PERCEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS TOWARDS GUILIN

การรับรู้ของนักท่องเที่ยวนานาชาติต่อเมืองกุ้ยหลิน

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Abstract

The study was aimed to identify how international tourists acquire their information, cognitive and affective attributes that contribute to their image of Guilin, and the influences of socio-demographic factors. The target population group for quantitative primary data collection was international visitors (including Hongkongese, Taiwanese, and Macanese) over 18 years old in Bangkok, Thailand. The quantitative method was employed for data analysis, and 400 questionnaires were distributed. However, due to the flooding of Bangkok, only 200 completed questionnaires were collected. The majority of respondents were male, student, 18-29 years old, had monthly incomes below $1.499, graduated with a bachelor degree, and were Asian.

The results revealed Americans, Asians and Europeans tend to consider "recommendation from friends and relatives" as the most important information source. On the other hand, Oceanians and Africans preferred internet information sources most. Moreover, international tourists have difference cognitive image of Guilin, for good transportation and easy to get information, Americans had less agreement than Asians, while Asians agreed less than Europeans in language barriers. Furthermore, for affective image, Americans preferred to have a change from daily life more than Asians. Additionally, international tourists by region have different perception on the factors about Guilin and even though they have the same perception but the level of agreement showed differences.

Keywords : international tourists, information source, cognitive image, affective image, perception

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ของกรณีศึกษานี้คือเพื่อระบุวิธีช่องทางที่นักท่องเที่ยวนานาชาติได้รับข้อมูล ความรู้สึก และความคิดในการสร้างภาพของกุ้ยหลิน และอิทธิพลของปัจจัยทางสังคมประชากร ประชากร กลุ่มเป้าหมาย สำหรับการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณหลักคือนักท่องเที่ยวจากต่างประเทศ รวมทั้ง ชาวฮ่องกง ไต้หวันและ มาเก๊า ที่อายุมากกว่า 18 ปี ในกรุงเทพมหานคร ประเทศไทย วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยวิธีการเชิงปริมาณ โดยแจก แบบสอบถามจำนวน 400 ชุด แต่เนื่องจากปัญหาอุทกภัยของกรุงเทพมหานคร แบบสอบถามที่รวบรวมได้ มีเพียง 200 ชุด ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามส่วนใหญ่เป็นนักศึกษาเพศชายอายุ 18-29 ปี มีรายได้ต่อเดือนต่ำกว่า $ 1.499 จบการศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีและเป็นชาวเอเชีย

ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าชาวอเมริกัน ชาวเอเชียและชาวยุโรปนิยมที่จะพิจารณาจากคำแนะนำของ เพื่อนๆ และญาติ เป็นแหล่งข้อมูลที่สำคัญที่สุด ในขณะเดียวกัน ชาวโอเชียเนียและแอฟริกานิยมใช้อินเทอร์เน็ต เป็นแหล่งข้อมูลมากที่สุด นอกจากนี้ นักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติมีภาพความคิดของกุ้ยหลินต่างกัน ชาวอเมริกัน เห็นด้วยน้อยกว่าชาวเอเชีย ในด้านการขนส่งที่ดีและการเข้าถึงข้อมูลได้ง่าย ในขณะที่ชาวเอเชียเห็นด้วยน้อยกว่า ชาวยุโรปในเรื่องอุปสรรคทางภาษา นอกจากนี้ ในด้านภาพอารมณ์ความรู้สึกต่อกุ้ยหลินสำหรับชาวอเมริกัน ชอบมีการเปลี่ยนแปลงจากชีวิตประจำวันมากกว่าชาวเอเชีย นอกจากนี้ นักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติของแต่ละภูมิภาค มีการรับรู้ที่แตกต่างกันในด้านปัจจัยเกี่ยวกับกุ้ยหลิน และถึงแม้ว่าจะมีการรับรู้ที่เหมือนกัน แต่ระดับของการรับรู้ ก็แตกต่างกัน
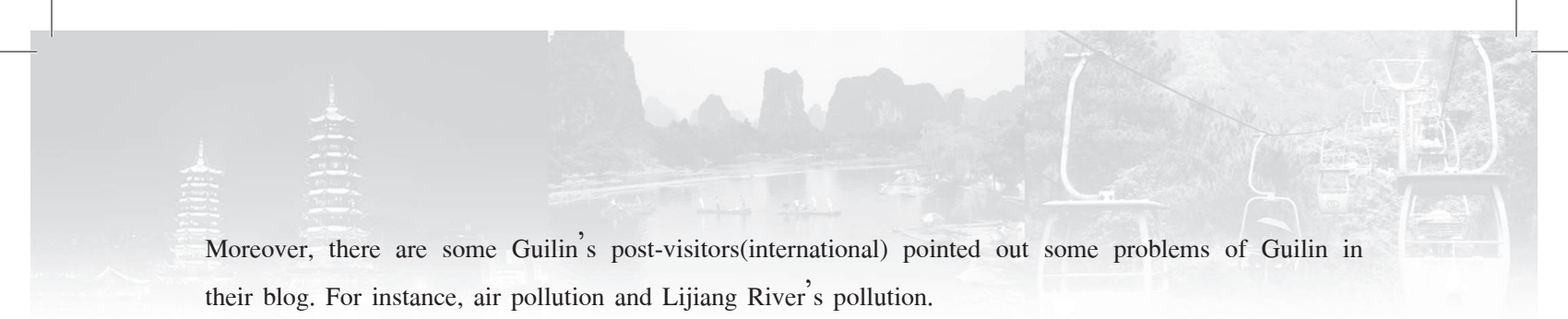
คำสำคัญ : นักท่องเที่ยวนานาชาติ แหล่งข้อมูล ภาพทางปัญญา ภาพอารมณ์ การรับรู้

