Xiaoying Liu

THE BRANDING OF FINLAND AS A DESTINATION TO CHINESE TOURISTS

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Currently, more and more Chinese tourists choose to have outbound tourism as a way to relax themselves from daily stressful work. The purchasing power of Chinese tourists is noticeable, so that they strongly boost local economy and promote the development of tourism industry. Consequently, an increasingly number of countries realize the great potential of Chinese tourists and take measures to attract Chinese tourists. Finnish government also make great efforts to attract more Chinese tourists, such as setting up more visa centers in China and strengthening the marketing of Finland from tourism perspective by launching many campaigns. Accordingly, this thesis is aimed to contribute to the branding of Finland as a destination to attract more Chinese tourists.

The thesis has a very solid theoretical background. It is supported by numerous previous academic achievements and main schools of thoughts in its field, featured by relational network destination branding model, image forming agents’ theory, framework of destination competitiveness. Many related concepts have been mentioned under the three main ideas, structured by destination branding, destination image, destination competitiveness. From this perspective, the thesis exhibits the comprehensive understanding of past literatures and paves the way to the empirical study.

The study applies to in-depth interviews to collect data. The interviewee can be classified as two groups. One is from the actual tourists, the other is from practitioners who work in Finnish tourism bureau and are responsible with marketing Finland as the destination. The common findings are expected to generate in the aspect of Chinese tourists and Finland as a destination.

Since this thesis is abductive by nature, a new model of destination branding process is proposed to enrich the knowledge in this field. It acknowledges the great importance of Word-of-Mouth in the process of destination branding and connects destination competitiveness with destination branding. Moreover, the study figures out how the destination branding of Finland is conducted in China and examines the effect of current destination branding channels. Suggestions have been proposed in order to get an effective destination branding, represented by expanding the content of destination branding, building psychological link between Chinese tourists and Finland as destination, strengthening the cooperation with destination management organizations. This study has not only theoretical implication in destination branding research field, but also it offers practical and adaptable tools to improve the tourism development of Finland to Chinese tourists.

Keywords
- Destination, destination branding, destination competitiveness, brand loyalty, brand reality,
- Destination management organizations, tourism, Chinese tourists, Finland

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and research objectives

There is a notable tendency that the increasing number of Chinese tourists choose to have outbound travelling, which drives consumption in tourism industries in a global scale. According to the annual report released by China Tourism Academy, 117 million of Chinese citizens have travelled in other countries in 2015, and a total of USD 104.5 billion have been spent by Chinese tourists during the year 2015. The report also exhibits that outbound Chinese tourists have generated the expense mainly in the aspects of shopping, fees to travel agencies, local catering industry and tickets for tourist attractions. Among these expenses, 85.9% of outbound tourists regard shopping as their main expenditure during the trip. (China Outbound Tourism Development Annual Report, 2016)

It is commonly acknowledged that the prosperity of tourism industry is advantageous, since it can boost local economy, bring fortunes and jobs, and promote other related industries (San Martín and Del Bosque, 2008). The vast numbers of Chinese visitors make many countries’ governments gradually realize those visitors’ potential purchasing power in tourism industries. Therefore, a lot of countries’ authorities are planning or have already carried out the procedures to facilitate Chinese tourists to visit their countries. For example, Japan authority adjusts the validity of multiple-entry visa for high income Chinese citizens extending from three years to five years, and South Korea authority apply the policy to Chinese citizens in a similar way. India authority starts to launch E-visa for tourism purpose in order to avoid the trouble of preparing excessive paper documents for Chinese applicants. New Zealand authority claim that the bank deposit certificate is not necessarily needed for part of visa applicants who meet certain conditions. More examples include Russia, Indonesia, Chile, Fiji and so forth. (NTES News, 2015)

Those policies announced by each authority are beneficial to Chinese citizens since they simplify the visa application process. It shows that more and more countries have realized the consumption capacity of Chinese tourists and hope to attract more Chinese tourists to have a visit. Finland government also notice the great potentials
of this specific target group and take measures to entice tourists from China. Since 2016, 13 additional visa application centers have been established in different cities in China (Embassy of Finland, 2016). This measure is aimed to facilitate Chinese citizens who apply Finnish visa and avoid them from going to cities such as Shanghai or Beijing just for visa application. In addition, the Finnish Tourism Bureau has cooperated with Finnair as well as other Finnish companies to launch the program called “Stopover Finland package”, and targets Chinese visitors who stay in Finland between 5 hours to 5 days (Embassy of Finland, 2016). Those measures show the great interest of Finnish Tourism authority toward Chinese tourists.

Under such circumstance, the objective of this research is to help tourism-related companies and organizations in Finland to better understand the psychology of Chinese tourists, to further brand Finland as a destination, and to propose adaptable suggestions for Finnish tourism development. In this research, Chinese tourists and Finland as a tourism destination are the key elements to be studied.

1.2 Existing research and research gaps

Tuominen (2003) enriched the knowledge in tourism research context, and elaborated how Chinese tourists regarded Finland as a destination in winter. The data was collected by survey with 25 questions in Helsinki Vantaa airport when tourists prepared to fly to Beijing, the capital of China. The results in Tuominen (2003) research divided respondents into two groups and compared the data. The first group was Finnair passengers who visited Finland and deemed it as the main destination. The second group of data was from passengers who were only transit in Finland.

For the first group, Tuominen (2003) investigated the satisfaction rate of trip in Finland. The finding was that unsatisfied comments from tourists accounted for the majority of respondents. 44.7% of respondents admitted that they were not satisfied with the trip in Finland, with 22% of respondents maintained a neutral attitude, shown as “cannot say or so so”. The researcher also sought to the explanations behind it, and found out three top reasons including 1) Nothing to see, 2) No arranged performance in Helsinki, 3) Too short daytime, which were constantly mentioned by respondents. In addition, some other reasons contained 4) Stereotype
of high price in Nordic Countries, 5) Surprise that Finland was included in trip, 6) Coldness, 7) Closed shops on Sunday. (Tuominen, 2003)

In addition, the willingness of recommending Finland as a tourism destination was also investigated by Tuominen (2003). Similarly, most of the respondents gave negative answer. About half of the respondents (48%) confirmed that they would not recommend, and 17.1% of respondents showed with vague attitude by telling “not sure” or no answer. The reasons were similar as mentioned above, including nothing to see and nothing special. The third most popular reason was just because of transit in Finland. By contrast, people who would recommend to come Finland offered their explanations, including direct and relatively short flight time, clean environment, civilized people and good first impression of Finland. (Tuominen, 2003)

Other scholars have explored the topic from a different perspective. Laitinen (2004) obtains interview data from tour guides, who are insiders of tourism industry. It is found out that Chinese tourists do not regard Finland as a single destination to have a visit; rather it always one part of a longer journey in Europe. This viewpoint has been mentioned by all respondents. In addition, the main reason for Chinese tourists to visit Finland is accessibility, which means secure and easy flight with Finnair and Helsinki’s role as gateway destination to other European countries. (Laitinen, 2004)

The previous studies provide clear insights on the condition of Finnish as the destination regarded by actual tourists and experienced staffs in tourism industry. They provide information on Chinese tourists’ psychology and how these tourists comment on Finland as a destination. Besides, researchers also seek to the reasons behind it. Moreover, they directly exhibit the precise data on their findings which make it more plausible and clear. Furthermore, they target on Chinese tourists rather than many international tourists from different countries. This focus on the specific tourist group can reduce the cultural influences on the impressions of destination raised by respondents’ diverse cultural background. In this sense, these previous studies pave the way to further research on how to attract the sole tourist source, which means Chinese tourists in this research.

Nevertheless, the previous research on Chinese tourists and Finland as a destination has their own limitations. Tuominen (2003) investigates the satisfaction level,
willingness of recommendation, the preference of Finland as a tourism destination based on the data that is collected in winter. In other words, Tuominen (2003) research reflects Finnish tourism situation for Chinese tourists through one perspective and fails to consider the influence of other seasons on Finnish tourism to the specific tourists group. Moreover, Laitinen (2004) and Tuominen (2003) point out the problems of visiting Finland from the views of Chinese tourists, such as lacking entertainment and attractiveness, but they fail to give systematic solutions on how to cope with the situation and how to popularize Finnish tourism resources to attract Chinese tourists.

Destination branding is the theme of this research. It not only fulfills the gaps mentioned above, but also contributes to the application of the concept into the research from both academic and empirical aspects. As Caldwell and Freire (2004: 50) contend, destination branding is an emerging research field, and it lacks “empirical academic research on the topic”. This study applies destination branding to Finland case, which enrich the knowledge of the research.

1.3 Research questions

Since the related research on destination branding is limited, this report is aimed to combine both academic theory and empirical research to discuss Finland as a tourism destination to Chinese tourists. The main research question is proposed as follows:

“How Finland as a destination can be branded effectively toward Chinese tourists?”

In order to answer this main research question, it is very necessary to divide it into sub questions with certain logical sequence. First and foremost, it is very crucial to figure out the current strategies of destination branding adopted to the potential Chinese tourists. Only on the base of it can this research present constructive suggestions on how to further brand the destination. In this sense, the first sub question proceeds as follows:

“How is the destination branding accomplished in relation to Chinese tourists?”
Next, it is essential to realize that destination branding is just like branding products or service, so understanding the psychology of the targeted consumers is needed. This applies to branding the destination to attract tourists also. Therefore, the second sub question should be proposed as:

“How does Finland as a destination entice Chinese tourists?”

Knowing the current destination branding strategies and tourists’ psychology with the application of theoretical knowledge is not enough. It is very necessary for destination management organizations to take appropriate measures to attract more tourists and make it realized. In this sense, the third sub question is proposed for the managerial implication.

“What operations can DMO do to attract more Chinese tourists to visit?”

By answering those questions, it can contribute to develop Finland as a tourism destination toward Chinese tourists. As Tasci and Gartner (2007) comment, Chinese tourists seem to be the main force in recent years and have a tendency to disseminate around global destinations. Finland is an emerging destination to Chinese tourists and it should grasp the opportunity to attract Chinese tourists. The benefit is not merely tourism expense from travelers during their trips. More importantly, international tourism exhibit to visitors and increase the possibility on attracting them to invest, trade and do the business in this country (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999).

1.4 Research structures and approach

The thesis consists of five chapters to elaborate the research questions and findings with certain logic. In the introduction chapter, it starts with the background of the research, including the Chinese tourists’ outbound tourism performances, every countries’ policies to attract Chinese tourists, and Finland’s reaction to Chinese tourists. Thus, it leads to the objective of this thesis, that is, understanding Chinese tourists’ preferences and psychology and further branding Finland as a destination to them. In introduction part, it also elaborates the existing research and research gap, featured by Tuominen (2003) and Laitinen (2004). The previous researchers
investigate the satisfaction rate, willingness of recommendation, and other index from Chinese tourists with the approach of questionnaires and surveys, which provides very clear and understandable statistic data to readers. Nevertheless, the research that is toward Finlad tourism and Chinese tourists are very limited, but this thesis offers new insights on the topic.

The second section of the thesis is the theoretical part. It includes mainly three units, that is, destination branding, destination image and destination competitiveness. In destination branding section, it contains many relevant concepts in research fields, including the concept and classification of destination, the notion of destination management organization, brand, brand reality and brand loyalty. These concepts are closely connected with destination branding, since destination branding originates from brand. Moreover, it is found out destination image is the most cited and most crucial concept in destination branding research. Therefore, it is carefully elaborated in literature review. The destination competitiveness is the last unit in literature review. Two models have been analyzed and compared.

Followed by literature review, the methodology is clarified. The thesis applies to in-depth interviews to acquire data. In total of 12 interviews have been accomplished, with 10 interviews from actual tourists who visit Finland and 2 interviews from practitioners who are responsible with branding and marketing Finland as a destination in China. Morgan and Pritchard (2000: 103, 108) contend that the in-depth interviews can generate novel understanding on tourists’ perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the destination and can even catch the market trend.

The next chapter is empirical findings. Based on the interviews, different sessions are divided, and they are in line with literature review. The findings are carefully elaborated and analyzed and some original interview scripts are incited to increase the credibility. In the last chapter, the research questions are answered. The theoretical implication has been exhibited by developing the new model and by explicating the results that are consistent or incompatible with previous research. The managerial and social contribution is shown by revealing current situation and guiding future action. The reliability, validity and limitation of the research, and the suggestion for future research are proposed at last.
2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 Destination branding

2.1.1 Destination and destination management organization

Destination is defined as a set of organizations or individuals conducting marketing-oriented activities or business in the place that can be either “physical or virtual” (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011:133), which is obviously different from a specific manufactured product (Dwyer, Mellor, Livaic, Edward and Kim, 2004). According to Framke (2002: 92), the content of the destination includes both “an agglomeration of attractions and services” and “a dynamic agglomeration of attractions, cultures, events, landscapes and services”. The potential of one tourism destination is mainly decided by three factors: attractions, accessibility and amenities (Burkart and Medlik 1974 via Framke 2002). It is contended that destination need to get powerful and dedicated guidance from both public sectors and business institutions in order to keep the destinations’ environmental and inheritance worth (Dwyer and Kim, 2003). To be more specific, those various firms, organizations, tourists and other players in tourism industry perform the mutual interaction and bring about the experiences to tourists in destinations (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011).

