy and pertinence of brand personality items to tourism real estate firms in the study, it is better and valuable to use culture-specific measurement of brand personality in China. Therefore, we first conducted some qualitative research to identify the brand personality measurement items in the study context. To start, we identified 45 brand personality items from the literature. Then

the first author of this article discussed the semantic meaning, clarity, and applicability of each item with three fellow PhD candidates who have rich experience in both tourism real estate industries. Two of the PhD candidates are also managers of tourism real estate firms while studying for their PhD degree. The third PhD candidate's research specialises in brand personality. Subsequently, 17 items were removed and 28 retained for further verification. Second, in-depth interview, as an open-ended and discovery-oriented method to obtain detailed information about a specific topic from respondents (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991), was employed. We conducted eight personal in-depth interviews with senior managers in the real estate industry and related sub-sectors (e.g. real estate brand planning agency, real estate marketing agency) from 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2014 to 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2014. Participants were asked to list what characteristics they think tourism real estate firms possess; afterwards they were shown items obtained from the previous step, and asked if those items could exactly be used to describe brand personality of tourism real estate firms. Finally, they were asked whether there are other necessary items. Based on content analysis of the interview data, we removed "aggressive" "upper-class" "amiable" from the item pool, combined "identity-enhancing" and "respectable" as "identity revealing", rephrased "responsible" as "socially responsible", and added "ecological" "cultural" "international" "people-oriented" "high-quality" "social circle" "leisure" and "vacation" into the pool. Eventually, we obtained 34 brand personality measurement items. As a cautious triangulation effort to avoid single method bias, we further conducted a focus group discussion to refine the items. 12 participants joined the focus group discussion and consequently, the item "young" was excluded from the item pool as it was deemed not to be semantically unique. After these initial works, we came up with 33 tourism real estate brand personality measurement items as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Brand personality measurement items.

| Items              | Sources                                                                   | Original Chinese expression |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Ecological      | In-depth interview and focus group*                                       | 生态的                         |
| 2. Cultural        | In-depth interview and focus group                                        | 文化的                         |
| 3. International   | In-depth interview and focus group                                        | 国际化的                        |
| 4. People-oriented | In-depth interview and focus group                                        | 以人为本的                       |
| 5. Harmonious      | Huang and Lu(2003); In-depth interview and focus group                    | 和谐的                         |
| 6. Trendy          | Aaker et al. (2001); Sung and Tinkham (2005)                              | 符合趋势的                       |
| 7. Contemporary    | Sung and Tinkham (2005)                                                   | 现代化的                        |
| 8. Up-to-date      | Aaker(1997); Aaker et al.(2001);                                          | 时尚的                         |
| 9. Innovative      | Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf (2009)                                      | 创新的                         |
| 10. Unique         | Aaker et al. (2001);                                                      | 特色的                         |
| 11. Dynamic        | In-depth interview and focus group<br>Geuens et al. (2009);               | 活力的                         |
| 12. Exciting       | In-depth interview and focus group<br>Aaker(1997); Bosnjak et al. (2007); | 令人兴奋的                       |
| 13. Charming       | In-depth interview and focus group<br>Aaker(1997); Aaker et al. (2001)    | 魅力的                         |

|                              |                                                                             |         |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 14. High-quality             | In-depth interview and focus group                                          | 高品质的    |
| 15. Identity revealing       | In-depth interview and focus group                                          | 彰显身份的   |
| 16. Good taste               | Huang and Lu (2003);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                  | 有品位的    |
| 17. Social circle            | In-depth interview and focus group                                          | 社交的     |
| 18. Authoritative            | Huang and Lu (2003); He and Cong (2008); In-depth interview and focus group | 权威的     |
| 19. Professional             | Huang and Lu (2003);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                  | 专业的     |
| 20. Competent                | Bosnjak et al. (2007);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                | 有实力的    |
| 21. Successful               | Aaker (1997); Aaker et al. (2001);<br>In-depth interview and focus group    | 成功的     |
| 22. Intelligent              | Aaker (1997)                                                                | 智能的     |
| 23. Environmentally friendly | Huang and Lu (2003);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                  | 环境友好的   |
| 24. Trustworthy              | Geuens et al. (2009);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                 | 值得信赖的   |
| 25. Reliable                 | Aaker(1997); Aaker et al. (2001);<br>In-depth interview and focus group     | 可靠的     |
| 26. Down-to-earth            | Geuens et al. (2009)                                                        | 务实的     |
| 27. Social responsible       | Geuens et al. (2009);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                 | 有社会责任感的 |
| 28. Cozy                     | He and Cong (2008);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                   | 温馨的     |
| 29. Happy                    | Aaker et al. (2001); He and Cong (2008); In-depth interview and focus group | 快乐的     |
| 30. Healthy                  | He and Cong (2008);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                   | 健康的     |
| 31. Leisure                  | In-depth interview and focus group                                          | 休闲的     |
| 32. Vacation                 | In-depth interview and focus group                                          | 度假的     |
| 33. Family-oriented          | Aaker et al. (2001);<br>In-depth interview and focus group                  | 家庭导向的   |

\* Eight in-depth interviews was conducted, followed by one focus group as a form of triangulation to further confirm and refine the generated items.