1. Introduction

As an international tourist city, the tourism industry is a pillar industry of Guilin. The tourism industry not only provides high revenue, but also offers a lot of jobs and employments, for instance, in 2004, the total employment of Guilin is 1,459,800 and the tourism industry directly and indirectly provided jobs 101,580, accounted of 7% of total employment of Guilin (Yi, 2007).

Since 1970s, Guilin as a favourite scenic destination has always been scheduled into the best-selling tour lines of Chinese destinations to international tourists. The number total visitors increased year by year. From 2001 to 2009, the number of both domestic and international visitors increased. However, in terms of growth rate, growth rate of domestic visitors' number between 2001 and 2009 increased significantly (almost 83%), meanwhile, the growth rate of international tourists increased approximately 30%. It is also important to note that the number of international tourists include the tourists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau who tend to have a similar background of culture and language.

With regards to the relationship between the perceived image and purchasing behaviour of customer, as suggested by Burke and Resnick (1991), negative attitude on the product cause a customer avoid purchasing, on the other hand, positive image results in purchase (Burke & Resnick, 1991)

Moreover, there are some Guilin's post-visitors(international) pointed out some problems of Guilin in their blog. For instance, air pollution and Lijiang River's pollution.

Doh and Hwang noted that electronic word of mouth has become an important influence on consumer's product evaluation. Potential customers visit websites and read reviews from other customers so as to find out more about a product or service before making a purchase (Doh & Hwang, 2009). In addition, Hamadoun Toure (the head of the UN's International telecommunications agency) pointed out the number of Internet users worldwide has reached the two billion (Hamadoun, 2011) .

In relation to this, this might imply that Chinese visitors tend to have a positive perception toward Guilin, while international visitors might have negative attitude toward Guilin. Consequently, it could be the reason why the number of domestic tourist sharply increased, meanwhile, the number of international tourist slowly increased.

2. Objectives

1). To explore how tourists get into information sources about Guilin.

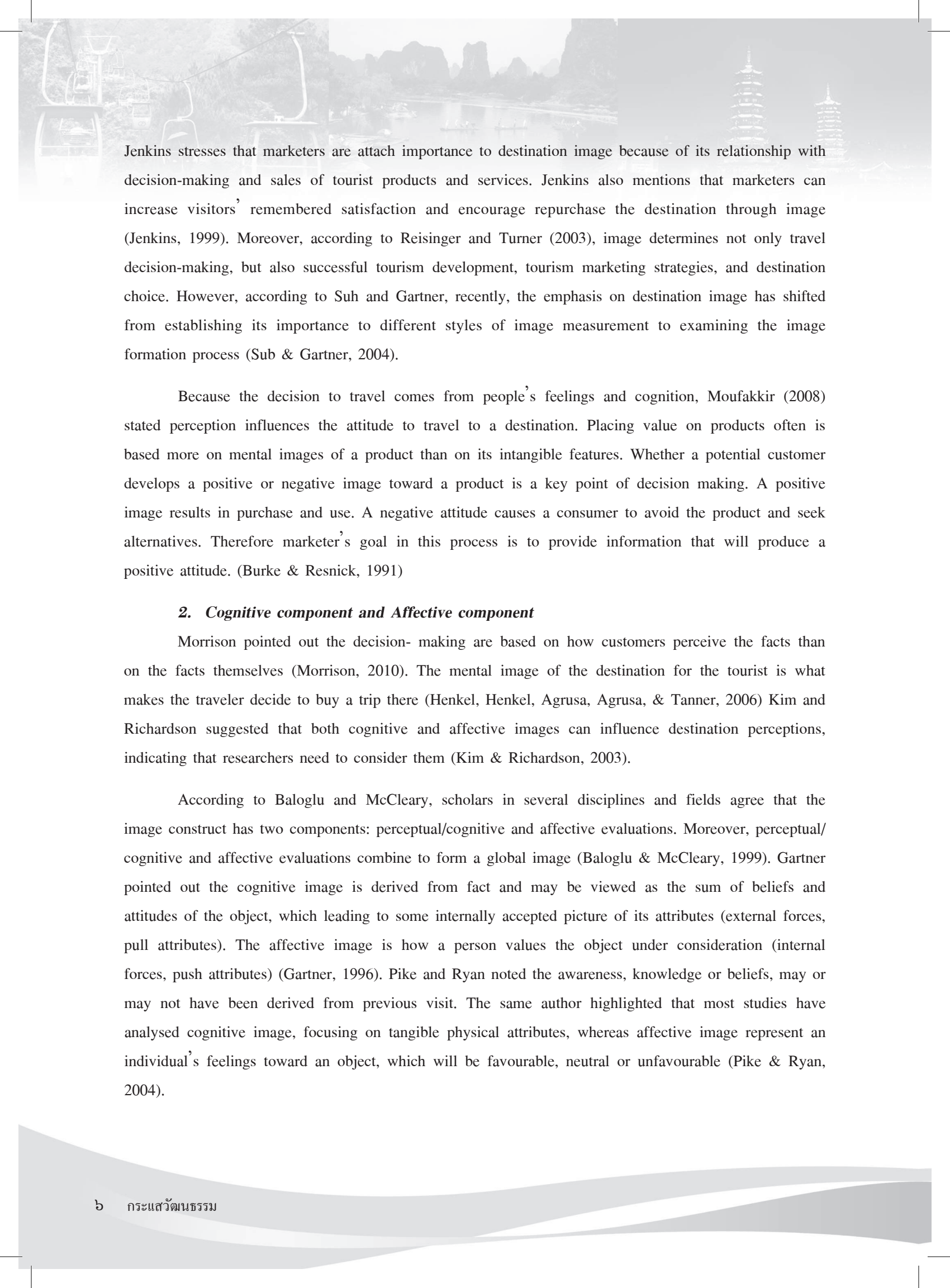2). To investigate the pre-visit perception on Guilin