Other scholars term those stakeholders as Destination Management Organization, namely DMO (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005). They explain that DMO can be any individuals or firms that support tourism and all hospitality–related entities, which are significant in tourism industry. It is argued that in order to achieve sustainable tourism, Destination Management Organizations can operate either promotional or facilitation strategy (Dwyer and Kim, 2003). Destination Management Organizations can be generally divided into two groups depending on their linkage to tourism. Those obvious DMO members are restaurants, hotels or tour operators, while attractions, transportation companies and retail shops are all potential DMO members since they indirectly support tourism (Blain et al. 2005). From this definition and back to Finland as a tourism destination, it needs to be realized that Finnair, tourism attractions places, and any companies or agents that offer different services to tourists are destination management organizations. Branding and marketing Finland
is not the business for tour operators only, in turn; it is closely connected to all direct and indirect DMO members and their performances. Dwyer and Kim (2003) propose the approach to improve tourism, and they contend that DMOs can cooperate and coordinate with members to improve the management as well as promote the development of tourism, by means of exchanging the information between government and all stakeholders and by clearly defining the responsibility. Similarly, it is also argued by Hassan (2000) that destinations’ development should be under the efficient and useful management with the pursuit of sustainable customer base.

Scholars classify destinations by their typical characteristics. According to Buhalis (2000), there are generally six types of destination, namely urban destinations, seaside destinations and resorts, alpine destination, rural tourism, authentic (Third world) countries, and unique-exotic-exclusive destinations. Finland, a highly developed country, is famous for high quality of life and civilization. Tourists often choose and visit those famed tourism cities such as Helsinki, Tampere and Turku, which are urban destinations. The famous tourist attraction Santa Clause Village with Christmas culture and atmosphere can be regarded as a unique-exotic-exclusive destination. However, the destination classification by Buhalis (2000) is quite broad and vague, and fails to consider all the features of destinations, for example the nature of Finland, featured as nature resorts such as plenty of lake and forests.

2.1.2 From brand to destination branding

Brand is regarded as a “name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them interned to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition”, defined by American Marketing Association (Kotler and Gertner, 2004: 41). From their view, brand is a representation that mainly has two functions, that is identification and differentiation. Likewise, Aaker (1991) also defines brand as a distinguishing name and/or a symbol in order to identify and to differentiate products or services offered by opponents. Such definitions of brand are widely accepted in sphere of learning (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005). However, these definitions of brand are criticized by De Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley (1998) that those definitions are rather narrow and fail to take account of intangible elements and consumer’s perceptions, which are cores of
brand’s concept. They postulate that brands have complicated and multiple natures, among which brands as value systems are the most fundamental. In their view, brands are in effect co-produced by both companies and consumers, because consumers’ reactions are traced and analyzed by companies in order to adjust and improve brands. The customers’ rational and emotional needs are approached by those long period efforts and commitments, and these repeated process finally facilitates companies to create strong brands. (De Chernatony and Dall’ Olmo Riley, 1998)

Brand association is a frequently mentioned concept in the researches about brands. Brand associations can influence customers’ assessments on brands and brand selection (Aaker 1991, Qu, Kim & Im, 2011). Brand associations can be grouped as three primary categories: attributes, benefits and attitudes (Keller, 1993). According to Keller (1993), attributes are the descriptive features that outline artifacts or services, perceived by consumers during their purchasing. It can either be physical substances such as exact ingredients, or non-product-related attributes like price information, packaging or usage imaginary. Benefits are personal values that customers attach to the brand attributes in three sorts, that is: functional, experiential or symbolic benefits (Keller 1993, Qu, Kim & Im 2011). Brand attitudes are the overall evaluation of the brand from costumers, and they usually lay the foundations for customer behaviors, such as brand choice. (Keller, 1993)

According to Keller (1993), the strength of brand associations relies on two prerequisites, one is how the information penetrates into buyers’ mind (encoding), the other is how it keeps as one portion of the brand image (storage). Keller (1993) continues to argue that the powerful brand associations are generated in a buyer’s mind as long as the buyer actively consider in mind and further share to others his or her own thought on this products or services information.

Fundamentally, brand stands for a promise of value (Kotler and Gertner, 2004). This view is also supported by other scholars. Brands ought to meet self-expression needs, which means they are not merely meet functional needs but more importantly, the intangible self actualization needs (Caldwell & Freire, 2004). In general, the value of brand is decided by four determinants: brand awareness, perceived quality of the

Like products and services, places can be branded in the same way (Caldwell & Freire, 2004, Kotler & Gertner 2004). Same with manufacturers’ brands, place brands induce certain values, quality guarantees and psychological fulfillments from customers’ head with respect to the possible values of any products coming from that place (Anholt, 2004). What’s more, the author holds the view that a positive and well-managed place brand promotes and boost inward investments, tourism destination development and identity for the residents in the country, region or city (Anholt, 2004). In other words, destination branding should be part of place branding, in terms of tourism field.

Similarly, the concepts of brand associations can also be applied into the destination branding context. Cai (2002) proposes a destination branding model, and the author regard it as a cyclical process with brand identity, brand image building, and brand element mix. Associations including attributes, affective, and attitude components act as intermediate bonds from brand element mix to brand image building. It is argued that by means of recognizing the most suitable brand associations and one optimum brand element mix, the image for branding a destination can be built. (Cai, 2002)

Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) examine and enhance the concept of destination branding defined by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998), with the approach of survey and interviews from senior Destination Management Organization managers. Therefore, the improved definition of destination branding is that:

“Destination branding is the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitors and the destination; that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a
destination image that positively influence consumer destination choice.” (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005: 337)

The result shows that both Blain et al. (2005) and Ritchie & Ritchie (1998) highlight the logo or other recognizable sign to function as identification and differentiation, and convey the brand message to tourists. However, different from Ritchie & Ritchie (1998), in Blain et al. (2005) definition of destination branding, they attach the importance of emotional connections and images to a great content, which can be linked to the brand associations. Generally, destination branding contains seven main components, identified by Blain et al. (2005) through their qualitative and quantitative data in their research. These components are recognition, differentiation, consistency, brand messages, emotional response expectation and image, and those primary components from Blain et al. (2005) are presented in Figure 1.

Brand establishing is a chronical procession that requires long term investment (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000: 219). First, it requires recognition in order to stimulate tourist’ further action, which usually linked to the word such as “awareness” and “identification” (Blain et al. 2005). It is usually mentioned with “differentiation” in branding context. The authors propose that differentiation can be reached. Even though many destinations look alike and similar experiences are offered to tourists, destination management organizations can be very distinctive and competitive role in attracting and satisfying visitors (Blain et al. 2005). In effect, the “identification” and “differentiation” are recognized and emphasized by many tourism researchers for a long period (Aaker 1991, Ritchie & Ritchie 1998, Qu, Kim &Im, 2011).
Brand messages is tightly linked with consistency. From the perspective of Blain et al. (2005), brand messages should be sent consistently through communication channels from destinations to travelers, and enable tourists to have same actual experiences as they are told, (Blain et al. 2005). Other scholars also attach the importance of such consistency, explaining that if those projected images by tourism promoters does not reflect actual circumstance of destinations, unfavorable comments on destination may be disseminated by tourists who are disappointed with destinations (Beerli and Martin, 2004). The influence of such tourists’ behavior is harmful and fundamental. The “word of moth” channels of branding a destination is proved to be one of the most powerful tool for forming destination images of potential tourists (Gover, Go and Kumar, 2007: 19).

Later, emotional response and expectations from tourists’ side are proposed. It is emphasized that emotional response is closely connected with tourist loyalty level, which influences repeat visiting action or Word-of-Mouth recommendation (Blain et al. 2005). Emotional responses from potential visitors can be raised by destinations
or tourism related firms by means of constructive branding approaches (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000: 216)

Last but not least, image is ranked as the most important element in the process of destination branding (Blain et al. 2005). Academics term and develop the concepts of images from different perspectives. Brand image is the one of the most cited concepts, which is defined as “consumers’ perceptions of brand attributes and associations from which those consumers derive symbolic values (Patterson, 1999: 419). For branding Finland as a destination, the concept of country image should be emphasized. A country’s image is usually composed of its geography, history, culture aspects such as art and music, celebrities and other elements (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). For Finland, it is featured as lakes, forests and snow as geography features, relations with Sweden and Russia as history features, Sami culture and Christmas culture, as well as Kimi Räikkönen, a famous Finnish racing driver known by Chinese folk. In short, the importance of image in destination branding has been consented by large numbers of scholars and many research papers in this field are published (Baloglu & McCleary 1999, Buhalis 2000, Gallarza, Saura and Garcia 2002, Chi & Qu 2008). It is a very essential step to create, define, and convey a particular image for destination to travellers (Blain et al. 2005). The argument of image as a nucleus notion in destination branding is supported by scholars such as Cai (2002), Konecnik and Gartner (2007).

Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) believe that a successful brand must precisely reflect destination images and the experiences that tourists can get from a destination and argue that brand can eventually influence tourists’ destination choice. This argument is in accordance with the empirical findings from Konecnik and Gartner (2007:416) that destination image is “pivotal factor” in destinations’ selections in tourists’ mind.

2.1.3 Conduct of destination branding from different perspectives

Destination branding is a novel research field, which has relatively limited models currently. The research on destination branding can be represented by Hankinson (2004) relational destination branding model and Morgan and Pritchard (2000) ideas.
Morgan and Pritchard (2000) elaborate the destination branding from marketing and consumers’ psychological perspective. They propose that in order to brand the destination successfully, it first requires building the core value of the destination itself and later shift the attention to the establishing of psychological connections between tourists and destination brands. The authors present certain criteria to a successful emotional connection, which can be easily conveyed, believed, distinguished, and further “enthusing for trade partners” as well as “resonating with the consumer. (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000: 280-283)

Hankinson (2004) propose a conceptual model of place brand from a relation perspective and he argues that the core brand stands for a place’s identity, which can be defined by brand personality, brand positioning and brand reality. Nevertheless, the eventual success of a place branding cannot be reached unless effective extensions of the core brands are also focused, represented by four main relationships, as shown in Figure 2. (Hankinson, 2004)

The first component of core brand in this model is brand personality. Brand personality is defined as the “consumer’s emotional response to a brand through which brand attributes are personified” and used to distinguish with other similar products or services (Patterson, 1999:419). In other words, the author means that brand just like people, have the personality, and customers usually reflect their feeling to the brand. Brands that have the most abundant personalities are the strongest brands (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000: 219). Actually, brand personality is featured by “functional attributes”, “symbolic attributes” and “experiential attributes”, (Hankinson, 2004:115). Many researchers have developed their measurement of brand personality (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006), and Aaker’s (1997) five dimensions, namely sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication and ruggedness are commonly applied.
Brand positioning is the next important component of core brand. It is defined as what a brand represent from the view of consumers and its own likelihood, especially compared with its rivals in the aspect of benefits it brings (Upshaw 1995, Ritchie & Ritchie 1998). Similarly, Hankinson (2004) also contends that brand positioning is about identifying the attributes that is similar or unique to counterparts. In brief, the essence of brand positioning is to keep the persistent and stable competitive advantages or “unique selling points” that motivates buyers to make the purchase of that brand (Aaker & Shansby 1982, Keller 1993).

Brand reality is the last core brand element in the model. It is contended that both positioning and brand personality should be based on reality if destinations hint at the expected experience offered to tourists (Hankinson, 2004). Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) also mention the importance of brand reality and they contend that tourists want to have the guaranteed travel experiences. “A recognized brand is a promise” to
guarantee the quality and diminish the potential risk; under such circumstances, tourists are willing to pay for it (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005:330).

As mentioned earlier, in order to reach the favorable outcome of a place branding, the combination of core brand and its four effective extensions are inevitable. These include the effective relationships with primary services, media, brand infrastructures and consumers. In Hankinson (2004) model, the primary services are underscored as the essence of the core brand, which are provided by retailers, hotels, organizations that cope with historical remains or arrange events and leisure activities. It is postulated that the core brand is arduous to build for lack of affirmative relationship with core services providers (Hankinson, 2004).

Brand infrastructure relationship and media-communication relationship should be considered. Hankinson (2004) classifies the brand infrastructures as three groups: access services, hygiene facilities and brandscape, shown in Figure 2. It is also proposed that media and communication relationship is vital in establishing core brand in destination branding, which needs long-term effort to transmit coherent images (Hankinson, 2004). Moreover, the consumer relationship refers to tourists, inhabitants and workers in that region, who function in brand reality and contribute to the core brand values (Hankinson, 2004). It needs to be considered whether there are conflicts among those different groups, for example in the aspect of maintaining local culture, the balance to create a pleasant and exotic environment for tourists or boost the local economy and business (Ward 1998, Hankinson 2004).