### 3.2. Questionnaire design and data collection

For the English items of tourism real estate brand personality from the literature, a standard procedure of translation and back translation was employed (Brislin, 1980); the authors first translated them into Chinese, and then back-translated them into English; the back-translated English expressions were compared with their original English items to confirm the validity and accuracy. For the Chinese items from the interviews, the authors translated them into English, compared with existed English items for avoiding duplication of items. The questionnaire was designed in two parts. The first part consists of the 33 items intending to measure brand personality of tourism real estate companies. A 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1 denoting 'strongly disagree' to 5 as 'strongly agree') was adopted for the first part questions. The second part comprises questions collecting respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, education background, personal monthly income and occupation.

Data were collected through convenient sampling (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011) from two conferences and the sales departments of three tourism real estate companies. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed and 545 (507 usable) copies were returned, with an overall response rate of 90.8%. The Cultural Real Estate Committee Conference and the 4th China Tourism Project Investment Conference were held in Beijing from 11 to 12 and 13 to 14 June, 2014, respectively. During the conferences, real estate companies set up exhibition booths to demonstrate and promote their real estate projects. Visitors to the exhibition booths to seek information were considered to qualify as potential consumers of tourism real estate and therefore were approached for the questionnaire survey. Conference organizing staff and tourism real estate company staff were involved in distributing questionnaires to these potential consumers. Participation in this research was voluntary; respondents were asked to fill in the self-administered survey questionnaires and put them in a box with confidentiality. 220 copies (40.4% of the returned 545 copies) of the completed questionnaires were returned from the conference participants. The three tourism real estate companies that helped distribute survey questionnaires are as follows: the Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) Group in Guangdong Province, which is regarded as the pioneer and explorer of the "Travel + Estate" Business Model in China; the Clearwater Bay of Agile Group in Hainan, which takes "second life" as philosophy and is committed to creating high quality living environment; and the Million Hills Group in Shenzhen, which is one of the leisure industry leading companies in China. The sales staff of the three companies distributed the questionnaires to their potential customers during 7 to 14 June, 2014. Participation was also voluntary; those respondents who returned completed questionnaire to the sales departments could collect a USB memory stick as an incentive. 325 copies (59.6% of the returned 545 copies) were returned through the sales departments of the three tourism real estate companies.

### 3.3. Data analysis

Principal component analysis with VARIMAX rotation was carried out on all the 33 items for two reasons: (1) the analysis was an exploratory procedure to identify the underlying structure of brand personality, and (2) this approach facilitated comparison with previous studies on brand personality, which used the same approach (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Chen & Phou, 2013; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). An iterative scale purification procedure was used, five factors were generated, and factor reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha. Secondly, K-means cluster analysis was employed to identify the clusters according to brand personality perceptions of consumers. Thirdly, discriminant analysis was further employed to validate the differences among the clusters. Taking clusters as the dependent variable, this step identified the brand personality variables that could differentiate the clusters. Finally, cross-tabulation analysis was undertaken to profile the clusters in demographic variables, including gender, age, education background, personal monthly income, and occupation.

## 4. Study findings

### 4.1. Respondents' profiles

As indicated in Table 3, male respondents (60.4%) outnumbered their female counterparts (39.6%). The majority of respondents were in the age group of 26 to 35 (56.4%). As for the education background, 40.6% of the respondents had completed an undergraduate degree. Regarding personal monthly income, the respondents in the category of 3001 to 5000 RMB comprised 28.4% of the sample, followed by the category of 5001-8000 RMB (21.7%). In terms of occupation, the largest group of respondents (43.4%) was enterprise staff.

**Table 3**

Profiles of respondents ( $N=507$ ).

| Variable                                  | Category                               | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender                                    | Male                                   | 306       | 60.4           |
|                                           | Female                                 | 201       | 39.6           |
| Age                                       | 18-25                                  | 80        | 15.8           |
|                                           | 26-35                                  | 286       | 56.4           |
|                                           | 36-45                                  | 98        | 19.3           |
|                                           | 46-55                                  | 35        | 6.9            |
|                                           | 56-65                                  | 7         | 1.4            |
|                                           | >65                                    | 1         | .2             |
| Education background                      | Junior middle school and below         | 19        | 3.7            |
|                                           | Senior middle school                   | 107       | 21.1           |
|                                           | Junior college                         | 121       | 23.9           |
|                                           | Undergraduate                          | 206       | 40.6           |
|                                           | Graduate and above                     | 54        | 10.7           |
| Personal monthly income(RMB) <sup>a</sup> | 3000 and below                         | 81        | 16.0           |
|                                           | 3001-5000                              | 144       | 28.4           |
|                                           | 5001-8000                              | 110       | 21.7           |
|                                           | 8001-10,000                            | 46        | 9.1            |
|                                           | 10,001-15,000                          | 38        | 7.5            |
|                                           | > 15,000                               | 88        | 17.4           |
| Occupation                                | Government staff/civil servant         | 42        | 8.3            |
|                                           | Entrepreneur/Enterprise senior manager | 72        | 14.2           |
|                                           | Enterprise staff                       | 220       | 43.4           |
|                                           | Private business owner                 | 42        | 8.3            |
|                                           | Freelancer                             | 75        | 14.8           |
|                                           | Housewife                              | 6         | 1.2            |
|                                           | Retired                                | 4         | .8             |
|                                           | Student                                | 28        | 5.5            |
|                                           | Others                                 | 18        | 3.6            |