3. Research Questions

1). How do tourists get information about Guilin?

2). What are the pre-visiting perceptions on Guilin of tourists?

4. Literature Review

1. Image

In tourist destination literature, there are several different definitions of image. According to Echtner and Ritchie that destination image is frequently described as simply "impressions of a place" or "perceptions of an area" (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Millman and Pizam defined that image as impression of a product a place, or an experience held by the general public (Millman & Pizam, 1995). Crompton's definition is relatively more accepted than others: 'the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination' (Crompton, 1979).

The importance of images is widely acknowledged, since it influences both the destination-making behaviour of potential tourists (Crompton, 1979) and the satisfaction regarding level of tourist experience (Chon, 1992). Chen and Tsai stated that destination image is a concept which tourism managers and DMOs recognize as being one of the most important factors in destination marketing. This is because the destination image can influence the tourists' destination choice, decision-making, future intentions to visit and their willingness to recommend the destination to others. (Chen & Tsai, 2006)

Jenkins stresses that marketers are attach importance to destination image because of its relationship with decision-making and sales of tourist products and services. Jenkins also mentions that marketers can increase visitors' remembered satisfaction and encourage repurchase the destination through image (Jenkins, 1999). Moreover, according to Reisinger and Turner (2003), image determines not only travel decision-making, but also successful tourism development, tourism marketing strategies, and destination choice. However, according to Suh and Gartner, recently, the emphasis on destination image has shifted from establishing its importance to different styles of image measurement to examining the image formation process (Sub & Gartner, 2004).

Because the decision to travel comes from people's feelings and cognition, Moufakkir (2008) stated perception influences the attitude to travel to a destination. Placing value on products often is based more on mental images of a product than on its intangible features. Whether a potential customer develops a positive or negative image toward a product is a key point of decision making. A positive image results in purchase and use. A negative attitude causes a consumer to avoid the product and seek alternatives. Therefore marketer's goal in this process is to provide information that will produce a positive attitude. (Burke & Resnick, 1991)

2. *Cognitive component and Affective component*

Morrison pointed out the decision- making are based on how customers perceive the facts than on the facts themselves (Morrison, 2010). The mental image of the destination for the tourist is what makes the traveler decide to buy a trip there (Henkel, Henkel, Agrusa, Agrusa, & Tanner, 2006) Kim and Richardson suggested that both cognitive and affective images can influence destination perceptions, indicating that researchers need to consider them (Kim & Richardson, 2003).