In short, Hankinson (2004) model elaborates how to develop place branding through multiple facets. What’s more, it provides a powerful and meaningful tool to analyze the effectiveness of the place branding, which can even be applied into a specific case. Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) also view this model as a conceptual framework that is more directly connected with destination branding.
2.2 Image as a crucial component in destination branding

2.2.1 Destination image: definition and its nature

The most significant indicator for tourists choosing their destination is probably the image of the destination (Buhalis, 2000). The importance of destination image in the destination choosing and branding is widely recognized by most of researcher (Baloglu & McCleary 1999, Gallarza, Saura and Garcia 2002, Cai 2002, Blain et al. 2005, Konecnik & Gartner 2007). Destination images also influence tourists’ behaviors at a destination and satisfaction levels, sales of tourism products (Jenkins, 1999). Due to the great importance of destination image in tourism, the researchers study destination images in many aspects, particularly covering the definition of image (Buhalis 2000, Konecnik 2002, Hankinson 2004), the nature of destination image (San Martín & Del Bosque 2008), image formation process (Garner 1993, Baloglu & McCleary 1999, Beerli and Martin, 2004), measurement of destination images (Jenkins 1999, Echtner and Ritchie 1999).

Destination image has the subjective nature, which means it changes from person to person (Gallarza, Saura and Garcia, 2002). Therefore, researchers define image from different perspectives, especially putting attention on image acceptors’ viewpoint. Konecnik (2002) regard images as beliefs or impressions that a person has toward an item, a place or a destination. Similarly, image is regarded as “the set of expectations and perceptions a prospective traveler has of a destination” (Buhalis, 2000: 101). On the basis of previous literature, Gallarza, Saura and Garcia (2002:71) agrees that destination image is the perception of tourists toward the place, but they think destination image also comprises “the different tourism services can be found there: accommodation, food, transport, and more”. Other scholars, however, highlight the role of actors who create such impression and contend images linked with image receivers and image senders. Image is viewed as “what consumer perceives while identities is defined as what the firm try to communicate (Hankinson, 2004:111)”.

Many scholars hold the view that destination image is influenced by two components: cognitive and affective (Beerli & Martin 2004, Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2006, San Martin & Del Bosque 2008). Cognitive evaluation and affective
evaluation constitute the overall image of a place (Baloglu & McCleary 1999). The cognitive dimension refers to the general belief on one destination’s objective attributes (Hosany et al. 2006), which can be “functional/ tangible (e.g. landscape, culture attractions) and psychological/ abstract (e.g. hospitality, atmosphere)”, according to San Martin & Del Bosque (2008: 274). The frequently cited word such as “natural environment”, “culture heritage” or “atmosphere” are constantly linked with the cognitive dimension of destination image in one place (San Martin & Del Bosque, 2008: 265). By contrast, the affective dimension is about the personal feeling toward it (Qu, Kim & Im, 2011). Therefore, destination image should be seemed as “a multi-dimensional phenomenon” that consists of both belief on one place’s attributes and individual’s feeling on that place (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008: 265).

Researchers test the casual relationship between cognitive image and affective image with the approach of path analysis, and they find that cognitive image strongly influence affective images, later cognitive image and affective image co-influence overall image of one destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). It is also argued that cognitive images have more influence on overall image than affective images do (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). In addition to the cognitive image and affective image, Qu et al. (2011) propose the importance of unique image and compare the effects of those three images on the overall destination image. Qu et al. (2011) agree the most crucial role of cognitive dimension in building overall image as Baloglu & McCleary (1999) argues, and their finding is that cognitive image has the strongest influence in forming the destination image, followed by unique images and affective images (Qu et al. 2011).

2.2.2 Factors of influencing destination image building

Scholars have investigated and researched the factors that influence image formation (Jenkins, 1999). The image forming agents proposed by Gartner (1993) is regarded as “the closest towards a model of destination branding” as well as “the most comprehensive to date in the literature” (Cai, 2002: 723).
Garner (1993) explores and specifies image forming agents and he claims that the destination image is formed by those agents (as Figure 3 shows). Image forming agents refer to the forces producing perceptions (Beerli & Martin, 2004), images or specific results (Garner, 1993). Those image forming agents can be simply explained as information sources (Beerli & Martin, 2004). The images forming agents, according to Garner (1993), can be classified into induced level, organic level and autonomous.

Induced images agents refer to images created by tourism promoter, which is divided into overt induced agents (conventional advertising through television or newspaper) and covert induced agents (a celebrity’s recommendation), argued by Garner (1993). In order to establish the induced images successfully to audience, it requires a long term coverage with sufficient budgets and focuses on a specific destination images (Cai, 2002).

Organic images and autonomous images are established from other sources rather than intended tourism promoters. Based on senders of information sharing the knowledge or experience by either volunteered or requested (Beerli & Martin, 2004), Garner (1993) proposes that organic images agents can be specified as unsolicited organic (unrequested or volunteered information offering in the occasion of random chatting among friends), solicited organic (information offered because of being requested) and organic level (travel experience sharing). What’s more, it is assumed by Garner (1993) that organic images get the highest credibility from potential tourists, and for who easier to build the destination image in their mind. The autonomous image agent generally means documentaries or movies that mention the destinations (Garner, 1993). As a result, those different image agents that produce the images gradually form the destination images by either joint efforts or separately (Garner, 1993), which is the fundamental argument of the author. The Figure 3 presents the classification of image agents from Garner’s (1993) ideas.
Garner’s model is crucial in the field of destination image formation and many researchers explore further based on his model. The empirical researches support the Garner (1993)’s assumptions in certain aspects, especially in the influence of organic agents and induced agents. Gover, Go and Kumar (2007: 19) proves the great importance of organic agents in forming the destination images by the data gained from 1100 respondents, that is “word of mouth (mentioned by a quarter of respondents)” and “word of mouse” (the internet) and the respondents’ own travel experience or experience of others. Similarly, research data from Beerli and Martin (2004: 677) also agrees the organic and autonomous information sources significantly influence the cognitive component of perceived images, and points out that “word of mouth is the most believable and truthful communication channel”. As Gallarza, Saura and Garcia (2002) comment, this model provides great theoretical insight on image formation mechanism. However, this model is not immaculate. It is also pointed out that Gartner’s model lacks in connecting brand identity with destination image formation (Cai, 2002).

For the induced image agents, the empirical data shows that television, newspaper and televised news, acknowledged by respondents, is the most common source of information; in other words, media in general have a major influence in forming the destination image among potential tourists (Gover et al. 2007). Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that the overt induced agents such as tourism promotion or
advertising has rather limited effects (Gover et al. 2007). His findings prove Garner’s (1993) assumption that induced image agents have a wide coverage but low credibility. However, Beerli and Martin (2004) finds from their data result that induced information sources have no significant influence in cognitive image building among first-time travelers.

Others scholars hold the view that the formation of destination image is influenced also by other factors. Therefore, the model (Figure 4) is developed to explain and test other possible different factors that form the destination image. Beerli and Martin (2004) test not only Garner’s (1993) image forming agents that show as primary and secondary information source in this model, but also the personal factors including motivations, experiences, age, social class, education level, gender and country of origin. This model is largely influenced by the destination image formation model proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999); therefore, the results of two models can be compared and analyzed.

Figure 4. Model of the Formation of Destination Image (Beerli and Martin, 2004: 660)
Baloglu & McCleary (1999) and Beerli & Martin (2004) model test the various factors that influence image formation with the same approaches of path analysis, but they use different destinations as the empirical data sources. Their findings supplement and verify each other even though the data collections of two researches are quite different. Baloglu & McCleary (1999) test hypotheses by measuring variables about four countries: Turkey, Italy, Egypt and Greece. Questionnaires were mailed to respondents, so that no clear evidences showed whether those respondents had been to four countries or not. By contrast, Beerli & Martin (2004) emphasized on the testing of post-visit image of one destination Lanzarote Island and data were collected in the Airport of Lanzarote Island, and hypothesis are raised to distinguish first-time travellers and repeated travellers.

Despite those differences in data collecting section, their findings on factors influencing destination image formation are same in some aspects. First, Beerli & Martin (2004) find out the motivation can largely influence affective component of perceived image for both first-time travellers and repeated traveller; and especially for first-time travellers, the resources of “sand and sun” become attractive and positively linked to affective images that are related to “relaxation”. In the same vein, Baloglu & McCleary (1999: 887) also confirm that motivation is “moderately support” affective image, but motivation about “relaxation and escape” can significantly support affective image. Second, the socio-demographic index age factors have no influence (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) or “statistically significant difference” (Beerli & Martin, 2004: 678) in either cognitive or affective components. Third, about information sources, it is found out that information amounts influence cognitive images (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Relating to the type of information, only “world of mouth” has significant influence in cognitive image, but other information sources shows no significant effect (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), which is in accordance with the findings of Beerli & Martin (2004) and Gover et al (2007) elaborated earlier.

Beerli & Martin (2004) explore two new factors that are not included in Baloglu & McCleary (1999) model. First, it is found out that level of experience has significant and different influence in different tourist groups. To be more specific, experience is greatly influential in building cognitive image among first travelers and in forming
affective image among repeated travelers. Second, the country of origin, as a socio-demographic indicator, has the greatest effect on the cognitive and affective images. Therefore, the authors point out when operating communication strategies and conveying the destination images, it is necessary to consider the culture factor and the tourists’ country of origin. (Beerli & Martin, 2004)

Based on the previous studies, San Martín & Del Bosque (2008) especially explore the influence of psychological motivations and culture on the destination images by combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The significant role of motivation on affective image’s building is verified. Especially, they further give an explanation that “individuals have more favorable affective image when the emotion evoked by the tourist destination coincide with their motivations to visit it (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008: 273). In addition, they find that culture distance has partial influence on the destination image before tourists’ visiting, which in particular that tourists have more confidence to visit the place having similar cultures (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). Their findings are in line with Beerli and Martin (2004)’s argument on motivations and culture factors on destination image.

2.2.3 Destination image and its functions

The great importance of destination image in tourism field is supported by numerous scholars (Baloglu & McCleary 1999, Jenkins 1999, Gallarza, et al. 2002). The very common reason is that decisions of traveling a specific destination are usually encountered with uncertainty, risk and time-consuming information searching efforts for tourist, therefore the destination image perceived by tourists turns to be the extraordinarily decisive element when they are selecting destinations (Cai, 2002).

Nevertheless, functions of destination images are further explored and examined by theoretical research and empirical evidence. Chi and Qu (2008) examine the interactions among destination image, attribute satisfaction, overall satisfaction and destination loyalty. It is believed that destination loyalty can be disclosed by tourists’ intention of revisiting the destination as well as the willingness of recommending it (Oppermann 2000, Chi & Qu 2008). Attribute satisfaction aggregates tourists’ satisfactions level towards each domain of tourism activity, such as accommodations,
catering, shopping, tourist attractions, activities and events, environments and accessibility (Chi & Qu, 2008).

It is found out that destination image preliminarily affects attribute satisfaction. Together with attribute satisfaction, destination image poses the positive influence on overall satisfaction directly, which lead to an impact on destination loyalty. In other words, destination image shapes and affects tourists’ satisfaction and favorable destination images hold by tourists can result in their behaviors of revisit the destinations or recommend to others with higher possibility. (Chi & Qu, 2008)

The research results from Chi & Qu (2008) has both some overlaps and conflicts with the earlier studies by Chen and Tsai (2007). They argue that the better destination image cannot necessarily lead to the overall satisfaction, which is opposite from Chi & Qu (2008) argument. Nevertheless, both researches verify the consequential role of destination image in affecting the attribute satisfaction and behavioral intention such as recommendations or re-visititation. In addition, the views on the influence of overall satisfaction to behavioral intention has also coincided.

In short, the past studies highlight the important role of destination image on selecting destinations before tourists’ visiting (Cai, 2002). More importantly, the impact of destination image continues. It should not be neglected the fundamental role of destination image on after visiting behaviors, especially in willingness to recommend and repeated sightseeing (Chen & Tsai 2007, Chi & Qu, 2008).

2.3 Destination competitiveness

2.3.1 Concepts of destination competitiveness

Understanding and exploring those unique competitiveness and advantages in one destination is beneficial to the branding and marketing of that place. The effective branding and marketing on a destination necessitates not only the accurate analysis on its own superiority and shortcomings, but also the awareness of chances and challenges that a destination may encounter (Kotler and Gertner, 2002).
The current tourism market is featured as diverse and heterogeneous tourists’ demands (Hassan, 2000). Tourists have very different tastes and preferences on what can be seen and enjoyed in the destinations. In order to develop the tourism industry, despite of countries, the ability to preserve “the competitive advantages in its delivery of goods and services to visitors” (Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao, 2000:9) is fundamental.