*Note:* The percentages were rounded up to one decimal point. Therefore, the percentage may not add to 100.0

because of rounding errors. <sup>a</sup>USD1.0=RMB6.14

#### 4.2. Brand personality dimensions

Principal component analysis with VARIMAX rotation (Aaker, 1997; Chen & Phou, 2013; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011) was employed on all the 33 items to identify the latent factor structure of brand personality. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic (0.940) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (5649.899;  $p < .000$ ) confirmed the appropriateness to run factor analysis. Eight measurement items (BP6, BP9, BP13, BP14, BP22, BP25, BP33) were removed due to either low factor loading ( $< .50$ ) or low communalities ( $< .40$ ). The remaining 25 items were subject to another round of analysis. Results of both KMO (0.926) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (4056.274;  $p < .000$ ) were also acceptable. Subsequently seven items (BP7, BP8, BP23, BP24, BP26, BP31, and BP32) were further removed due to either low factor-loadings ( $< .50$ ) or high cross-loadings on more than one factor ( $> .50$ ). After that, we conducted a further round of analysis on the retained 18 items. The KMO statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated sampling adequacy for the analysis. Five factors were generated with the remaining 18 items on the basis of the following criteria (Aaker, 1997; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010): (1) eigenvalues greater than one; (2) factor loadings greater than .50; (3) screen plot of eigenvalues; (4) meaningfulness of the factors. This five-factor solution explained 58.836% of the total variance of the items. Based on the semantic meanings of core items under each factor, the five factors were labelled as *humanity*, *excitement*, *status enhancement*, *professionalism*, and *wellness*, respectively. The Cronbach reliability values of the five factors were .716, .645, .669, .764, and .761, respectively (Table 4). The Cronbach's alphas for the second and third factor were slightly lower than the .70 criteria (Nunnally, 1978). However, as this study is intended to explore on the cultural specific brand personality indicators in the tourism real estate context in China, the reliability scores of these two factors are deemed acceptable. Compared to previous cross-cultural studies (e.g. Chen & Phou, 2013; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Xie & Lee, 2013), Cronbach's alpha values for the second and third factors were also acceptable.

Core items of the *humanity* factor include 'ecological', 'cultural', 'people-oriented' and 'harmonious'. The *excitement* factor contains three items 'unique', 'dynamic' and 'exciting'. The three items under the *status enhancement* factor, namely 'identity revealing', 'good taste' and 'social circle', would represent Chinese consumers' desire to enhance their social status through consuming a branded good. The factor *professionalism* was characterized by such items as 'authoritative', 'professional', 'competent' and 'successful'. The *wellness* factor appears to be unique in the Chinese context; the items characterizing this factor include 'cozy', 'happy', 'healthy' and 'socially responsible'.

**Table 4**

Exploratory factor analysis results (n=507).

| Factors and Items                                 | Loading | Cronbach's<br>$\alpha$ if deleted | Eigenvalue | Variance<br>Explained<br>(%) |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Humanity</b> ( $\alpha = .716$ , $M = 3.955$ ) |         |                                   | 5.806      | 32.354                       |