According to Baloglu and McCleary, scholars in several disciplines and fields agree that the image construct has two components: perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluations. Moreover, perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluations combine to form a global image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Gartner pointed out the cognitive image is derived from fact and may be viewed as the sum of beliefs and attitudes of the object, which leading to some internally accepted picture of its attributes (external forces, pull attributes). The affective image is how a person values the object under consideration (internal forces, push attributes) (Gartner, 1996). Pike and Ryan noted the awareness, knowledge or beliefs, may or may not have been derived from previous visit. The same author highlighted that most studies have analysed cognitive image, focusing on tangible physical attributes, whereas affective image represent an individual's feelings toward an object, which will be favourable, neutral or unfavourable (Pike & Ryan, 2004).
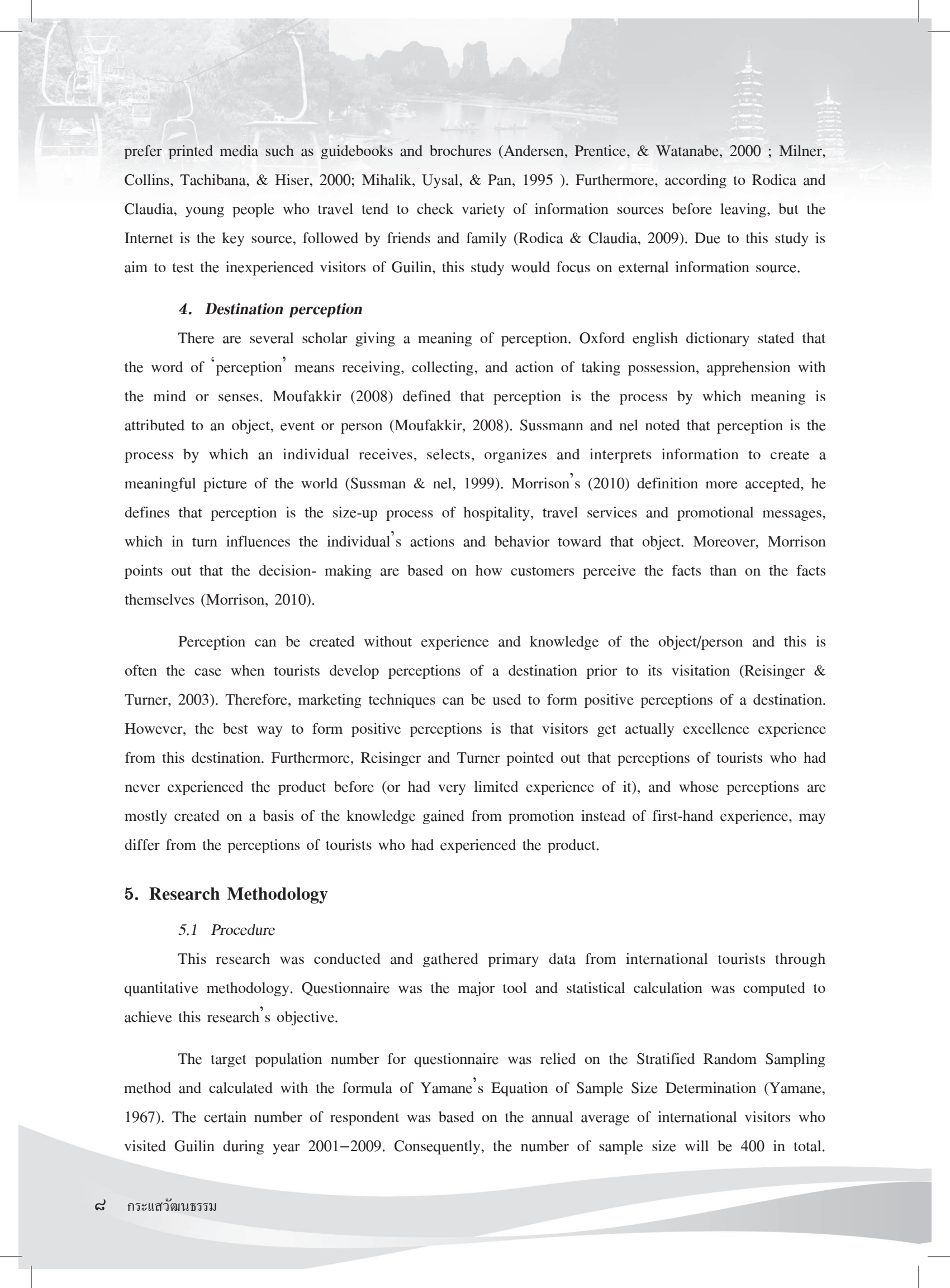
3. Information sources

As a result of the intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable and perishable characteristics of tourism products and services, tourism is known as an information intensive industry (Bieger & Laesser, 2004). Gartner pointed out that information source is the image forming agents which influence the forming of perceptions and evaluations (Garter, 1993). Moutinho stated that information about tourist goods and services is the most influential factors in selecting a destination. Moutinho also noted that visitors making a decision depend on different information sources (Moutinho, 1987) Mangaloglu and Baloglu found that information source and marketing channel influence destination image and choice, especially for international destination (Mangaloglu & Baloglu, 2001). In addition, Baloglu suggested the type, quality and quantity of information would determine the type of image (Baglulo, 2001).

Moreover, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) confirmed that different types of information sources have varying degree of effect. A growing body of study recognizes the importance of getting the right information to tourists (Molina & Esteban, 2006; Lehto, Kim, & Morrison, 2005). Fodness and Murray pointed out the necessity of marketers to better understand tourists' information search strategies, i.e. how and where different tourists search for information under different circumstances (Fodness & Murray, 1999). Understanding how tourists acquire knowledge is important for developing effective tourism marketing and communication strategies (Pearce & Schott, 2005; McCleary & Gursoy, 2004; Money & Crotts, 2003).