However, maintaining the competitive positions of one destination seems to be laborious. Crouch (2011) attribute the dilemma to a series of intricacies raised many participants. He contends that the tourism product is not a standard commodity produced and delivered by one company; instead it is an experience of a tourist, resulting from numerous different Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) that represent different interests, such as focusing on profits, environmental or social targets. Under such circumstance, it is very demanding to control the quality of tourism products with same standard. In addition, each tourist also has individual experience that different from others. All those intricacies pose challenges to the management of destination competitiveness. (Crouch, 2011)

The definitions of competitiveness are given by scholars from different perspective. Competitiveness is defined by Hassan (2000: 240) as the “destination’s ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources”, at the same time keep the “market position relative competitor”. From his perspective, the cores of the tourism competitiveness are on the continuous resources it possesses that focus on the destination itself and performance compared to other players. Slight different from Hassan (2000) viewpoints, other researchers linked competitiveness with benefits on all stakeholders, defining that destination competitiveness should include “the sustainability of local resources for ensuring the maintenance for long term success” and “the achievement of equitable returns-on resources utilized to satisfy all stakeholders” (Buhalis, 2000: 106).

Except for competitor and all stakeholders, Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao (2000) shift their attention to price factors that affect the competitiveness of a destination, arguing that traveling cost, especially the cost generated from fluctuating exchange rate, to a specific destination can largely affect its percentage of visitors on outbound tourism
in total. Most tourists have not been to places before they pay for tourism products (Buhalis, 2000), so that pricing is crucial in early stage. However, Dwyer et al. (2000) also agree that destination competitiveness is decided also by non-price factors. Therefore, competitiveness is regarded as “a general concept that encompasses price differentials coupled with exchange rate movement, productivity levels of various components of the tourist industry and qualitative factors affecting the attractiveness or otherwise of a destination” (Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao. 2000: 9). Qualitative factors generally include destination images and attractiveness, propagation of destination, performances of tourism-related organizations (Dwyer et al. 2000). Buhalis (2000) suggests one approach for destination to keep the competitiveness and to be able to charge high price from tourists, that is by offering the remarkable and extraordinary experience to travelers, but he also points out that it becomes progressively more complicated and challenging to satisfy and to excite tourists since a fast growing number of tourists have visited many different destinations in the past.

2.3.2 Frameworks of destination competitiveness

The earliest conceptual model of destination competitiveness was developed by Crouch and Richie (1999), and they regard the competitiveness of one destination as the capability of the place to make contribution to local inhabitants’ life standard improvement. Enlightened by Porter’s (1990) competition model targeting to firm level, Crouch & Ritchie (1999) propose four main determinants and apply them to tourism industry, which include: core resources & attractors, supporting factors & resources, destination management and qualifying & amplifying determinant. The model assumes that the competitiveness of a destination is affected by both competitive (micro) environment and global (macro) environment, and the environments are in the varying condition (Crouch & Richie 1999, Cracolici, Nijkamp and Rietveld 2008). In addition, it is proposed that destination competitiveness significantly relies on resources that a destination possess and the competence to allocate and manage resources (Crouch & Richie 1999, Crouch 2011).

Later Dwyer and Kim (2003) develop an integrated model that includes main elements of destination competitiveness on the basis of various previous literatures.
Dwyer and Kim (2003) admit that many variables and categories are identified by Crouch and Ritchie (1995, 1999); however, some crucial aspects are different from previous scholars’ work. Dwyer and Kim (2003) classify six factors in terms of destination competitiveness: resources, destination management, situational conditions, demand, destination competitiveness and socio-economic prosperity. Different from Crouch & Ritchie (1999), the model emphasizes to elaborate the connections and casual links between the factors that are recognized by Dwyer & Kim (2003). Their model illustrates that resources and destination management can have an effect with tourism demand and situational conditions, which determines and shapes destination competitiveness and socio-economic prosperity (Crouch, 2011). In other words, the destination competitiveness is not a mere result of policy making from destination management but also an inevitable step to reach economic success. (Dwyer and Kim, 2003: 377). This argument however is in accordance with the thoughts of Buhalis (2000) who connects destination competitiveness with all stakeholders’ gains.

Compared with Crouch & Richie (1999) model and Dwyer & Kim (2003) model, it can be found both models recognize resource and destination management as salient factors that constitute their models. The resources for tourism competitiveness are undeniable. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) classify resources in two types: core resources and attractors, and supporting factors and resources, and they highlight that the accessibility of destinations belongs to supporting factors.

Nevertheless, resources in Dwyer and Kim (2003) model are classified in a more detailed way, and it is clearly presented in Figure 5. Endowed resources and created resources are the core resources, and supporting resources have an assisting role in reinforcing the competitiveness on destinations. Moreover, endowed resources can be grouped as natural and heritage/culture resources. (Dwyer and Kim, 2003)

The category of Resource, especially Core Resource, can be regarded as one of the most key element in the destination competitiveness. Many scholars emphasize resources in their definitions of destination competitiveness (Hassan 2000, Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao 2000, Buhalis 2000) and both models from Crouch & Richie (1999)
and Dwyer & Kim (2003) stress the importance of resources. Resource is also the most relevant element to the destination branding of Finland case.

Figure 5. Destination competitiveness: resources as key determinants

It is argued that the core resources and attractions are the “primary motivation for destination appeal” (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999:146, Dwyer & Kim, 2003: 380). From the above elaboration, the core resources of Finland as a tourism destination can be identified. Finland is renowned as “a country of thousands of lake and island” in a worldwide scale (Wikipedia Finland Geography 2016, Visit Finland 2016a), especially in Chinese tourism forums. According to Statistic Finland (2016), Finland has about 168,000 lakes with an area of 500 square meter or more, of which about 57000 with an area of over one hectare. Besides, Statistic Finland (2016) also shows that Finland has about 187,000 islands, which has an area of 100 square meter or more. From the data, it clearly exhibits that one of the core resource that Finland as a destination possess should be its natural resource, that is, lake and island. In addition to the most featured nature resources (lakes and islands) in Finland, the climate such
as midnight sun and northern light, the heritage resources such as Santa Village, Suomenlinna cannot be ignored. Whether those core resources play the important roles, as they should be, can be tested later.

Next, the Destination Management undertaken by public sectors (government side) and private sectors (industry side) includes activities from those organization, destination marketing, planning and development. (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000, Dwyer and Kim, 2005). It is argued that destination management can not only improve the attractiveness of core resources, but also improve the quality and effectiveness of supporting factors influenced by situational conditions (Crouch & Ritchie 1999, Dwyer and Kim, 2005).

Many researchers also study and evaluate the relative importance of factors identified by Crouch and Richie (1999) model or Dwyer and Kim (2003) model. Crouch and Richie (1991) model develops 36 sub-factors under each category. Dwyer and Kim (2003) model, however, also identifies a large variety of indicators under each main competitive factor. Despite of such circumstance, there are some common findings, especially in the importance of resources. The empirical research shows that core resources and attractors are ranked as the most important destination competitiveness attributes by the results of analytic hierarchy process (AHP), according to Crouch (2011). In the category of sub-factors, physiography and climate, which are seemed as naturally endowed advantages, are ranked as the top determinant, followed by culture and history, tourism superstructure and special event organizing, which is about how effectively resource can be used (Crouch, 2011). Moreover, Dwyer, Mellor, Livaic, Edwards and Kim (2004) analyze the data collected from stakeholders in tourism industry of Australian and Korean, and finds that nature-based and other resources plays the important role, and they suggest that it is very necessary to treat nature resources and culture resources as potentially different market by operating destination marketing strategies.

Even though both Crouch & Richie (1999) and Dwyer & Kim (2003) include destination management as a theoretically crucial component in their model of destination competitiveness, the empirical finding of its importance is not equivalent with what researchers think. By evaluating the factors in Crouch & Ritchie (1999)
model, destination management ranks forth out of all five main factors (Crouch 2011).

Some factors are proved to be very significant to the competitiveness of a destination, despite the fact that they are not major components in either Crouch & Richie (1999) model or Dwyer & Kim (2003) model. Crouch (2011) identify the importance of infrastructure and accessibility through the testing. It is worth mentioning that accessibility means the ease of having transportation enter into or around a destination (Crouch, 2011), which is regard as very important criterion in tourists’ mind. In addition, the awareness and images of destinations also constitute the destination competitiveness, based on the finding from Crouch (2011). If a gap exists between destination image and actual destination environment, it will be much less competitive for destinations’ further development (Mihalič, 2000).

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The previous literature review embraces those elements into together, and it mainly includes destination, destination management organizations, destination competitiveness, destination branding and destination image. Figure 6 exhibits the connection between those concepts. It shows that destination is the core concept and connects all the related concepts.

The previous scholars tend to do researches on the basis of the notion of destination, and several sub research fields have been divided. Destination branding, destination competitiveness and destination management organizations have been studied separately in existed researches. For example, Crouch (2011) finds that researches in destination competitiveness field mainly focus on one specific country, one particular aspect, such as price competitiveness studied by Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao (2000), or simply developing models on destination competitiveness.

Destination branding is also an important field. Under the studies of destination branding, many concepts have been constantly mentioned, such as brand positioning, brand reality, brand personality. Moreover, scholars tend to hold the view that destination image is closely connected with destination branding in previous
research. Destination image is the most fundamental part in destination branding (shown in Figure 6), and develop its own research field. Destination image has certain connection with destination competitiveness, since destination image is relevant to images’ delivery to receivers about the features of one destination. Despite of it, there is an obvious link between destination management organization and destination branding, since the conduct of destination branding relies on destination management organizations.

Thus, as Figure 6 shows, this report is processed under these concepts. The empirical findings follow the sequence of destination, destination branding, destination image, and later destination competitiveness, at last the destination management organization. Since this research is abductive by nature, the theoretical understanding among different notions will be verified or changed in order to better explain the phenomenon on branding Finland to Chinese tourists.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data collection and research design

In this report, a qualitative approach was applied, by which in total of 12 in-depth interviews were generated. The first group of interviews are conducted with 10 actual Chinese tourists as respondents, and the second group of interviews are taken with 2 practitioners who work in Finnish tourism Bureau in China. The primary reason to choose the in-depth interview is “to discover the shared understandings of a particular group” (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree 2006:317). This research is originally aimed to brand Finland to Chinese tourists, so that some common findings are expected to generate to such a specific target group through in-depth interviewing. The second reason to choose the in-depth interview is its nature of flexibility in the process of asking questions (Wilson, 2010: 139). It is postulated that interviews as a data collection method permit researchers and scholars to “explore particular themes” which are caused by interviewees’ answer (Wilson, 2010: 139). In this sense, some new understandings on the topic can be obtained with means of those open-ended questions to respondents in this paper.

The first group of interviews were carried out in August 2016. The interviewees were collected in Helsinki, Kauppatori. With the researcher’s observation, this location aggregates many Chinese tourists, since it is near to port where tourists leave Finland and head to other countries. In addition, Kauppatori is arranged to tourists by travel agencies to have flexible time to buy some local food or souvenirs, which enable the interviewer to get in touch with these specific tourists’ groups and ask the permission to do the interview for the research. Except the tourists who follow the fixed itinerary planned by travel agencies, there are also some other types of tourists in the location, such as free individual visitors. Those individual travelers are mainly initially for friend or family visiting or business trip. However, during their stay, they arrange the visiting activities by them own and have more flexible schedule than package tourists. Therefore, in this location, the interviewer can have chance to come into contact with various kinds of Chinese tourists who visit Finland.
The process of gathering primary data is as follows. The researcher searches for the interviewees in locations mentioned above and targets potential interviewees by chatting to know their basic information, introducing the research target and asking for the contact information from interviewees. Later the researcher and interviewees agree on the time and using computer-assisted telephone interviewing method, which is also applied by Konecnik and Gartner (2007). Such chatting with potential interviewees and further in-depth interviewing through telephone is aimed to build rapport that means trust and respect for interviewees and information they convey (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Telephone interview is one out of three main interview types, and the other two types include face-to face interviews and focus group (Wilson, 2010: 137–145). Interviewing through telephone allows interviewees and the researcher to agree on the time in advance and to have a more private and open conversation without being disturbed, in this sense the rapport proposed by (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006) is more easy to establish. Individuals older than 18 years old are invited to have the interviews. The interviews last between 15:28 minutes to 64:52 minutes. The interviewees who participate in the research are (1) retired couple, (2) colleague students from other European countries, (3) colleague students from China, (4) people who work in companies, (5) university teacher. The interviewees are designated as No.001 to 010 for maintaining anonymity.

Table 1. Conducted interviews and interviewees’ profile. (the first group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee No.</th>
<th>Type of tourists</th>
<th>The length of whole trip</th>
<th>The duration of staying in Finland</th>
<th>The length of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>Package tourists (Arranged by travel agency)</td>
<td>10 days</td>
<td>1.5 days</td>
<td>43:01 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourist Type</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Days</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Package tourists</td>
<td>12 days</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>53:59 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Arranged by travel agency)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>Leisure tourists</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>39:10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Visiting friends)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>Package tourists</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>22:50 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Arranged by travel agency)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>Package tourists</td>
<td>12 days</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>1h 04 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Arranged by travel agency)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Leisure tourists</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>25 days</td>
<td>48:39 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Visiting friends)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Business tourists</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>15:20 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Helsinki, Joensuu)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>Business tourists</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>21:26 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Helsinki, Tampere)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee No.</td>
<td>Types of interviewees</td>
<td>Length of interviews</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>Business tourists (Helsinki, Tampere)</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>28:23 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>Package tourists (Arranged by travel agency)</td>
<td>13 days</td>
<td>1.5 days</td>
<td>15:28 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Except those interview data gathered through actual tourists, the other group of interviews are collected from practitioners who are responsible with marketing Finland as destination and currently work in Finnish Tourism Bureau in China, shown as Table 2. The interviews have been conducted in February and March, 2017 separately. In this sense, those interview data from the perspectives of tourists and of practitioners in tourism industry can offer comprehensive insights on the research.

