TOURIST TEXTS: AN IMAGE-TEXT ANALYSIS OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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AIM & CONTEXT

Part One

To investigate how China is constructed and represented in the advertising brochures of two tourist companies for the grassroots Western traveller whose background is essentially mono-lingual and mono-cultural.

By means of an image-text analysis of *Gecko* and *Intrepid* brochures.

Part Two

To investigate the extent to which consumer perspectives of travel in China support the claims presented in the brochures.

By means of 6 in-depth interviews with recent travellers.
WHY CHINA?

• The recent positioning of China as a new destination for the contemporary consumer.

• In the past, China was a forgotten and closed cultural location:

   In the second half of the 20th century China stifled its domestic tourism industry and was virtually a non-participant in the development of the international tourist industry......During this period (1949-1977) international tourism in China was largely limited to politically inspired and motivated visits with most visitors arriving from other communist countries. (Wen & Tisdell 2001:5)
FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHANGE

• Economic globalisation impacting on local politics (late 20th century) leading to growth in tourism
  
  • Post 1978 economic reconstruction & reform
  
  • Chinese Communist Party (1987) accepted international (inbound) tourism as a key industry for economic development.

• China’s entry into WTO (2001) strengthened her position as a tourist destination:
  
  » Reduced formalities & barriers for cross-border travellers
  
  » Removed some protectionist policies
SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS CHANGE

• WTO predicts that China will become the world’s top country for international arrivals by 2020.

• Thus, the importance of analysing publicity materials to see how China is constructed and represented.

• As tour group marketing increases, the need for niche branding will grow.
BRANDING - A DEFINITION

To brand =

• to construct
• to frame a culture
• to present people, places & experiences for a particular audience
• to construct that which is the ‘truth’ (that which is assumed as known and appears neutral)
COMMUNICATING THE BRAND

• Branding – marketing relationship:

  Branding is the most powerful marketing weapon available to contemporary destination marketers confronted by increasing parity, substitutability and competition. (Morgan & Pritchard 2002:11)

• The task of marketers:

  • To establish a brand’s core values
  • To establish its changing aspects of personality
  • To consider head & heart as key aspects of a brand personality
COMMUNICATING THE BRAND

• The tools of the marketer:
  
  • Linguistic and visual imaging of people, places & experiences for a targeted market/audience.

  *At the dawn of the third millennium images are the currency of cultures, reflecting and thereby reinforcing particular shared meanings and beliefs and particular value systems.* (Morgan & Pritchard 1998: 3)

• What do images do?

  » create identities
  » represent certain ways of seeing reality
  » reflect & reinforce particular relationships in society
PRODUCT SIMILARITIES

• A ‘new old-world’ that invites the Western traveller to actively enter, participate, not merely gaze
• A destination that can bring the traveller into close proximity with:
  • Its historical & contemporary exoticism
  • Its enormity & splendour
  • Its mystery & mythology

This is juxtaposed with:

• a friendliness from ‘ordinary’ people
• The potential for grassroots adventure
Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou
Yu village, Yangshuo region
Interactions with locals
PRODUCT SIMILARITIES

• A vast land of diverse people, places & histories that is open and available to Western economic and social interventions.

• A land where experiences can be ‘diverse, fascinating, complex, confounding & spectacular’.

• A land where the cultural ‘other’ is available for those seeking a new and different experience of life and culture.
PRODUCT DIFFERENCES - BROCHURE COVERS

• Similar visual images of exoticism and availability but subtle differences evident

  • Gecko:
    » peasant pastness - warm smiling peasant against yellow light of corncobs - an illusion of warmth

  • Intrepid:
    » present possibilities - an exciting/exotic destination where the ‘other’ constructed as an equal
INTREPID COVER
PRODUCT DIFFERENCES - BROCHURE COVERS

Linguistic images focusing on the promise of new experiences for the traveller who is seeking a new dimension to his/her life.

• Intrepid:

  • There’s more to life than the world you live in.