Information search includes internal information search and external information search. Internal information search, means retrieving decision-relevant knowledge from the memory, on the other side, external information search means acquiring new information from the marketplace or the environment (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Gursoy & Chen, 2000). External information sources have been organized into four basic categories: (1) personal (e.g. word of mouth from friends/relatives), (2) marketer-dominated (e.g. advertisements in print and electronic media), (3) neutral (e.g. third-party sources such as travel agents and travel guides), and (4) experiential sources (e.g. direct contacts with retailers) (Money & Crotts, 2003). According to Carson and Schmallegger, the Internet has increasingly been used as an electronic source of personal information, providing word of mouth from travellers in online travel blogs, product review sites or virtual communities (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) noted that family and friends were the key role in choosing a destination. According to Bord Filte, 51% of visitors mentioned word of mouth from friend, relative, or business association as an important influence in destination selection, and the internet account for 48% (Filte, Visitor Attitudes Survey, 2009) For Dutch travelers, travel agents and friends and family's recommendation are important information (Yuan, Fridgen, Hsieh, & O'Leary, 1995). Moreover, previous studies dealing with the use of travel information by Japanese tourists pointed out that Japanese tourists

prefer printed media such as guidebooks and brochures (Andersen, Prentice, & Watanabe, 2000 ; Milner, Collins, Tachibana, & Hiser, 2000; Mihalik, Uysal, & Pan, 1995). Furthermore, according to Rodica and Claudia, young people who travel tend to check variety of information sources before leaving, but the Internet is the key source, followed by friends and family (Rodica & Claudia, 2009). Due to this study is aim to test the inexperienced visitors of Guilin, this study would focus on external information source.

4. Destination perception

There are several scholar giving a meaning of perception. Oxford english dictionary stated that the word of 'perception' means receiving, collecting, and action of taking possession, apprehension with the mind or senses. Moufakkir (2008) defined that perception is the process by which meaning is attributed to an object, event or person (Moufakkir, 2008). Sussmann and nel noted that perception is the process by which an individual receives, selects, organizes and interprets information to create a meaningful picture of the world (Sussman & nel, 1999). Morrison's (2010) definition more accepted, he defines that perception is the size-up process of hospitality, travel services and promotional messages, which in turn influences the individual's actions and behavior toward that object. Moreover, Morrison points out that the decision- making are based on how customers perceive the facts than on the facts themselves (Morrison, 2010).
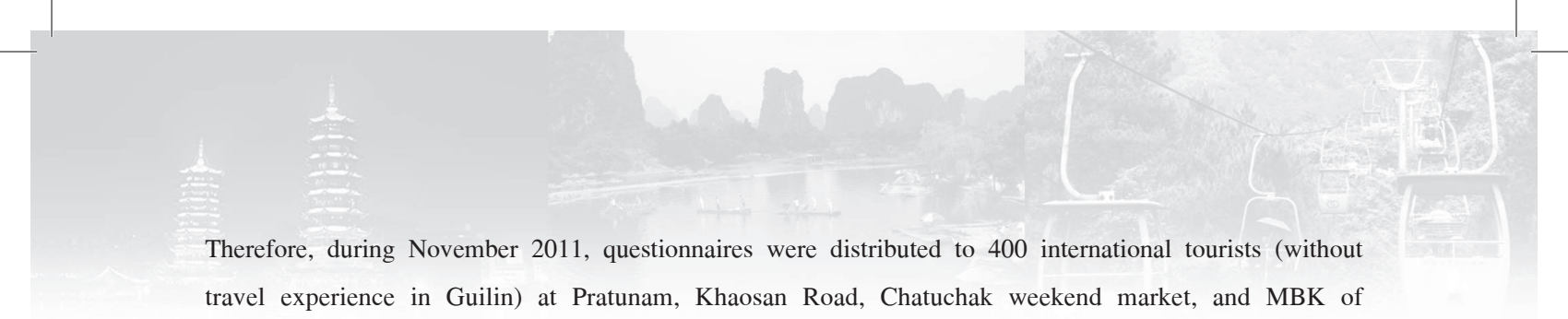
Perception can be created without experience and knowledge of the object/person and this is often the case when tourists develop perceptions of a destination prior to its visitation (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Therefore, marketing techniques can be used to form positive perceptions of a destination. However, the best way to form positive perceptions is that visitors get actually excellence experience from this destination. Furthermore, Reisinger and Turner pointed out that perceptions of tourists who had never experienced the product before (or had very limited experience of it), and whose perceptions are mostly created on a basis of the knowledge gained from promotion instead of first-hand experience, may differ from the perceptions of tourists who had experienced the product.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Procedure

This research was conducted and gathered primary data from international tourists through quantitative methodology. Questionnaire was the major tool and statistical calculation was computed to achieve this research's objective.

The target population number for questionnaire was relied on the Stratified Random Sampling method and calculated with the formula of Yamane's Equation of Sample Size Determination (Yamane, 1967). The certain number of respondent was based on the annual average of international visitors who visited Guilin during year 2001–2009. Consequently, the number of sample size will be 400 in total.

Therefore, during November 2011, questionnaires were distributed to 400 international tourists (without travel experience in Guilin) at Pratunam, Khaosan Road, Chatuchak weekend market, and MBK of Bangkok by using convenience sampling. It is convenient for the researcher to access the target destinations which were planned to be used in collecting the questionnaires.

5.2 Data Analysis

To develop high reliability questionnaire and to reduce unclear wording, this questionnaire was gone through face validity and pilot testing. Modifications to these questionnaires were completed prior to administration.

After the expected amount of data collection was reached, data analysis process had been computed with statistic computer program in order to analyse in the followings:

5.2.1 Section one - Demographic

This section consisted of six questions asking about general information of respondents: i.e. gender, age, education, present residence, occupation and monthly income.

5.2.2 Section two - Information Sources Used for Destination Selection Phase

This section consisted of 20 questions. The respondents answer by indicating their level of agreement, based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = least to 5 = most).