|                                                                                |                                                |      |      |       |        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------|------|-------|--------|
| BP1                                                                            | Brand X is ecological                          | .690 | .682 |       |        |
| BP2                                                                            | Brand X is cultural                            | .667 | .669 |       |        |
| BP4                                                                            | Brand X is people-oriented                     | .735 | .604 |       |        |
| BP5                                                                            | Brand X is harmonious                          | .642 | .654 |       |        |
| <b>Excitement (<math>\alpha = .645</math>, <math>M = 3.704</math>)</b>         |                                                |      |      | 1.375 | 7.640  |
| BP10                                                                           | Brand X is unique                              | .675 | .606 |       |        |
| BP11                                                                           | Brand X is dynamic                             | .694 | .529 |       |        |
| BP12                                                                           | Brand X is exciting                            | .754 | .499 |       |        |
| <b>Status enhancement (<math>\alpha = .669</math>, <math>M = 3.662</math>)</b> |                                                |      |      | 1.262 | 7.013  |
| BP15                                                                           | Brand X is identity revealing                  | .777 | .524 |       |        |
| BP16                                                                           | Brand X makes you have good taste              | .797 | .506 |       |        |
| BP17                                                                           | Brand X represents some certain social circles | .568 | .667 |       |        |
| <b>Professionalism (<math>\alpha = .764</math>, <math>M = 3.776</math>)</b>    |                                                |      |      | 1.136 | 6.312  |
| BP18                                                                           | Brand X is authoritative                       | .680 | .731 |       |        |
| BP19                                                                           | Brand X is professional                        | .711 | .686 |       |        |
| BP20                                                                           | Brand X is competent                           | .686 | .709 |       |        |
| BP21                                                                           | Brand X is successful                          | .682 | .708 |       |        |
| <b>Wellness (<math>\alpha = .761</math>, <math>M = 3.792</math>)</b>           |                                                |      |      | 1.011 | 5.617  |
| BP27                                                                           | Brand X is socially responsible                | .605 | .747 |       |        |
| BP28                                                                           | Brand X makes me cozy                          | .795 | .677 |       |        |
| BP29                                                                           | Brand X makes me happy                         | .711 | .702 |       |        |
| BP30                                                                           | Brand X is healthy                             | .690 | .692 |       |        |
| <b>Total (<math>\alpha = .875</math>)</b>                                      |                                                |      |      |       | 58.836 |
| KMO= .895; Bartlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2 = 2606.434$ , $p < .000$     |                                                |      |      |       |        |

Note: Extraction method: Principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization.

#### 4.3. Segmenting Chinese consumers by their perceptions of brand personality

To segment Chinese consumers on the basis of their perceptions of brand personality, we conducted K-means cluster analysis. SPSS system-generated factor scores for the five brand personality factors were used to run the cluster analysis. A three-cluster solution was identified finally. Alternative solutions of two and four clusters were also examined (Table 5). For the three-cluster solution, F statistics for five factors were significant. However, F statistics for two of the five factors were non-significant for the two- and four-cluster solutions. These empirical results show that the three-cluster solution is preferred over the two or four-cluster solutions (Hair et al., 2010). After confirming the three-cluster solution, each cluster was subsequently named by evaluating the mean values of the five factors (classification variables). Table 6 shows the classification of the three clusters of Chinese consumers identified by brand personality perceptions. Cluster 1 consisted of 159 members, accounting for 31.36% of the total sample. This sample was named “status/humanity

consumers” as members scored high on both the status enhancement and the humanity factor. Members in this cluster tend to regard status enhancement and human care as more relevant brand personality characteristics of tourism real estate brands. They would expect tourism real estate to be in good cultural tastes, and demonstrate certain social status of the consumer. They tend to choose tourism real estate brands that can reveal their social esteem and identity. At the same time, they expect tourism real estate to provide good ecological landscape, create people-oriented and harmonious atmosphere and cultural feelings. Cluster 2 members were labelled as “wellness seekers” (n=198, 39.05%). Members scored much higher on the wellness factor than any other factors. Cluster 2 members seem to be more concerned with the healthy, comfortable and happiness characteristics a tourism real estate brand demonstrates. Cluster 3 members were labelled as “professionalism minders” (n=150, 29.59%), as they scored very high on the “professionalism” factor. These consumers would treat professionalism, authority, success to be indispensable qualities of a tourism real estate brand.

**Table 5**

ANOVA *F* results assessing cluster solutions

| Factors            | 2 Clusters |      | 3 Clusters |      | 4 Clusters |      |
|--------------------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|
|                    | <i>F</i>   | Sig. | <i>F</i>   | Sig. | <i>F</i>   | Sig. |
| Humanity           | 2.214      | .137 | 31.624     | .000 | 1.921      | .125 |
| Excitement         | 238.010    | .000 | 19.469     | .000 | 1.326      | .265 |
| Status enhancement | 40.550     | .000 | 32.196     | .000 | 189.464    | .000 |
| Professionalism    | 1.566      | .211 | 195.551    | .000 | 172.685    | .000 |
| Wellness           | 197.899    | .000 | 146.915    | .000 | 159.960    | .000 |

**Table 6**

Classification of Chinese consumers by perception differences in brand personality.

| Factors |                    | Status/humanity consumers | Wellness seekers | Professionalism minders | ANOVA    |      |
|---------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|----------|------|
|         |                    | (n=159, 31.36%)           | (n=198, 39.05%)  | (n=150, 29.59%)         | <i>F</i> | Sig. |
| BPA     | Humanity           | .25114                    | .18694           | -.51297                 | 31.624   | .000 |
| BPB     | Excitement         | -.36068                   | .28054           | .01200                  | 19.469   | .000 |
| BPC     | Status enhancement | .33271                    | -.41463          | .19464                  | 32.196   | .000 |
| BPD     | Professionalism    | -.96766                   | .34670           | .56807                  | 195.551  | .000 |
| BPE     | Wellness           | -.09544                   | .67692           | -.79237                 | 146.915  | .000 |

#### 4.4. Validating the identified clusters

Following the suggestions of previous studies (Chen et al. 2014), a discriminant analysis was further performed on the three clusters to further verify the classification of the clusters. As Hair et al. (2010) pointed out, to a three-cluster discriminant analysis model, it was necessary to apply two canonical discriminant functions. As shown in Table 7, the two

functions were statistically significant when assessed by the Chi-squared test ( $p < .001$ ). Function 1 explained 55.1% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 1.359, function 2 explained 44.9% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 1.108. The canonical correlation value of function 1 was 0.759 and that of function 2 was 0.725, both were close to 1.0. The discriminant scores and the groups showed a relatively high degree of association.