**Table 2. Conducted interviews and interviewee’ profile. (the second group)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee No.</th>
<th>Types of interviewees</th>
<th>Length of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>011</td>
<td>Marketing representative</td>
<td>21:04 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>012</td>
<td>Marketing staff</td>
<td>25:05 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this research, the qualitative method via open-ended semi-structured interviews is chosen. It is the most commonly applied in qualitative research either in group interviewing or individual interviewing process (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Semi-structured interviews are similar with the structured interviews in the aspect of preparing pre-determined questions, however, it gives the interviewees more space
and flexibility to answer the questions with their own thoughts, rather than restrict interviewees with certain response categories (Qu and Dumay, 2011), therefore it can provide abundant and in-depth data (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006) to uncover the phenomenon.

Despite the interview as the primary data in this research, some secondary data are also used in this research. According to Wilson (2010:134, 170), secondary data refers to the data that has been publicly released or gathered by other scholars. It can be sorted into electronic formats and written formats, and it can be further classified as commercial purpose electronic formats, commercial purpose written formats, academic purpose electronic formats and academic purpose written format (Wilson, 2010:174-177). In this paper, the electronic format secondary data for commercial purpose are used, which are gathered from official websites from relevant companies or institutions. Wilson (2010:177-178) points out the benefits of secondary data, and he contends that it is achievable and cost effective especially to student researchers. Most importantly, the secondary data enable the researcher to compare his or her primary finding with those collected secondary data (Wilson 2010:177), which is the crucial reason to apply some of secondary data in this research.

### 3.2 Data analysis method

It is argued that recording the interviews is essential and note-taking is a supplement approach to support the voice recording (Wilson, 2010: 139). In this research, all the interviews were conducted in Chinese, and they were voice recorded with the assistance of computer. In addition, the note was taken at the same time during the interview process.

Wilson (2010: 255–269) propose four steps to analyze qualitative data. First of all, it is pointed out the data should be transcribed. In this research, all the interviews have been typed down and carefully translated into English, since the original interviews were conducted in Chinese. It is the mother tongue of interviewees and the researcher, and by communicating in this language, interviewees can express their opinions and convey messages more accurately.
The next step is to read through the data, start coding and create categories, themes and patterns (Wilson, 2010: 255, 258). Coding refers to marking respondents’ answers with certain signs and classifying those answers into several categories (Cooper and Schindler, 2008: 416). Generally speaking, the coding process can be either inductive, deductive or abductive (Kovács & Spens 2005). Inductive coding, which is also named as emergent coding, is the method that categories will be generated after examining the data (Wilson, 2010: 258); by contrast, deductive research is aimed to examine the existed theory by testifying the correctness of assumptions with empirical data (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), in which categories have been confirmed before the analysis starts (Wilson, 2010: 258).

For the abductive approach, it is a hybrid between inductive and deductive method, which is aimed to develop the theory or explore new variables (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In this research, the abductive approach is applied to, because it is aimed to result in “new insight about existing phenomena by examining these from a new perspective (Kovács & Spens, 2005: 138). In addition, it is also argued that the abductive research can develop and extend theories with the pre-understanding on theoretical knowledge (Kovács & Spens, 2005). In this research, the literature review exhibits the essential influence of destination images in destination branding, and the role of destination management organization to the branding for tourism purpose. By comprehending the prior academic achievement, this research further enriches the knowledge and enhances theories in the field of destination branding.

The third step is to interpret main findings, and the most important part is to elaborate the relationship and link among categories that are generated from interview scripts (Wilson, 2010: 262). The research is aimed to gain information from the abundance of collected data (Cooper and Schindler, 2008: 93). In this report, the raw data are analyzed and explained after being coded.

The final step is to produce the report. It is highlighted that the precise evaluation of managers’ or clients’ need should be always considered in the research process and the final report (Cooper and Schindler, 2008: 94). In this research, to explore and enhance the branding of Finland is the fundamental objection, therefore the content of the research is around the target.
4 EMPIRICAL DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter exhibits the empirical finding of the research, which is consistent with the theoretical framework established in the early chapter. The data is gathered through multiple sources, including the opinions of actual visitors from China, the viewpoints of tourism promoters working in Finnish Tourism Bureau, and some secondary data as supplements. All of the collected data is valuable, since it first contributes to the understanding of current destination branding approaches and later offers an alternative insight on how to brand Finland more effectively that is based on the tourists’ perspectives.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, the empirical finding about destination is elaborated. Destination is a very broad concept that can refer to countries, regions or cities (Caldwell and Freire, 2004). In this part, the destinations where the Chinese tourists usually choose to visit is shown. Second, the destination branding of Finland for tourism purpose is discussed. The official channels on how tourism promoters popularize Finland to Chinese tourists is elaborated with the help of practitioners’ interview data and some secondary data. Followed by destination branding, the destination images from tourists’ perspective is discussed. It is carefully described how Chinese tourists establish their destination images on Finland, what images of Finland they possess, and how destination images affect their behavioral intention. Later, destination competitiveness is reflected by analyzing core resources and attractors, examining competitiveness of Finland with its neighboring countries and re-considering the competitiveness of Finland. At last, the destination management organization are discussed.

4.1 Destination

The analysis starts with destinations. Destinations can be countries, regions or cities, as no consensus is achieved in the academic field of destination branding (Caldwell and Freire, 2004). Nevertheless, several common characteristics about destinations can be found out through the interviewees’ travel experience. In general, for the tourists who buy the travel agencies’ tourism products and follow the fixed schedule (namely package tourists), their trip to Finland is always tied with other three Nordic
countries (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Sweden), and sometimes includes an additional country, such as Russia or Germany. Such phenomenon is shown in all interviewed package tourists’ trip schedules.

In addition, the trip usually lasts from 10 to 13 days for the package tourists who fly from a city in China and fly back later. One exception is that an interviewee visits four Nordic countries with 6 days’ schedule organized by a German travel agency, because she participates in the package trip from Germany and return to Germany after the trip, and continue her study in Germany. In this sense, her trip excludes the long flight time between China to Nordic countries and additional destinations such as Germany or Russia is not in her schedule. Despite the differences in length of whole trip, there is one shared feature that all the package tourists’ interviewees visit Helsinki only, and stay for 1 day in Finland during the whole trip.

“At the night of second day, we flied to Finland from Denmark, and we slept in the hotel in Helsinki. The third day we hung around Helsinki and went to Sweden later on the same day.” (Interview 001)

“About Finland, we only stayed there for one day. The cruise arrived Helsinki from Stockholm in the early morning, and we were back in the later afternoon.” (Interview 004)

By contrast, other types of tourists have stayed in Finland clearly longer than package tourists. In this paper, we abbreviate them as leisure tourists and business tourists respectively. Leisure tourists refers to those who are initially aimed to visit friends or family in Finland, and business tourists means those who visit the destination because of business affairs.

It is found out that business tourists usually spend most of their time in one particular Finnish city where their corporations or their business partners locate. In most of their daytime, they carry on business or have meetings. However, some activities or sightseeing are offered to business tourists during their stay in that specific Finnish city. These activities or sightseeing are either arranged by local Finnish colleagues or launched by themselves. In addition, business tourists usually allocate one day to Helsinki to go sightseeing and do shopping. Therefore, compared with package
tourists, business tourists show their understanding not only in Helsinki, but also in the city they have stayed.

For leisure tourists, it shows that they have more chance to travel in different cities in Finland. Different from business tourists, who are busy with work stuffs in the daytime, leisure tourists usually have more spare time on visiting destinations. It shows that the destinations inside Finland that leisure tourists have visited mainly concentrate on cities such as Helsinki, Tampere, Porvoo, Turku, Rovaniemi.

According to Buhalis (2000) about the classification of destination, the destination in Finland that Chinese tourists usually visit are urban destinations. Helsinki is the inevitable destination that all types of tourists (e.g. package tourists, leisure tourists, business tourists) choose to visit. Besides the capital city, Tampere, Turku, Turku, Rovaniemi and Joensuu are usually visited by business tourists or leisure tourists.

### 4.2 Destination branding

This paper is aimed to explore the effective destination branding of Finland, and the overall research is conducted largely by the data from actual Chinese visitors. Before analyzing the actual effect of destination branding of Finland from the tourists’ perspective, it is important to discuss how the destination branding of Finland is processed to potential tourists in China and what efforts tourism branding institutions have made.

The unique insights are offer by practitioners in Finnish Tourism Bureau to answer these questions. Interviewees 011 and 012 are the professionals who are responsible for branding Finland in Chinese market. Finnish tourism bureau is the leading institution to brand Finland as a destination to international tourist. It is named as Visit Finland, which is dominantly funded by Finnish government (Visit Finland, 2016c).

In this session, the strategies of Finnish Tourism Bureau on how to brand Finland toward Chinese tourists will be elaborated based on their interview data. Later, the achievements of branding the destination are also shown. At last, the challenges of
branding Finland are pointed out. By exhibiting those findings, the current situation of branding Finland to Chinese from the practitioner’s perspective can be revealed.

4.2.1 Channels of Destination branding to Chinese tourists

Finnish Tourism Bureau has launched the operation of destination branding toward Chinese tourists for over a decade, according to the respondent 011 and 012. It can be traced back to the time when branch offices for tourism purpose are set in China. These branches are located in Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong and they deal with branding affairs to local and nearby regions.

The channels of destination branding from Finnish Tourism Bureau can be divided into B2B and B2C (Interview 012). In other words, branches of Finnish Tourism Bureau in China endeavor to brand and market Finland as a destination to tourism-related companies and to consumers separately. To be more specific, in B2B area, Finnish tourism bureau in China contributes to do trade marketing and maintains media relationships. The respondent gives the detailed elaboration on it, shown as follows.

“Trader marketing is targeted to those tourism operators and travel agencies. It is the main channel we conduct branding and marketing Finland as a destination. We organize many seminars, workshops and invite them to take part in our activities. We build network and develop relationship with them, and we do the “sales call”. In daily work, we need to keep contact with them and react immediately as long as they have any doubts, such as how to apply Finnish visa.” (Interview 011)

The respondent 012 contends that Finnish Tourism Bureau in China operates trade marketing toward many kinds of travel agencies in China, including direct sales ones, custom line, and online travel agencies. Especially online travel agencies are found to be a very popular and booming business in recent years (Interview 012). Despite of the consulting service offered to travel agencies in China, the Finnish Tourism Bureau actively act the role as “middle-man” to connect Finnish partners with Chinese travel agencies in order to promote the business and cooperation. The respondent 011 claim that as the practitioners in destination branding institution, they have to catch the trend of market need in China and invite the suitable Finnish
partners to attend the marketing activities. By coordinating and building the bridge between Chinese travel agencies and Finnish partners, those suitable tourism products that caters to local tourists are expected to designed and invented.

The other B2B channel that Finnish Tourism Bureau concentrates on is media and public relation. It is regard as a very basic and fundamental part in their job, according to the interviewee 011. By interacting with media, Finnish Tourism Bureau expects to influence the consumption of potential Chinese tourists (Interviewee 012). These can be key opinion leaders, bloggers and other media channels. Practitioners give the full description, shown as below.

“We build the media relation with traditional media, online media and social media. We do the public relation with them. We need to release news, organize media activities on a regular basis, as well as organize media inspection groups and media visits. By implementing those projects, they can familiarize the destination and make news coverage on the destination.” (Interview 011)

It is worthwhile to mention that Finland Tourism Bureau in China and their partners make great efforts to popularize Finland as a destination by releasing two TV programs, named Chef Nic (Chinese name: 十二道锋味) and We Are in Love (Chinese name: 我们相爱吧). It is believed that the traditional media can increase the exposure rate on Finland and have a wide coverage to audience and potential tourists, argued by the respondent 011.

Take the TV program named chef Nic as an example. Launched in 2016, it highlights the celebrities’ travel experience of husky sledding, Northern light chasing and snowmobile safari during their stay in Finland. These three scenes are used as a preface of the episode in order to attract audience interest to continue watching. Later, the geographic location of Finland is introduced. In this process, recognition and differentiation of the destination (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005) is completed. In the whole episode, the activities of ice-fishing, cooking smoked salmon, taking sauna with locals and ice swimming are exhibited. In this sense, the image of Finland is built. Kotler and Gertner (2002) contend that culture, geographic features, and some other elements collectively comprise the country image. From the TV program, it shows local culture by habitants’ lifestyle, such as sauna and salmon cooking, and it
also shows geographic features, such as heavy snow, low temperature and Northern light.