5.2.3 Section three - Cognitive Image of Guilin as a Tourism Destination

The cognitive image (14 items) is derived from fact and may be viewed as the sum of beliefs and attitudes of the Guilin. Respondents could answer by indicating their level of agreement, based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strong disagree to 5 = strong agree).

5.2.4 Section four- Affective Image of Guilin as a Tourism Destination

The aim of this section was to understand respondents' affective image of Guilin. There are 14 items in this section. They could answer by indicating their level of agreement, based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 =strong disagree to 5 =strong agree).

5.2.5 Section five- Perception of Guilin as a Tourism Destination

The aim of this section was to understand respondents' overall perception of Guilin. There are 6 items in this section. They could answer by indicating their level of agreement, based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 =strong disagree to 5 =strong agree).

In the end, SPSS, descriptive statistics, T-Test and ANOVA were used to analyse the data.
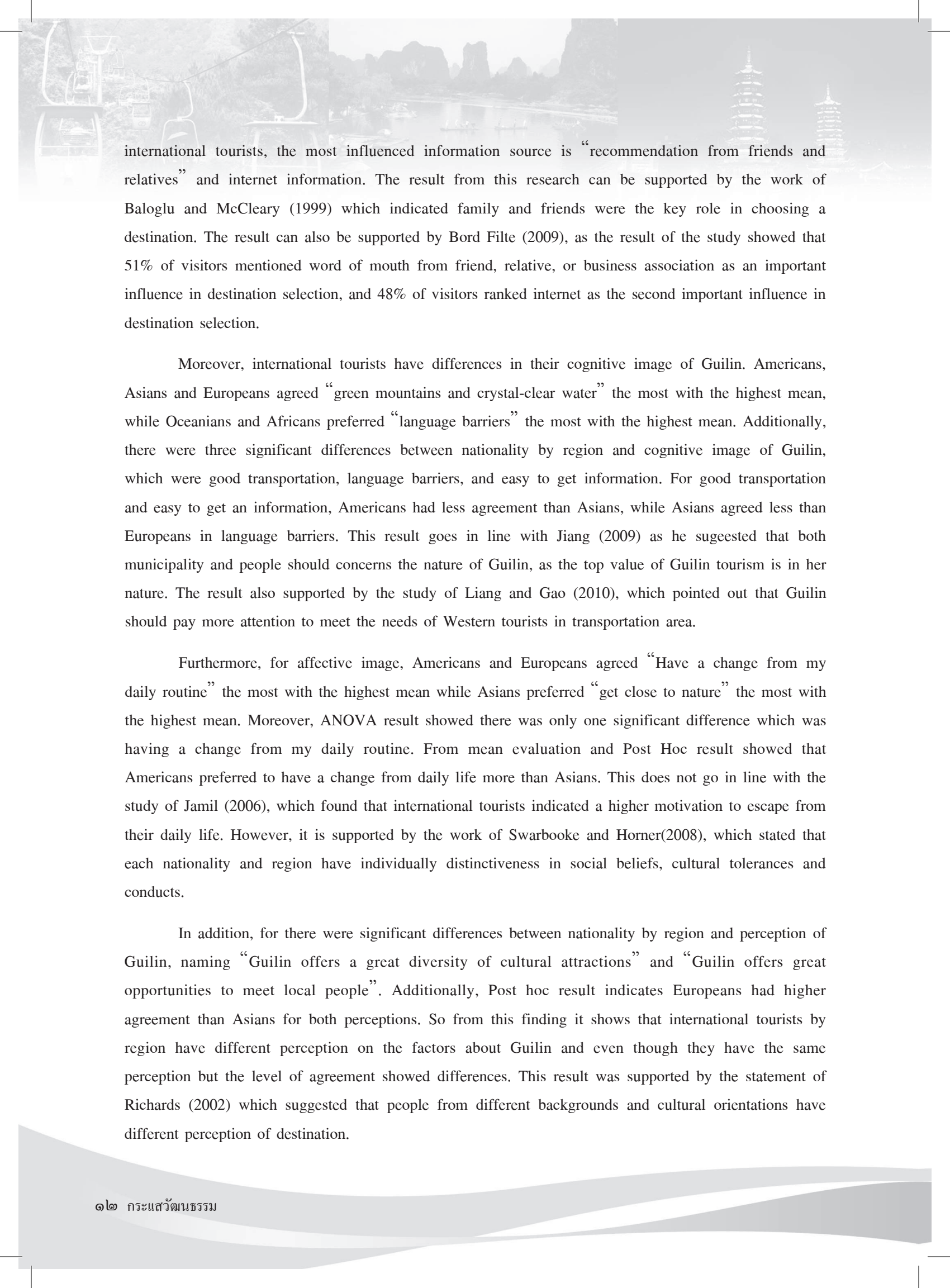
6. Results

As mentioning previously regarding the process of data analysis, the finding was mainly aimed to answer the research questions. Therefore the quantitative approach was taken to reply reliably by statistical proof.

A. *Demographic Description:* It was found that the more respondent number was male. Age of 18 – 29 was also found as the largest ranged group. Their education level mostly was at bachelor degree. Largest respondents were from Asia. Mainly they were students than other occupations. They earned monthly income between 0 to USD 1, 499.