**Table 7**

Test of the significance of the three clusters.

| Discriminant function | Eigenvalue         | Variance (%) | Canonical correlation | Wilk's lambda | $\chi^2$ | Sig. level |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------|----------|------------|
| 1                     | 1.359 <sup>a</sup> | 55.1         | 0.759                 | 0.201         | 805.215  | .000       |
| 2                     | 1.108 <sup>a</sup> | 44.9         | 0.725                 | 0.474         | 374.391  | .000       |

a First two canonical discriminant functions were used in the analysis

In order to identify which factor as predictor variable contributes the most to the function, discriminant function coefficients were examined. Table 8 shows that the status/humanity consumers tend to have high values on function 2 (as suggested by functions at group centroids) and are dominantly driven by the humanity factor of brand personality (as suggested by both standardized and unstandardized canonical discriminant function coefficients), whereas the professionalism minders tend to have high values on function 1 (as also suggested by functions at group centroids) and are dominantly driven by the professionalism factor of brand personality (as also suggested by both standardized and unstandardized canonical discriminant function coefficients). These results are consistent with findings in Table 6. Thus, it is concluded that the three clusters identified in this study are valid. Furthermore, we checked the predicted and actual classification results. As shown in Table 9, in both original group cases and cross-validated group cases, the hit ratios of the analysis sample were excellent with over 98% of the cases in any cluster being correctly identified. This confirmed that the high degree of classification accuracy for the three clusters.

**Table 8**

Discrimination between clusters and factors.

|                                                             | Function 1         | Function 2         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Functions at group centroids                                |                    |                    |
| Tourism real estate brand personality clusters              |                    |                    |
| Status/humanity consumers                                   | -1.647             | .445 <sup>a</sup>  |
| Wellness seekers                                            | 1.102              | .853               |
| Professionalism minders                                     | .291 <sup>a</sup>  | -1.598             |
| Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients   |                    |                    |
| Factors                                                     |                    |                    |
| Humanity                                                    | -.154              | .612 <sup>b</sup>  |
| Excitement                                                  | .517               | .069               |
| Status enhancement                                          | -.548              | -.331 <sup>b</sup> |
| Professionalism                                             | .913 <sup>b</sup>  | -.413              |
| Wellness                                                    | .377 <sup>b</sup>  | .891               |
| (Constant)                                                  | NA                 | NA                 |
| Unstandardized canonical discriminant function coefficients |                    |                    |
| Factors                                                     |                    |                    |
| Humanity                                                    | -.163              | .648 <sup>b</sup>  |
| Excitement                                                  | .536               | .071               |
| Status enhancement                                          | -.580              | -.350 <sup>b</sup> |
| Professionalism                                             | 1.214 <sup>b</sup> | -.549              |
| Wellness                                                    | .474 <sup>b</sup>  | 1.119              |
| (Constant)                                                  | .000               | .000               |

<sup>a</sup> Unstandardized canonical discriminant functions evaluated at group means.<sup>b</sup> Factors mostly contributed to discriminate the three clusters in each function.

**Table 9**

Classification results.

| Cluster number of case (actual cluster) |       |                                      | Predicted group membership |           |           |       |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
|                                         |       |                                      | Cluster 1                  | Cluster 2 | Cluster 3 | Total |
| Original                                | Count | Cluster 1: Status/humanity consumers | 159                        | 0         | 0         | 159   |
|                                         |       | Cluster 2: Wellness seekers          | 0                          | 198       | 0         | 198   |
|                                         |       | Cluster 3: Professionalism minders   | 0                          | 1         | 149       | 150   |
|                                         | %     | Cluster 1: Status/humanity consumers | 100.0                      | .0        | .0        | 100.0 |
|                                         |       | Cluster 2: Wellness seekers          | .0                         | 100.0     | .0        | 100.0 |
|                                         |       | Cluster 3: Professionalism minders   | .0                         | .7        | 99.3      | 100.0 |
| Cross-validated                         | Count | Cluster 1: Status/humanity consumers | 156                        | 1         | 2         | 159   |
|                                         |       | Cluster 2: Wellness seekers          | 0                          | 197       | 1         | 198   |
|                                         |       | Cluster 3: Professionalism minders   | 1                          | 1         | 148       | 150   |
|                                         | %     | Cluster 1: Status/humanity consumers | 98.1                       | .6        | 1.3       | 100.0 |
|                                         |       | Cluster 2: Wellness seekers          | .0                         | 99.5      | .5        | 100.0 |
|                                         |       | Cluster 3: Professionalism minders   | .7                         | .7        | 98.7      | 100.0 |

*Note:* Cross-validation is done only for those cases in the analysis. In cross-validation, each case is classified by the functions derived from all cases other than that case; 99.8% of original grouped cases correctly classified; 98.8% of cross-validated grouped cases correctly classified.