The third channel of destination branding is directly toward consumers. The approaches include launching campaigns and making advertisements which are targeted to consumers (Interview 011).

Take the campaign named “Extreme Northern Night, Extreme Experience for 100 days” as an example, it was co-launched by National Finnish tourism Bureau and Finnair (Visit Finland, 2015). This campaign started from December 5, 2015 to March 3, 2016 (Gzhphb, 2015) in order to let participants experience the unique winter and activities in Finland. These winter-themed activities included skiing, Northern light photography, Husky sledding Tour and so forth. This campaign was regarded as the largest marketing activity in the Finnish tourism marketing history. In total of 4000 applicants applied for this program, and only 5 applicants from different countries were selected by organizers. The campaign mainly focused on Asia tourists from China, Korea, and Japan; and two European countries including Germany and Britain. (Visit Finland, 2015)

This campaign is a very typical destination branding operation, although it is not exclusively target Chinese tourists. It is aimed to attract those potential tourists’ attention by disseminating information of travelling Finland in winter. It perceives and distinguishes Finland as a winter destination by displaying the logo “Extreme Northern night, Extreme Experience for 100 days”. From the logo, the potential tourists can know what can be expected from the trip in Finland, and the most obvious element is northern light. When the curiosity and interest in this campaign turns into the action, the emotional response (Blain et al. 2005) is raised. Some potential tourists apply for the program and hope to get selected by the campaign, and the other may consider Finland as a destination for their next trip.

Except campaigns, operating Wechat public account is the another destination branding tool that is commonly used by Finnish tourism promoters (Visit Finland, 2016b). Wechat is a popular Chinese social media app that has 700 million monthly active users (Walkthechat, 2016). The top three functions of Wechat for registers are
browsing the posts shared by friends, sharing own daily moments, reading contents and articles through the Wechat public accounts (Walkthechat, 2016). About 86.2% of Wechat users’ ages are between 18-35 and 9.5% of Wechat users’ age are between 26.50 (Weijingtong, 2016). Due to the favorable users’ coverage in Wechat, many companies, organizations and institutions use Wechat as a tool to conduct marketing and advertising themselves or relevant products by operating their Wechat public accounts.

Not only Finnish Tourism Bureau using Wechat platform to conduct branding activities, but also other tourism-related organizations have their Wechat accounts. It includes Finnair, Visit Porvoo, Visit Lapland and some private tourism institutions that are located in Finland. Take the official Wechat account operated by Finnish Tourism bureau as an example, it is registered as VF China (Wechat ID). It releases one or two articles on a weekly basis. The previous articles contain the introductions of Helsinki attraction places, Finnish brand, shopping tips, Sauna, lake areas, national park, northern light and some other useful travel information. In this sense, the approach of branding Finland through Wechat public accounts reflects what Blain, Levy & Ritchie (2005) proposes, that is sending brand message consistently in order to raise tourists’ emotional response and expectation to the destination, and finally establish the destination image in the mind of potential tourists.

Similar with operating Wechat account, another popular tool for Finland Tourism Bureau is using Sina Weibo accounts (Visit Finland, 2016b). It has 200,000 followers and a total of 3742 posts has been released (Weibo.com/our Finland). Generally speaking, Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging websites and the posts are usually within 140-character limit (Wikipedia). It is estimated that the advantageous user profile is the one of the primary reasons to conduct destination branding on Sina Weibo. According to 2015 Sina Weibo Users’ Development Report released by Sina Weibo data center (2015a), 222 million users are monthly active users and 100 million users are daily active users. Similar with Wechat, Sina Weibo are also featured by young people. 79% of Sina Weibo users are aged from 17-33, 11% of users aged from 34-45, and the rest of proportion are either under 16 or over 46 years old (Sina Weibo data center, 2015a).
Finland Tourism Bureau activates in the platform of Weibo by releasing tourism related information and images, launching the topic, or interacting with other users who has travelled Finland. Sina Weibo shows the active interaction among individual users and marketing institution accounts. Related to tourism, it is found out Weibo users tend to participate in Weibo tourism topics, to search for tourism information and when they have actual visit, they conduct location sharing behavior. (Sina Weibo data Center, 2015b). Different from Wechat that is restricted in a relatively narrow social network, in which users can only share posts with their friends, Sina Weibo enables users to contact and interact with unfamiliar users. In this sense, the spreading of tourism information is effective among unknown Weibo users especially by those interaction behaviors.

Despite of the popular use in Wechat and Sina Weibo to directly affect potential Chinese tourists, interviewees 011 and 012 highlight that these two platforms are also applied to media and public relation channels. The respondent gives an explanation:

“…PR (Public relation) also includes some Wechat and Sina Weibo. A lot of social media, our KOL (key opinion leader) are blogger. Sometimes we need contact them in PR manner. Of course we hope that they can influence our consumers, so you can regard it (meaning Wechat and Sina Weibo) in both channels.” (Interview 011)

In short, this session exhibits the approaches of destination branding by Finnish Tourism Bureau in China. Trade marketing, media and public relations as well as the branding activities directly to tourists are the three main approaches. It is found that the action of Finnish Tourism Bureau somehow reflects the Hankinson (2004) model. The scholar proposes the place branding from a relational perspective. In the model, primary service relationship, brand infrastructure relationship, media relationship and consumer relationship should be established in order to have an ideal place branding result (Hankinson, 2004). In this session, it is found out practitioners in Finnish Tourism Bureau endeavor to build relations with those relevant stakeholders. Those words such as “keep contact”, “cooperate with”, “organize”, “invite” are commonly mentioned by interviewees. It can be seen that Finnish Tourism Bureau makes long-term efforts to conduct branding Finland as a destination, not only toward potential local tourists but also toward local travel agencies and tour operators. Nevertheless, it
is also found out that the current approaches of branding Finland is emphasized in induced aspects, such as television programs, campaigns, operating Wechat and Sina Weibo public accounts. It can be explained that induced media have a major influence on the potential tourists because of its wide coverage (Gover et al, 2007). Whether the effect of the induced media is as satisfying as tour promoters wish, which can be evaluated in the later sessions of this report.

4.2.2 Strategies of Destination branding

To begin with, Finnish Tourism Bureau frames policies on the branding Finland as a destination to global tourists, which focus on four aspects, they are Helsinki area, Lapland, lake area, and islands (Interview 012). The practitioner in Finnish Tourism Bureau highlights that these four aspects are branded differently according to the markets.

“For European market, we are emphasized in branding lake areas and islands. For Asian tourist, we have branded more on Helsinki areas, Lapland and lake areas. For North America marker, it will be a different story.” (Interview 012)

Based on the mindset of different branding strategies to global tourists, Finnish Tourism Bureau have launched dissimilar programs. “FinRelax” and “Stopover Finland” are the representatives, introduced by the respondent 012. FinRelax program is targeted to European market and north America market, which includes some relaxing activities, such as Sauna, and living in wooden cottage in forests. By contrast, “Stopover Finland” is aimed to attract Asian tourists, especially who transit in Helsinki Vantaa Airport and have chance to stay in Finland for one to five days.

It is worth to mention that the practitioner in Finnish Tourism Bureau mentions that “the program such as FinRelax is not to suitable to Asian market”, commented by interview 012. She further gives her explanation.

“We cannot say absolutely ‘not suitable’. Actually it is suitable to Japan market, but it is not suitable to Chinese market. It is decided by the habits of Chinese tourists. Currently, Chinese tourists belong to the type of sightseeing tourists. Chinese tourists who are willing to go foreign countries to have a relaxing journey are minority.” (Interview 012)
Consequently, Finnish Tourism Bureau stresses the importance of branding Helsinki and Lapland toward Chinese market. “Our Finnish partners that are from Lapland and Helsinki are the majority, and they are active. Therefore, the marketing is also toward these areas.” (Interview 011). From the perspective of practitioner, the destination competitiveness lies in Lapland, due to the tourism infrastructure, culture elements and winter activities.

“Our competitive advantage is Lapland. Some people question us why we market Lapland so much. One reason is Lapland indeed has competitive advantages, and they do a lot of work.

It shows mainly in tourism infrastructure, compared with Lapland regions in other Nordic countries. The hotel and shops are sufficient…In addition, we have Saint Clause, the theme. We have both cultural and natural things. For Chinese tourist, they may emphasize on seeing attractions. They can only have snow other activities in other Nordic countries in Winter...” (Interview 011)

Another strategy shows in Finnish Tourism Bureau’s branding operation is that they pay attention to the cooperation with other institutions. As commented by the practitioner in Finnish Tourism Bureau, the interviewee 011 contends that their partners can be divided into several groups. The first group of main partners is the regional tourism bureau, such as Visit Rovaniemi, Visit Helsinki, Visit Espoo, Visit Turku etc. Second, almost all the renowned hotel brands in Finland have the cooperation relationship with Finnish Tourism Bureau. The last group is local travel agencies and tourism related companies in Finland. These Finnish partners actively participate in activities organized by Finnish Tourism Bureau, and the institution invites those most relevant partners according to the theme of those activities. (Interview 011)

Finnish Tourism Bureau not solely focus popularizing their own destination, but seek to cooperate with those tourism bureaus of Nordic countries also, including Sweden Tourism Bureau, Denmark Tourism Bureau and Norway Tourism Bureau (Interview 012). For example, the online tourism branding campaign named “Nordic surprises” are co-launched by four Nordic countries’ tourism bureaus. This campaign is disseminated in all the Wechat public accounts of those countries.
“We cooperate and have destination branding together, to build the destination image of Nordic countries. We think it is beneficial to all of us.” (Interview 012)

To conclude, the strategy of Finnish Tourism Bureau to popularize the destination is to conduct branding Finland according to the different market division. For Chinese market, Lapland and Helsinki areas are the key branding contents, since Chinese tourists prefer to go sightseeing in main tourist attractions. The other strategy of Finnish Tourism Bureau applies to is the cooperation with destination management organizations. Actually, the cooperation with them is highly emphasized. Finnish Tourism Bureau not only pay attention to the cooperation with the Finnish tourism related firms and connect them to Chinese partners, but also seek to the collaboration with other Nordic countries’ tourism bureau in order to build the destination brand of Nordic Tourism jointly.

4.2.3 Achievements and challenges of branding Finland

Finnish Tourism Bureau applies Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to evaluate the effect of their destination branding of Finland. In total of 184,603 Chinese citizens have visited Finland in 2016, and 271,175 nights spent in hotels in Finland. Respondents 011 and 012 especially highlight the growth rate of numbers of Chinese visitors and overnights spent, increasing 32.9% and 28.8% respectively, compared to last year. (Statistics Finland/ Accommodation statistics via Visit Finland, 2016d).

Despite the positive growth rate on the the numbers of Chinese visitors and overnight spent, it can be found that the share of Chinese visitor’s in all foreign visitors accounts for 4.7% only and the duration stay in average is 1.5 day (Statistics Finland/ Accommodation statistics via Visit Finland, 2016d). Therefore, the potential of branding Finland as a destination and attracting more Chinese tourists can be further explored.

Practitioners admit that challenges are met in the process of branding and marketing Finland as a destination. First of all, the destination image of Finland in Chinese citizens mind is relatively weak, so it brings the difficulty to branding Finland toward the targeted population. From the view of tourism promoters, the vague destination
image is resulted from the similarly unclear country image of Finland. In order to better clarify this argument, the respondent makes the comparison between Finland and Sweden to exhibit the influence of powerful country image toward the destination image.

“It is the problem of country image. Just compare Finland and Sweden, Sweden has a very famous brand named IKEA. It is so popular in China that you can see the obvious IKEA logo everywhere. In IKEA shops, it fulfills the Swedish elements. Sweden also have very strong brands in fashion and other aspects. By contrast, the country image of Finland is weak in China, which leads to the weak destination image of Finland to Chinese tourists.” (Interview 011)

In addition, the considerable travel expense is considered as the one of the key challenges. Finland is a quite expensive place to go travel. Therefore, from the view of practitioner 012, Chinese tourists who can afford to travel Finland are a relatively small number of people, which pose the obstacle to branding Finland and attracting tourists to have an action.