B. *Information source:* The mean evaluation result showed that majority of respondents used 'Recommendation from friends and relatives' as the main resource to arrange the trip.

C. *Cognitive Image of Guilin as a Tourist Destination:* From mean evaluation presents that 'Green mountains and crystal-clear water' ranked on the top of the list with the mean.

D. *Affective image of Guilin as a Tourism Destination:* From mean evaluation that 'Get close to nature' ranked on the top of the list.

E. *Perception:* From mean ranking, the most impressed perception amongst all respondents was 'Guilin has varieties of sight-seeing places'.

F. *Select Guilin as a travel destination for near future trip of international tourists:* From the result of Frequency statistic, majority of respondents would like to select Guilin for near future trip (75.00%).

G. *If Recommend Guilin to friends or not of both international tourists:* Majority of respondents would like to recommend Guilin to friends or the others (75.00%).

H. *Information sources- Nationality(by region):* From mean comparison, it showed that Americans, Asians and Europeans loved "recommendation from friends and relatives" the most with the highest mean of 4.30, 4.12 and 4.03 in sequence. On the other hand, Oceanians and Africans preferred "Comments on an online social network from people you know" and "Travel blogs or online travel diaries" the most with the highest mean of 4.00. Moreover, ANOVA result showed three significant differences, which were traveller review websites, travel blogs or online travel diaries, and interactive maps that display lodging and attractions. Additionally, Post hoc result indicates the statistical significant P-values and reveals that for traveller review websites, Europeans ($\overline{X} = 3.82$) and Americans ($\overline{X} = 4.09$) had higher preference to use than and Asians ($\overline{X} = 3.12$). Moreover, for travel blogs or online travel diaries, Americans ($\overline{X} = 4.00$) preferred to use more than Asians ($\overline{X} = 3.30$). Lastly, interactive maps that display lodging and attractions where Europeans ($\overline{X} = 3.59$) and Americans ($\overline{X} = 3.78$) would like to use more than Asians ($\overline{X} = 3.03$).

I. *Cognitive image-Nationality (by region):* From mean comparison, it showed that Americans, Asians and Europeans agreed "green mountains and crystal-clear water" the most with the highest mean of 4.09, 4.05 and 4.03 in sequence. On the other hand, Oceanians and Africans preferred "language barriers" the most with the highest mean of 4.67. Additionally, Post hoc result indicates the statistical significant P-values and reveals that for good transportation, Americans ($\overline{X}$ = 2.30) had less agreement than Asians ($\overline{X}$ = 3.07). Moreover, for language barriers, Asians ($\overline{X}$ = 3.27) agreed less than Europeans ($\overline{X}$ = 3.91). Lastly, Americans ($\overline{X}$ = 2.74) had lower agreement than Asians ($\overline{X}$ = 3.33) of easy to get an information.

J. *Affective image(by region):* From mean comparison, it showed that Americans and Europeans agreed "Have a change from my daily routine" the most with the highest mean of 4.43 and 4.31 in sequences. On the other hand, Asians preferred "get close to nature" the most with the highest mean of 4.24. Moreover, from mean evaluation and Post Hoc result, it determined that Americans ($\overline{X}$ = 4.43) preferred to having a change from daily life more than Asians ($\overline{X}$ = 3.92) since there were significant P-values.

K. *Perception-Nationality (by region):* Post hoc result indicates the statistical significant P-values and reveals that for perception of Guilin, for "Guilin offers a great diversity of cultural attractions", Europeans ($\overline{X}$ = 3.97) had higher agreement than Asians ($\overline{X}$ = 3.59). Moreover, for "Guilin offers great opportunities to meet local people", Europeans ($\overline{X}$ = 3.87) agreed more than Asians ($\overline{X}$ = 3.27).

L. *Select Guilin as a travel destination for near future trip-Nationality (by region):* The result identified that out of 100.00% in each variable, Americans said they would select with a percentage of 73.91%, Asians would select with a percentage of 81.48%, Europeans would select with a percentage of 56.41%, lastly, Africans and Oceanians would select with a percentage of 66.67%.

M. *Recommend Guilin to friends or others-Nationality(by region):* The result indicated that Americans would recommend with a percentage of 60.87%, Asians said they would recommend with a percentage of 83.70%, Europeans said they would recommend with a percentage of 58.97%, and lastly Africans and Oceanians said they would recommend with a percentage of 33.33%.

6.1 CONCLUSION

Based on the importance of mean ranking, it shows that for Americans, Asians and Europeans, "recommendation from friends and relatives" was the most important information source. On the other hand, Oceanians and Africans preferred "Comments on an online social network from people you know" and "Travel blogs or online travel diaries" the most with the highest mean. So from these findings, for

international tourists, the most influenced information source is "recommendation from friends and relatives" and internet information. The result from this research can be supported by the work of Baloglu and McCleary (1999) which indicated family and friends were the key role in choosing a destination. The result can also be supported by Bord Filte (2009), as the result of the study showed that 51% of visitors mentioned word of mouth from friend, relative, or business association as an important influence in destination selection, and 48% of visitors ranked internet as the second important influence in destination selection.