#### 4.5. Socio-demographic profile of Chinese consumers clusters

A cross-tabulation analysis (chi-square test) was further conducted to examine whether the three clusters of Chinese consumers were significantly different in their demographic characteristics (see Table 10). Results revealed that there were no significant differences among the three clusters in term of their demographics. Such a finding suggests that brand personality perceptions bear more psychological qualities and preferences than demographic differences among Chinese consumers.

**Table 10**

Chi-square test results for demographic profiles of each segment.

| Variable | Category | Cluster 1                 | Cluster 2        | Cluster 3               | Chi-square test |    |      |
|----------|----------|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|----|------|
|          |          | Status/humanity consumers | Wellness seekers | Professionalism minders |                 |    |      |
|          |          | (n=159, 31.36%)           | (n=198, 39.05%)  | (n=150, 29.59%)         | $\chi^2$        | df | Sig. |
| Gender   | Male     | 101                       | 113              | 92                      | 1.619           | 2  | 0.44 |
|          | Female   | 58                        | 85               | 58                      |                 |    |      |
| Age      | 18-25    | 28                        | 23               | 29                      | 8.099           | 10 | 0.61 |
|          | 26-35    | 85                        | 118              | 83                      |                 |    |      |
|          | 36-45    | 31                        | 40               | 27                      |                 |    |      |

|                              |                                        |    |    |    |       |    |       |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----|----|----|-------|----|-------|
|                              | 46-55                                  | 12 | 14 | 9  |       |    |       |
|                              | 56-65                                  | 3  | 3  | 1  |       |    |       |
|                              | >65                                    | 0  | 0  | 1  |       |    |       |
| Education background         | Junior middle school and below         | 7  | 7  | 5  | 4.428 | 8  | 0.817 |
|                              | Senior middle school                   | 35 | 35 | 37 |       |    |       |
|                              | Junior college                         | 41 | 46 | 34 |       |    |       |
|                              | Undergraduate                          | 62 | 85 | 59 |       |    |       |
|                              | Graduate and above                     | 14 | 25 | 15 |       |    |       |
| Persona monthly income(R MB) | 3000 and below                         | 26 | 32 | 23 | 9.079 | 10 | 0.525 |
|                              | 3001-5000                              | 53 | 44 | 47 |       |    |       |
|                              | 5001-8000                              | 31 | 45 | 34 |       |    |       |
|                              | 8001-10,000                            | 10 | 22 | 14 |       |    |       |
|                              | 10,001-15,000                          | 11 | 18 | 9  |       |    |       |
|                              | >15,000                                | 28 | 37 | 23 |       |    |       |
| Occupation                   | Government staff/civil servant         | 13 | 17 | 12 | 13.04 | 16 | 0.670 |
|                              | Entrepreneur/Enterprise senior manager | 19 | 33 | 20 |       |    |       |
|                              | Enterprise staff                       | 61 | 88 | 71 |       |    |       |
|                              | Private business owner                 | 19 | 14 | 9  |       |    |       |
|                              | Freelance                              | 25 | 29 | 21 |       |    |       |
|                              | Housewife                              | 1  | 3  | 2  |       |    |       |
|                              | Retired                                | 2  | 1  | 1  |       |    |       |
|                              | Student                                | 11 | 10 | 7  |       |    |       |
|                              | Others                                 | 8  | 3  | 7  |       |    |       |

## 5. Conclusions and discussion

### 5.1. Conclusions

Previous studies on brand personality have been conducted in western countries and few oriental countries such as Japan and Korea. As the emerging significant consumer market in the non-western world, China provides a significant context to further expand the brand personality literature; there is a need to investigate the culture-specific factors of brand personality as perceived by Chinese consumers. This study has two purposes: (a) to identify the salient brand personality factors as perceived by Chinese consumers with regards to tourism real estate as a new consumption good, and (b) to understand the current

tourism real estate consumer market by segmenting Chinese consumers based on their brand personality perceptions. This study identified five brand personality dimensions as perceived by Chinese consumers in the context of tourism real estate firms and segmented Chinese consumers into three clusters based on their brand personality perceptions. The five dimensions were humanity, excitement, status enhancement, professionalism and wellness. The three clusters were status/humanity consumers, wellness seekers, and professionalism minders.