Moreover, the equivalence between the features of Finland and preferences of Chinese tourists to destination is lacking. The interviewee contends that Chinese tourists like to visit a lot of locally renowned tourist attractions, while Finland is not such a country. Under such circumstances, tourists may complain that there are not enough places to visit. (Interviewee, 012)

Last but not least, from both practitioner’ views, summer season in Finland is regarded as not competitive as winter season for Chinese tourists. One argument is that too many destinations can be chosen in summer, such as North America, Western European countries and so forth, so Finland is not put into the priority by Chinese tourists (Interview 012). The other argument is that even within the framework of Nordic countries, the competitive advantage of Finland in summer is not obvious either, “Norway is much more competitive in summer” (Interview 011). Nevertheless, both interviewees speak highly of the winter tourism development of Finland and the branding achievements, due to the northern light photography, snow activities and some unique accommodation experiences.
4.3 Destination image

4.3.1 Image forming agents

Despite of the frequent use of the word “branding” in tourism destination branding literatures, the distinction between establishing a destination image and the branding of that destination is lacking in current researches (Cai, 2002). Even though Cai’s (2002) comment is reasonable to some extent, the empirical finding on how respondents have knowledge on Finland as a destination should be analyzed in this section. Several reasons can support this argument. First, the channels of knowing Finland is various. According to the interviewees, it can not only be from the official media tools such as Wechat as mentioned earlier, but also from the internet, chatting with friends and so forth. In this sense, the diverse channels from actual tourists’ responses reflect Gartner’s (2003) framework. Second, the term destination branding more focuses on marketing activities launched by tourism promoters, according to the definitions from Blain et al. (2005). Therefore, the channels on how actual tourists perceive Finland as a tourism destination is elaborated in this part.

The most commonly mentioned channel of Chinese tourists to know Finland as a destination is though Internet and some online travel forums. It should be highlighted that some respondents mention that they search for the related tourism information on destinations just before they start on a journey.

“I did not have a very complete understanding of Finland. Since I would start to travel, I surfed the net and started to know something about destinations. I knew about Suomenlinna, and I wanted to know what was inside and the history…I learned that the suitable duration for visiting Suomenlinna should be half day and it was built in order to defend Russia’s attack.” (Interview 002)

“From the Internet. For example, Must to Buy in Finland, or Places You Can Not Miss in Finland. I collected the information and made notes.” (Interview 003)

“Before I flew to Finland, I found some travel information websites to see more about Finland. Generally, there were not so many introductions about Finland. I noticed most of them introduce only Helsinki and Lapland. (Interview 007).
Those responses imply that tourists increase their passion and curiosity on destinations and want to familiarize themselves with destinations, especially when it comes near to the departure date. No matter those tourists are package tourists (interview 002), business tourists (interview 007), or leisure tourists (interview 003), they are interested in what they can visit or buy during their stay in destinations.

Next, chatting with friends to acquire destinations’ information seems to be another main channels for tourists. Six respondents identify that the knowledge on Finland are from conversation with friends. Some tourists rely solely on discussions with acquaintances on past traveling experience, which establish images of destinations in their mind.

“It mainly depends on chatting with friends. I myself did not collect too much information. They said that Nordic countries had very beautiful natural scenery. I came to travel with such expectation. (Interview 005)

“Finland? Is the Santa Village in Finland? I heard from my friends that they had visited Santa Village. Besides that, I did not know anything about Finland” (Interview 004)

Those interviewees’ answers show that “beautiful natural scenery”, “Santa Village” are the main images in their mind. The influence of friends’ travel experience sharing is fundamental. It can quickly build the destination image on potential tourists’ mind. In addition, it can even influence potential visitors’ choices on destination selection in some occasions.

“Before I chose this Nordic trip, I asked opinions from my friends who have travel there. Compared with Eastern European countries and Nordic countries, where I should visit in this summer? Two or three of them recommended me to visit Nordic countries, and only one friend advised me to visit Eastern European countries. Finally, I choose Nordic countries.” (Interview 002)

“After I was back to China, I told my friends that the Nordic trip was very nice. As a result, some friends who had not visited with me, came to travel there later.” (Interview 002)

Gartner (1993) terms such information shared by acquaintances as organic image agents. From the interviews 005 and 002 elaborated above, it clearly shows the
characteristic of solicited organic agents, since the respondent get information by asking opinions. The solicited organic image agent is one branch of organic image agents, referring to knowledge or experience conveyed to receivers on the basis of they are requested (Gartner, 1993). It is also assumed that organic images get rather high credibility compared to other forms of communication and media channels, and contribute to form the image for potential visitors (Gartner, 1993). From the interview 005 and the interview 004, it certifies that those organic channels have a great impact on forming destination images on visitors. These result is in accordance with the previous research finding from Gover et al. (2007) and Beerli & Martin (2004).

Tour books are frequently mentioned also. Three respondents admit that they read through tourist handbooks before they start their journey. However, it is pointed out that the tour information about Finland as a destination is rather limited and lacking.

“There isn’t even a book especially talking about travel in Finland. I see those books in my city, and I find that they usually introduce Finland with other Nordic countries. For example, the book is called travel in Nordic country.” (Interview 003)

In order to examine the effect of destination branding on Finland from official channels, the interviewer poses questions to respondents whether they read tourism promotion materials posted by Finnish Tourism bureau and other induced channels, after interviewees’ free elaboration. Most of them deny and claim that they never get in touch with those sources. Only one respondent gives an ambiguous answer that she may read articles from Wechat platform and TV program that introduce Finland, but she confirms that her image of Finland with beautiful scenery because of chatting with friends “at the entrance of Finnish embassy” (Interview 005).

The result of induced channels is partially inconsistent with what previous researches predict. It is argued that induced channels are the most common sources of information (Gover et al. 2007) and have a wide coverage (Gartner, 2003). The induced image agents refer to the marketing efforts made by tourism promoter, and can be classified as overt or covet attributes, depending on whether audience can realize tour promoters involved in image output (Gartner, 2003). The official
channels from Finnish Tourism Bureau, such as operating accounts in Wechat and Sina Weibo, and some TV programs about Chinese celebrities’ travel show in Finland belong to induced channels. In this study, it does not reflect the wide coverage on induced channel, especially in those actual visitors. However, the previous scholars assume that induced image agents have no impressive impact in forming cognitive image among first time travelers (Beerli and Martin, 2004), which is in line with this study to some extent.

Except those traditional image agents, two respondents mention that their channels of knowing Finland is from some Finnish brands, such as Nokia and Suunto. Nevertheless, they do not know other information about Finland from the perspective of tourism.

For the leisure tourists and business tourists, although their channels of establishing image on Finland have overlaps about the image agents mentioned above, they receive more information about Finland due to work reasons or personal reasons. For both leisure tourists and business tourists, they have conversation with acquaintances or colleagues who live in Finland before their trips. In addition, other channels can be companies’ internal newspaper about Finland.

4.3.2 Perceived destination image

Cognitive images and affective images constitute overall images of a destination from tourists, and this argument is supported by many scholars (Baloglu & McCleary 1999, Beerli & Martin 2004, Hosany et al. 2006, San Martin & Del Bosque 2008). Researchers tend to believe that it is very beneficial to explore and decipher destination images rooted in tourists’ mind, if efficacious promotional strategies on destination are expected to produce (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Accordingly, the images of Finland perceived by Chinese tourists are studied in this research.

Before tourists actually arrive destinations, tourists have images on countries they will visit to a certain extent (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). The cognitive images are general beliefs on a destination’s objective attributes (Hosany et al. 2006). In this part of empirical research, it is found out those images can be either very concrete in
a specific aspect, or rather vague in a general level from those respondents. The very ambiguous images on Finland include that “it is a rich country and has lots of beautiful scenery” (Interview 004), and “a rich country with high welfare” (Interview 010). In these arguments, the respondents’ answers about their image on Finland can not be said in error. However, it is worthwhile to notice that these arguments are quite broad and extensive so that they can be applied to many other countries. These tourists also admit that “they do not have too much understanding or images on Finland other than that”.

Some tourists seem to have more detailed images on Finland. The most widespread understanding of Finland concentrates on its geographic and climate features, mentioned by all kinds of tourists. Elements such as “a lot of snow”, “very cold”, “scarcely populated areas”, “Northern light”, “a lot of lakes” are mutually mentioned by five respondents. These keywords can be regarded as main images that respondents possess when mentioning Finland as a destination.

“It is a very cold place. It has less amounts of population. There are plenty of lands with low density of population.” (Interview 006)

“It is a country renowned as thousands of lakes and islands.” (Interview 002)

“I think Canada and Finland have some similarities. They both have snow and temperature is alike” (Interview 009).

Another image of Finland perceived by actual tourists is featured in culture aspect. Only business tourists and leisure tourists show that they have some unique images in this field, and no package tourists mention and highlight images on Finland in this aspect.

“I know Finland has a famous figure, Moomin. Before I arrive Finland, I have already known that it originates from Finland, rather than Japan. Lots of people misunderstand and think that Moomin is from Japanese culture.” (Interview 009)

“I know Moomin from my Finnish roommate during our exchange period in America.” (Interview 003)
“I familiarize myself with Finland by casual chatting with my Finnish colleagues, since I work in a Finnish company located in China. I know from them that Finns like drinking and eating meat.” (Interview 009)

It is found out “Moomin” character is recognized by few respondents in empirical finding. Two interviewees directly point out that Moomin are introduced by their Finnish friends or colleagues to them, which forms their image about Finland. Other respondents show no signs of knowing such figure. In addition, one respondent has the image on Finnish eating habit, which is from the chatting with colleagues. It shows that tourists who come to Finland and have certain connections with Finland know more about the destination in cultural aspect. Package tourists knows little in such field since they do not have close contact with acquaintances who are familiar with Finland.

The third type of cognitive image that tourists hold views is on the aspects of economic performance and social affairs of Finland. It is mentioned by both business tourists and package tourists. They mention the words such as “developed”, “well-organized”, “rich”, “high welfare” to describe their images of Finland.

“My image is that Finland is economically developed countries and everything goes well-organized. I also know from Finnish students that Finland has high welfare systems, free education and there is not a big gap between the richness and poverty.” (Interview 007)

“The image before I come is that Finland is a rich county with high welfare. I do not have other images about this country” (Interview 010)

From the cited scripts above, it shows that business tourist and leisure tourists build their cognitive images through chatting with their friends, and get to know more details about Finland in some aspects. In contrast, package tourists show no signals of images in culture field about Finland but have some knowledge on economy and social affairs. It is assumed that Finland tied with other Nordic countries, is regarded as highly developed and high welfare countries in Northern Europe, but Finland as an individual destination is still quite unfamiliar and remote to them.

Tourists’ image after their visiting is valuable to decipher and examine for researchers. According to San Martin & Del Bosque (2008), destination image is
multifaceted, because it should include both tourists’ impression on a destination’s factual traits, and tourists’ personal sensation on that destination. However, most researches neglect exploring the affective dimension of destination image but focus solely on cognitive image (Echtner & Ritchie 1991, Ekinci & Hosany 2006). In order to have a comprehensive understanding of destination image of Finland from Chinese tourists, this study also delves into the respondents’ affective images on Finland.

When exploring tourists’ personal feelings toward destination from the affective dimension, in total of seven respondents use the words “relaxation” and “feel relaxed” to describe their stay in Finland. The other three responds from interviewees include “feel cold and nothing else” (Interview 004), “do not have any special feeling on Finland” (Interview 010) and no clear answer given by interviewee 005. Therefore, it can be found out the respondents who hold the feel of “relaxation” or “feel relaxed” accounts for the majority. Even though respondents from different tourist types use same words to express the sensation they have, it is found out that the originations of their relaxed feelings are dissimilar.

“I do not think visiting this country makes me excited or surprised, since it is just what I imagine, relaxation, nice environment and lakes connected with sky. The buildings and architecture in Helsinki is not so tall to make people feel depressed and constrained. After I arrive here, I feel both physically and mentally relaxed. It is not like in China, where you feel busy and tense all day long.” (Interview 001)

“I feel this Nordic trip is relaxing, especially compared to my last trip in France, Italy and other Central European countries. Last year we visited many museums and lived in remote areas, which made us exhausted.” (Interview 002)

The above scripts are depicted from package tourists. For such group of tourists, one prominent characteristic is that they usually follow the schedules arranged by travel agencies. As mentioned earlier, package tourists have a maximum of one day to travel Finland. Therefore, as shown in scripts, their sense of relaxation arises largely by comparing their past experience on other destinations or their daily life in China. The first respondent feels that the atmosphere in Finland is more refreshing and less stressful than in China. The second interviewee use “Nordic trip” rather than “trip in
Finland” as the subject for her sensation. It shows that the interviewee treats Nordic countries as a whole to evaluate, but the attitude toward Finland is unclear. It might be influenced by very short stay in Finland that the impression on Finland is obscure. However, the business tourists and leisure tourists seem to have divergent causes to get relaxed sensation.

“I felt very relaxed. My traveling schedule was quite loose so that I did not push myself to visit tourist attractions in a short time. I felt every city was different in Finland. For example, Porvoo gave me a feeling of relaxation.” (Interview 006)

“It was summer when we traveled in Finland. I felt quite relaxed and enjoyable. There was a large coverage of lawn where people lay down.” (Interview 003)

“I was actually very impressive by summer cottages. It was very comfortable to spend time there. Those wooden cottages were near to lake. The scenery was really nice and the experiences there gave me a thorough relaxation. I also experienced the sauna, which left me a nice feeling.” (Interview 007)

The interviews collected above are from leisure tourists and business tourists. It can be found out these two kinds of tourists use the word “relaxed” or “relaxation” to express their feeling and give more details on why they have such sensation. “Lawn to lie down”, “summer cottage”, the experience of “Sauna”, and “scenery near the lake” are highlighted to describe relaxation caused from these experience in Finland. From the Interview 006, it reveals one reason why these two kinds of tourist groups can enjoy the relaxation from Finland, that is they have much more days to stay and have chances to try various activities in Finland, which is different from package tourists.