  • Real life experiences….travel for people who want to leave their world behind.
PRODUCT DIFFERENCES - BEYOND THE COVERS

• Gecko
  • Visual images of the history & mystery of China
    » Photo of historic Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou

• Intrepid
  • visual images of interactions with smiling, happy locals – a means to accessing China’s history
  • Visual images of travellers engaging with others and with the viewer – a promise of excitement & a fun-packed adventure
  • Visual image of 2 highly-energised gentlemen – their visage reflects the up-beat claims of the text
Yu village, Yangshou region
INTERACTIONS WITH LOCALS
INTERACTIONS WITH TRAVELLERS
INTERACTIONS WITH TRAVELLERS
INTREPID REPRESENTATIVES

intrepid
real life
experiences...

People don't say they've never5 been anywhere travelling than they do at home — and I agree totally with this!

However, we got as enthused with our everyday routines
that we don't actually notice the world we are living in. So, if we
never have anything to do, are you living in a real world?

When Geoff and I started Intrepid, we had a philosophy that was
to see the world as a whole, not just as a series of
pictures. Our philosophy was that if you lived to be
in a place, you would want to be a part of the place — you
wouldn't just stand and stare at the destination and leave your
nightmares behind.

We want our travellers to see the world as a whole. Our
travellers get their own experience, not on the intrepid line. —
You are new to the world and you want to know what it looks like.
We've got at it, so you can take it all in — then there's the people who
reflect it on the Magic of Travel.

We have an incredible year ahead of us,
and we're developing our range of Intrepid Travel Adventures and
launching our new family adventures — the idea that travel is
nowhere near as a soaking experience as, say, you have kids of
your own. But travel needs of all are Intrepid people to
keep travel a new way to the social dimension and share some
of the special things with our friends and family.

Life is short — make the world beat and create a

66...when we travel everything
is new and different. New places
and people. Different smells,
tastes, cultures — even colours.
It's a whole new world!
PRODUCT DIFFERENCES – BEYOND THE COVERS

• Gecko
  • Text images of the history, mystery & spectacular scenery
    » Standing on the great wall is one of the great travel experiences
    » Getting off the beaten track is important too
    » Yunnan Province offers great opportunities to interact with minority groups and enjoy some awesome scenery

• Intrepid
  • Text images reinforce a heady emphasis on the orgasmic experience of the new
    » You want to have your senses immersed in the destination and leave your old world behind
    » When we travel everything is new and different. New places and people. Different smells, tastes, cultures – even colours. It’s a whole new world.
PRODUCT DIFFERENCES - COMPANY CLAIMS

Each company alludes to their offering of the best.

• **Type of experience**
  • *You’ll get to see and experience so much more on your holiday with us.* (Intrepid)
  • *We include many extras and we know the best of what to see.* (Intrepid)
  • *We save you money by using your time efficiently.* (Intrepid)
  • *We’ll take you off the beaten track to remote villages in the lee of vast mountains.* (Gecko)
  • *We provide a great alternative to the rigorous backpacking or the more clinical and sanitised mass-market approach of some operators.* (Gecko)

• **Quality of tour leaders**
  • *We are proud to say we have the best team in the region: qualified, well-presented, cheerful and funny guides who are good communicators and great company. Ours are born and bred in China so they understand its complexities far better than foreign tour leaders…* (Gecko)
  • *We give you local and foreign tour leaders so that you receive different cultural perspectives on the China.* (Intrepid)

• **Quality of company; Practice responsible tourism; Track-record.**
TARGET AUDIENCE

• The adventure traveller who is keen to actively engage with new cultural experiences in old lands rather then passively gaze.

• Those flexible of mind and emotionally fit to cope with culture shock.

• The younger traveller who is likely to enjoy:
  • Text images
    » chilling out in a little bar down the backstreets of a hutong
    » hitting a local restaurant
    » traipsing around town at some ungodly hour
    » the rigours of bike-riding & trekking to high mountains & far-off gorges
  • Visual images
    » small groups around bottles & cans
SMALL GROUPS AROUND BOTTLES & CANS
TARGET AUDIENCE

• Tension between 2 ends of the marketing spectrum

  We don’t have any strict age limits, but we must stress that these adventures have been specifically designed for younger travellers in the 20s, 30s and 40s age group. (Intrepid)

• Not for everyone (different grades)

  Gecko: 3 grades (easy, moderate, moderate plus)
  Intrepid: 5 grades (physical and culture shock)
CLAIMS V EXPERIENCES

• China of tourist media construction is based on market claims that are open for critique and substantiation.

• This is the focus of Part Two of this study:

> An investigation of the extent to which consumer perspectives support the claims presented in the advertising brochures.