Our findings are consistent with the argument that brands may carry both relatively culturally common and culturally specific meanings (Aaker et al., 2001; Kim & Lehto, 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011). Brand personality perceived by Chinese consumers shows the coexistence of both Chinese traditionalism and western modernism. Among the five identified dimensions of Chinese brand personality, excitement and professionalism are similar to those identified in previous studies (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al. 2001; Geuens et al., 2009; Sung & Tinkham 2005). However, the other three dimensions - humanity, status enhancement and wellness - are distinct from previous inquiries; this justifies the main contribution of the current study. This also confirms previous study findings suggesting that not all human characteristics are relevant to tourism brands (e.g. Pereira et al., 2014). These three culture-specific dimensions of brand personality are likely to be formed and shaped by the transformation of consumer's cultural values in the contemporary Chinese society.

First, the humanity dimension was defined by such attributes as ecological, cultural, people-oriented and harmonious. This dimension's connotation fits well with the core of the traditional Chinese culture. Different from western perspective that tends to view nature ideally as free from artificiality and human intervention (Sofield & Li, 2007), Chinese philosophy has emphasized unity and immanence, leading to a harmony between man and nature (Tang, Li, & McLean, 1989). The doctrine of "the Unity of Heaven and Humanity" (Tu, 2001) (*tian ren he yi*) was one of the most fundamental philosophical thoughts in Confucian tradition, and constituted a very important part in the traditional Chinese way of thinking. Moreover, the core of Confucianism is humanism (Juergensmeyer, 2005). Traditional Confucian thought has considerably influenced Chinese consumers' beliefs, attitudes and values, thus reflecting in the humanity dimension of brand personality. It is worth noting that human concern and human spirit were also emphasized in the in-depth interview.

Second, compared with "sophistication" dimension identified in previous studies (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001; Kim & Lehto, 2013; Kim et al., 2013), the status enhancing dimension places more emphasis on consumer's self-respect, identity and social circle brought by consumption products, as also elucidated in in-depth interviews. It may be attributed to the part of Chinese culture that positions oneself socially with others and pursues harmonious interdependence among human beings (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). A particular brand could define a person with respect to others when it comes to social identity. When a specific social identity becomes the main basis in a particular context, intergroup behaviours acquire discriminatory properties (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995), and people tend to use social identity to improve interpersonal esteem and social status. Through choosing brands with particular personality associations, consumers could communicate to others the

type of person they are or want to be seen, which in turn enhancing their psychological well-being and social identity. We further found that humanity and status enhancement can be dominant factors to define a subgroup of Chinese consumers.

Finally, the emergence of wellness indicates that modern Chinese consumers wish to evaluate a brand in relation to human well-being. Attributes such as cozy, happy, healthy and socially responsible clearly define the wellness dimension. Rapid economic development and industrialization in China inevitably bring forward problems such as lifestyle changes, pollution, food safety, health problems, increased urbanization, and environmental problems (Jing & Fu, 2001). As disposable income increases, physical and emotional well-being has been put onto the consumption agenda by Chinese consumers. Therefore, the wellness dimension in Chinese brand personality structure reflects consumer concerns for their well-being conditions. Accordingly, a single consumer cluster was identified with a high value in the wellness factor, which indicates that the specific meaning of wellness is prevalent among Chinese consumers.

In addition, China has undergone significant socio-cultural changes, along with its economic system changing from planned economy to market-oriented (Wang, 2003). Under this circumstance, consumption preferences and behaviours of Chinese people from different social classes are getting increasingly different. The study found three clusters among Chinese consumers, and empirically demonstrated that cultural and psychological factors were better than demographic variables in differentiating Chinese consumers. This is consistent with some studies on China's property market (e.g. Wang et al., 2001).

## 5.2. *Managerial implications*

Brand personality is important for product differentiation in the market. Effective marketing and management of brand personality helps consumers to develop a favourable image of the company. From a practical standpoint, the identification of the five dimensions of Chinese brand personality and three consumer clusters provides tourism real estate firms with implications for better marketing communications and management. Furthermore, it gives useful insights in strategic brand management of tourism real estate firms.

Firstly, with the emerging China's tourism real estate market, it is essential for tourism real estate firms to build and maintain a strong and distinctive brand personality. Marketers in tourism real estate industry should be more aware of the strategic importance of brand personality. Brand personality can be used to differentiate tourism real estate products and convey positive and incomparable experiences to consumers. Marketers are advised to focus on key dimensions of brand personality rather than merely physical attributes of tourism real estate products in their communication with customers. This would enable them to develop effective marketing programs and positioning strategies to better meet consumers' deeper mind psychological needs. Brand personality could be created and maintained by various activities such as brand positioning, brand promotion, product design and public relations; however, these measures could be effective only by combining with consumers' needs and perceptions.

Secondly, as the empirical findings indicated that brand personality can be considered a segmentation criterion in tourism markets, brand marketers and managers should pay more attention to integrating market segmentation into their branding strategies. Marketers should

have an accurate understanding of consumers' brand personality perceptions towards tourism real estate firms above all, differentiate consumers into different segments according to their corresponding perceptions, and then design marketing communication message about different brand personality dimensions with regard to specific market segments. For instance, as consumer preference for status concern and human care spirit is evident among the status/humanity consumers, company managers could emphasize the cultural connotation and social identity of the product when aiming at these consumers.