Moreover, international tourists have differences in their cognitive image of Guilin. Americans, Asians and Europeans agreed "green mountains and crystal-clear water" the most with the highest mean, while Oceanians and Africans preferred "language barriers" the most with the highest mean. Additionally, there were three significant differences between nationality by region and cognitive image of Guilin, which were good transportation, language barriers, and easy to get information. For good transportation and easy to get an information, Americans had less agreement than Asians, while Asians agreed less than Europeans in language barriers. This result goes in line with Jiang (2009) as he sugeested that both municipality and people should concerns the nature of Guilin, as the top value of Guilin tourism is in her nature. The result also supported by the study of Liang and Gao (2010), which pointed out that Guilin should pay more attention to meet the needs of Western tourists in transportation area.

Furthermore, for affective image, Americans and Europeans agreed "Have a change from my daily routine" the most with the highest mean while Asians preferred "get close to nature" the most with the highest mean. Moreover, ANOVA result showed there was only one significant difference which was having a change from my daily routine. From mean evaluation and Post Hoc result showed that Americans preferred to have a change from daily life more than Asians. This does not go in line with the study of Jamil (2006), which found that international tourists indicated a higher motivation to escape from their daily life. However, it is supported by the work of Swarbooke and Horner(2008), which stated that each nationality and region have individually distinctiveness in social beliefs, cultural tolerances and conducts.

In addition, for there were significant differences between nationality by region and perception of Guilin, naming "Guilin offers a great diversity of cultural attractions" and "Guilin offers great opportunities to meet local people". Additionally, Post hoc result indicates Europeans had higher agreement than Asians for both perceptions. So from this finding it shows that international tourists by region have different perception on the factors about Guilin and even though they have the same perception but the level of agreement showed differences. This result was supported by the statement of Richards (2002) which suggested that people from different backgrounds and cultural orientations have different perception of destination.

6.2 Limitations

First, since the number of tourists is huge number, hence, it is a limitation to collect data from them. To overcome this limitation, the calculation of the sample size is performed. Unfortunately, due to the flooding, tourists sharply decreased, and finally 200 completed questionnaires was collected.

Second, with the limited amount of time, it edges the choice of research approach. Though, in order to crosscheck the results of research, the mix-method might be an interesting way to conduct. However, with the limited time, it is better to focus on only one approach.

Third, it is related with the location in the process of questionnaire collections. Since the location for the questionnaire distribution is a public area that might be over crowded, and some shops might ban to distribute questionnaires, when and how to distribute the questionnaire come into the questions. To overcome this limitation, it was distributed at the exit gate as well as the waiting area. However, this will minimize the possibility of the participants.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated earlier, this study has attempted to make a research on the findings of information source selection and perception pre-visit of international tourists.

The study has indicated that differences were found in the level of important information source selection and the level of agreement on cognitive image, affective image and perception of international tourists by region and the questionnaires were based on ratings of the functional and psychological attributes of the destination.

For future research there are several ways that the study can take place. First, the research can have a both combined quantitative and qualitative methodology. As the respondents were only given a multiple choices to rate the various information and peception factors they did not have the choice of adding more factors that they liked. This could have been done by excluding some of information and perception factors from the questionnaire and given a choice for them to write their own factors. As the scaling methods only provide general information based on the attributes.

Moreover, for more detailed research a comparative study can be carried out between different information source selection and perception.
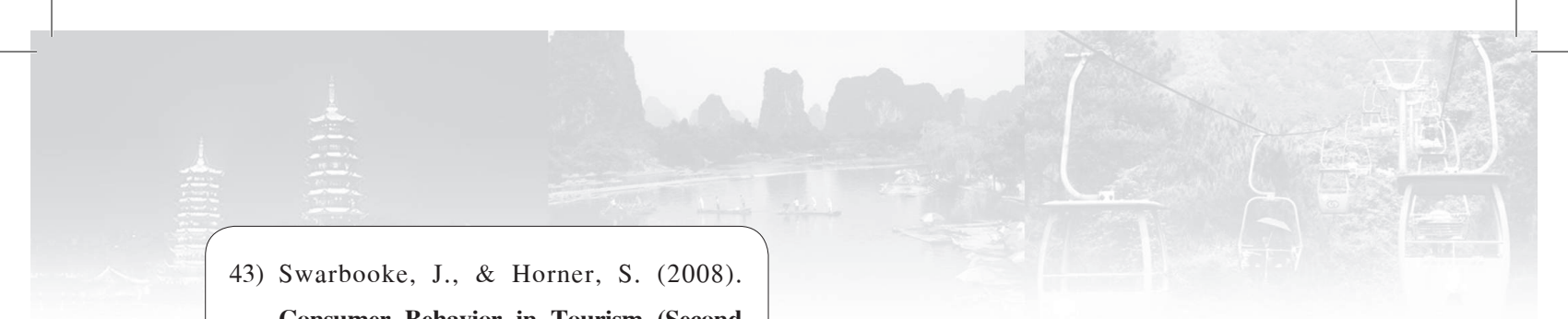
And lastly, based on the same topic, the area can be scoped down to a small area. For example, taking a small area, like Yangshuo and then finding out the different information source and perception of international tourists.

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