### *5.3. Limitations and future research*

The current study represents an important first step in investigating Chinese consumer perceptions of brand personality; however, several limitations exist and need to be considered in future research. Firstly, as little previous research could be found in investigating Chinese consumer's perception of brand personality, many of the items in the current study had to be selected from prior studies on consumers from other cultures. The measurement items may not be inclusive enough to cover all aspects of brand personality, even though in-depth interview was conducted. More qualitative approaches could be employed in future research to generate a more inclusive measurement item pool, and get a comprehensive understanding of Chinese brand personality. Secondly, this study employed a convenient sampling method, not random sampling. China has regions with different sub-cultural values, economic conditions, and lifestyles (Sin et al., 2000). Future research should validate and confirm the brand personality structures by different samples. Thirdly, we focused on the large-sized tourism real estate firms to identify the dimensions of Chinese brand personality. In reality, not all tourism real estate firms are in large size; therefore, the brand personality dimensions may be more relevant to large firms. Future research is needed to investigate on medium and small-sized tourism real estate firms to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Fourthly, this study only focuses on dimensions of brand personality; however, more efforts could be made to add incremental explanatory and predictive power of the findings. For example, future research could include the consequence variables of brand personality, such as congruity of brand personality and consumer image, brand attitude and loyalty.

## **Questionnaire of Tourism Real Estate Brand Personality**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We are now carrying on the research of tourism real estate brand personality, we sincerely hope you answer the following questions. Please choose the most appropriate option according to your true thought. Your answer is absolutely confidential and just used for academic research, please be at ease to give your answers.

### **Part A:**



|      |       |                                               |   |   |   |   |   |
|------|-------|-----------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| BP13 | Q3-13 | Brand X is charming                           | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP14 | Q3-14 | Brand X is high-quality                       | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP15 | Q3-15 | Brand X is identity revealing                 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP16 | Q3-16 | Brand X makes you have good taste             | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP17 | Q3-17 | Brand X represents some certain social circle | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|      |       |                                               |   |   |   |   |   |
| BP18 | Q3-18 | Brand X is authoritative                      | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP19 | Q3-19 | Brand X is professional                       | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP20 | Q3-20 | Brand X is competent                          | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP21 | Q3-21 | Brand X is successful                         | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP22 | Q3-22 | Brand X is intelligent                        | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP23 | Q3-23 | Brand X is environmentally friendly           | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP24 | Q3-24 | Brand X is trustworthy                        | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP25 | Q3-25 | Brand X is reliable                           | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP26 | Q3-26 | Brand X is down-to-earth                      | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| BP27 | Q3-27 | Brand X is social responsible                 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|      |       |                                               |   |   |   |   |   |
| BP28 | Q3-   | Brand X makes me cozy                         | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

|      |       |                                         |   |   |   |     |
|------|-------|-----------------------------------------|---|---|---|-----|
|      | 28    |                                         |   |   |   |     |
| BP29 | Q3-29 | Brand X makes me happy                  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 1 |
| BP30 | Q3-30 | Brand X represents an healthy lifestyle | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 1 |
| BP31 | Q3-31 | Brand X is leisure                      | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 1 |
| BP32 | Q3-32 | Brand X suits for vacation              | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 1 |
| BP33 | Q3-33 | Brand X is family-oriented              | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 1 |

**Part C: Please choose the corresponding figure according to your condition.**

|           |      |   |        |   |
|-----------|------|---|--------|---|
| D1 Gender | Male | 1 | Female | 2 |
|-----------|------|---|--------|---|

|        |       |   |       |   |
|--------|-------|---|-------|---|
| D2 Age | 18-25 | 1 | 26-35 | 2 |
|        | 36-45 | 3 | 46-55 | 4 |
|        | 56-65 | 5 | >65   | 6 |

|                         |                                |   |                      |   |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---|----------------------|---|
| D3 Education background | Junior middle school and below | 1 | Senior middle school | 2 |
|                         | Junior college                 | 3 | Undergraduate        | 4 |
|                         | Graduate and above             | 5 |                      |   |

|                                 |                |   |             |   |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---|-------------|---|
| D4 Personal monthly income(RMB) | 3000 and below | 1 | 3001-5000   | 2 |
|                                 | 5001-8000      | 3 | 8001-10,000 | 4 |
|                                 | 10,001-15,000  | 5 | > 15,000    | 6 |

|               |                                |   |                                        |   |
|---------------|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------------------|---|
| D5 Occupation | Government staff/civil servant | 1 | Entrepreneur/Enterprise senior manager | 2 |
|               | Enterprise staff               | 3 | Private business owner                 | 4 |
|               | Freelance                      | 5 | Housewife                              | 6 |
|               | Retired                        | 7 | Student                                | 8 |
|               | Others_____                    | 9 |                                        |   |

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**Please confirm you have already answered all the questions, thank you very much for your cooperation!**

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