4.3.3 Image gap and behavioral intention

In this section, the respondents’ images on destination after their visitation is elaborated. Besides, how the gap between early images and reshaped images influence tourists’ behavioral intention is discussed. Behavioral intention refers to the tourists’ assessment on the willingness to recommend or revisit the same destination
(Chen & Tsai, 2007). Some scholars also term such actions as an index of brand loyalty, for example Chi and Qu (2008).

It is asserted that tourists adjust and reshape their images on destinations after they acquire firsthand information and have their own travel experience (Echtner & Ritchie 1991). In this research, it can be classified as three circumstances. In the first circumstance, tourists have better image before their journey, but the images after the actual travelling is inferior to the early images on destinations. In the second occasion, the respondents claim that there is no obvious distinction between their early image on Finland and the image after the actual visitation. In the third occasion, the respondents speak highly of the visiting experience and reshape their own images in a favorable way after the journey.

“They (means the interviewee’s friends) said that Finland was a rich country, and it had lots of beautiful scenery. Because of it, I felt disappointed after I arrived Finland. Even though we had visited somewhere like parks, buildings, and architectures. I felt quite plain.” (Interview 004)

“The impression of Finland after the trip… was still quite vague. I felt quite pity, even though we seemed to visit Finland, walking on streets and visit main attractions…From the TV program, I remembered a short introduction about Finland on lakes and some natural scenery…” (Interview 005)

The first group of people have better images before the trip from organic or induced sources, as shown above. Their images on the destination are beautiful scenery and natural scenery endowed by Finland. However, tourists are not satisfied with the journey in Finland, showed by the word “feel plain”, “feel pity” and “vague impression”. These tourists are package tourists, while no other type tourists hold same views. During the interviews, both of them mention that they have visited those main tourist attractions in Helsinki. Nevertheless, the images of Finland after the trip is not impressive. The understandings of the destination from first group of tourists are still very limited. In other words, the trip does not enrich their knowledge or emotional connections on Finland.

In the second condition, five respondents assert that there is no gap between the images before their trip and after the actual visiting. These respondents include
business tourists, leisure tourists and package tourists. From the detailed inquiry, it is
found out tourists who hold relatively good images on Finland still maintain their
views after the trip. One exception is that the interviewee 005, who contend that
“There is not a big gap. I do not have the expectation on Finland before I come”. By
asking further about her fundamental motivation to have a Nordic trip, the
interviewee answers visiting fjord in Norway is the core reason. In other words, the
images on Finland from the interviewee is not prominent, and after her trip, the
image has not been improved by her experience in Finland either.

Nevertheless, other four respondents view no obvious gap existed in an optimistic
way. Their preliminary impression on Finland is positive, and they regard the actual
visitation as fine as their imaginations. Some of them highlight local environment in
Finland leave them a good impression, shown as Interview 001. Some respondent
may point out there are some slight differences from destinations and their past
perceptions, but the image gap is still narrow, shown as 003.

“No, there was not a huge gap…I found this country (referring to Helsinki) was
very beautiful in the aspects of greenings and lakes among islands. It was very
coordinating and harmonious in the overall city layout. It made me feel the
natural beauty, not a beauty made artificially” (Interview 001)

“No, I do not think there is a wide gap. However, there was still some
differences from my past life. I found shops in Finland close very early. In
summer, they daytime was long and I need go back hotels. It felt funny.”
(Interview 003)

In the third condition, respondents claim that images after trips is superior to initial
images on Finland, hence the image gap is noticeable. It includes both leisure
tourists, business tourists and package tourists.

“I felt there was an obvious gap. Before I visited Finland, I barely had
knowledge on it. I found Finland had no similar aspects with any city in China
after the trip, even though I had travelled many cities in China, as remote as
Xinjiang province. (Interview 002)

“There is a huge difference. It is better than what I expect…” (Interview 006)
“In my image, Finland should be original and have people hunting… Instead, it is very advanced and automatic. For example, …” (Interview 009).

In this group of respondents, tourists find some uniqueness of the destination, in spite of little understanding on Finland beforehand, shown as Interview 002. Moreover, some tourists have new understanding of the destination, therefore the images on Finland are shaped and formed.

Previous researchers examine the relationship between destination image and behavioral intention, and stress importance on the role of destination image to the willingness of recommendation and re-visiting (Chen & Tsai 2007, Chi & Qu, 2008). In this research, the respondents’ behavioral intention is also interviewed.

It is found out that the behavioral intention on willingness to recommend and willingness to re-visit the destination are separate in this study. First, for the tourists who have deteriorated or unimproved image after visiting Finland are not willing to recommend Finland as a destination to others (Interview 004, 005, 010), but the willingness on re-visit Finland varies from person to person. It may depend on time, budgets and other elements. The in-depth trip on Finland is expected to have. For the package tourists, one prominent characteristic is that they prefer to regard Nordic countries as a whole and recommend to their friends for travelling.

Second, for the respondents who are leisure tourists and business tourists, all of them confirm that they are willing to advocate Finland as a tourism destination to other people, for example, the interview 008 shown below. Similarly, they also willing to visit Finland again. Some of them mention that they would like to visit Finland again in summer with family members, and some of them are looking forward to visit Finland in winter.

“Yes, I will strongly recommend. I will advice them come to travel in Finland in summer. In addition, I will tell them not only visit Helsinki, but also go sightseeing in some other smaller cities.” (Interview 008)

In short, the images on destinations play important role in tourists’ behavioral intention. It is in line with the findings from Chen & Tsai (2007) and Chi & Qu
(2008). Moreover, this studies further explore the impact of destination image on recommendation to others and re-visiting behaviors respectively, which instills a new understanding and enrich the knowledge on the effects of destination images.

4.4 Destination competitiveness

The competitiveness of Finland as a destination is examined in this session. Core resources and attractions of Finland from a tourism perspective are evaluated carefully by respondents’ comments. Core resources are the most decisive component in destination competitiveness, since numerous researchers give an emphasis on core resources in defining and modeling the term (Crouch & Richie 1999, Hassan 2000, Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao 2000, Buhalis 2000, Dwyer & Kim 2003). In addition, the competitiveness of Finland with its neighboring countries is investigated by interviewees’ motivations of travelling and assessment after the trip. At last, the destination competitiveness of Finland will be analyzed and re-positioned.

4.4.1 Core resources and attractions

Core resources and attractions are composed of endowed resources and created resources. Endowed resources can be further specified as natural resources and heritage/culture resources, while created resources are artificial, including activities offered by tour operators, shopping, tourism facilities and so forth. (Dwyer & Kim, 2003)

According to Dwyer & Kim’s (2003) classification on core resources and attractions, it is found out in the empirical part that the destination of Finland related to Chinese tourists focus on endowed resources, especially the heritage/culture resources and attractions. To be more specific, the places that those interviewees have visited concentrate on famous tourism attractions or architectures in Helsinki. The respondents from all kinds of tourist type elaborate their travel experience in Helsinki. Among them, package tourists are arranged to visit Helsinki only during their trip in Finland.
In order to evaluate the destination competitiveness of Finland accurately, the feedback from interviewees about their traveling experience is acquired. It shows that in Helsinki, interviewees visit the tourist attractions in common, represented by Helsinki Cathedral, Rock church, Sibelius Park, Suomenlinna and open market called Kauppahalli. For the business and leisure tourists, few of them have visited extra places in Helsinki, such as Moomin road, but it is not too common to represent the large number of tourists.

“Helsinki Cathedral looks quite beautiful and historic… We had a bird eye view by standing upstairs.” (Interview 002)

“Helsinki Cathedral in my eyes, well… not so special. I have been many churches in Europe. I like church such as Notre Dame de Paris in France and Sagrade Familia in Spain.” (Interview 004)

“Helsinki Church is not special for me. I cannot feel the uniqueness… No, not attractive. Since there are plenty of churches I have visited in Europe, the churches in Helsinki are quite ordinary.” (Interview 007)

From the depicted scripts, it shows that tourists hold different opinions on Helsinki Cathedral. Some interviewees think it is a nice tourist attraction, however some tourists think Helsinki Cathedral is rather usual. It needs to be highlighted that for those tourists who have visited other European countries, they are inclined to have a neutral or negative attitude to Helsinki Cathedral, show as interview 004 and 007. It can be explained by Buhalis (2000) argument that nowadays it becomes more strenuous to intend to please tourists, since an increasing number of people have visited many places. Despite two views of Helsinki Cathedral mentioned above, some respondents claim that they are not impressive by it, since they just “pass it without visiting it inside” (Interview 001).

Different from comments on Helsinki Cathedral, the rock church wins overwhelming praise from interviewees. Seven respondents describe rock church as “unique”, with some other words such as “impressive”, “creative”, “great”. Some respondents remember details on visiting rock church, and recount it “quite narrow entrance but enough inner space with natural rock wall” (Interview 002), “playing the pipe organ”
In this sense, it shows the rock church leaves a deep and positive impression for the tourists.

“When I retrospect my trip, I feel that I still do not know so much on this country… I am only impressed by rock church. If you have visited enough countries and church in Europe, you will find those churches look similar. However, rock church is magnificent. It is the world’s only church built in rock…” (Interview 005)

“Rock church is very impressive, and I think it is unique. Other places in Finland are not so impressive or special in my eyes.” (Interview 010)

The selected scripts above shows that some package tourists regard rock church as one representative of their Finland trip, since there is few outstanding tourist attractions in their memory. Despite the fact that tourists speak highly of the rock church, no evidence shows that rock church is the key motivation for them to visit Finland.

Sibelius Park is an attraction combining both culture and natural traits. The park is built to commemorate Finnish renowned musician Sibelius and many respondents claim that they have visited the statue of Sibelius and the pipe monument. In this sense, the park reflects Finnish culture and visitors get in touch some Finnish culture to a certain extent. It is worthwhile to mention that respondents are attracted and impressed by natural scenery in the park also. Two respondents mention that they especially like the overall natural environment in the park, “full of lawns and flowers” (Interview 001, 002). Despite the bad weather with heavy rain during the trip, the interviewees admire the fresh air, grass and flowers, and the lake inside the park. Similarly, the lake view in Sibelius park is applauded by business tourists, such as interview 007.

Suomenlinna is the last culture/heritage attraction that Chinese tourists usually visit, founded in this empirical part. In total of three respondents assert that they have been to Suomenlinna in their trip and share their comments with the interviewer. It is found out that visitors perceive Suomenlinna from different perspective. First, the interviewee 001, featured as a male aged from 20-30, pays attention to Suomenlinna from a military perspective. The interviewee has confessed that he is “especially
interested in the things related to military.” (Interview 001). Therefore, he has spent a lot of time on the sightseeing in the military fortress and take lots of photos. Second, some other interviewee regards Suomenlinna as a historical attraction to witness parts of Finnish history. However, she also criticizes that the pathway in Suomenlinna is “quite inconvenient due to slope road with stones.” (Interview 002).

Leisure tourists who visit Suomenlinna have different routes to have a sightseeing, since they do not have a tour guide like package tourists. Therefore, they have an extra viewpoint on Suomenlinna, shows as follows. From the interviewee’s comment, it reflects that tourists are interested in the Finnish’s lifestyle and natural scenery, which can give them a pleasant feeling.

“Suomenlinna has the routine for visitors to go, and they can see the military fort or other historic sites. We do not go through that routine, instead, we just walk randomly and pass some local residents’ house in Suomenlinna. We enjoy the sea view. Everywhere looks so nice and natural.” (Interview 003)

The above part has elaborated those main attractions places that Chinese tourists usually visit when they have trip in Finland. It founds out no matter package tourists, leisure tourists and business tourists, Helsinki is the most commonly visited city in Finland. For the package tourists, Helsinki is the only city that they have visited from the interviews. Nevertheless, leisure tourists and business tourists have stayed in Finland for a longer period and have visited other cities than just Helsinki. Therefore, they have additional viewpoints on Finland as a destination.

“I like the town such as Porvoo. It leaves me the feeling of ancient time and local characteristic. Their streets are made by stones and slates. This is different from my hometown, where the roads are cement ground… I think Porvoo is quite charming and have nice scenery.” (Interview 003)

“My impression to Porvoo is very good. I visit Porvoo in best season and best weather. It is sunny and cozy… The place gives me the deepest impression.” (Interview 006)

As the interviews shown above, both two leisure tourists have visited Porvoo and speak highly of the town. The town conveys the historic feeling of Finland, as described by interviewee 003. It also creates the feeling of “peacefulness” and
“quietness”, summarized by interviewee 007. In addition, the weather condition is praised and emphasized by the respondents also. “Best season”, “best weather”, “sunny and cozy” in Porvoo said by interviewee 006, which has impressed the visitor. Crouch (2011) argues that physiography and climate are rated as the decisive components in sub-factors of core resources. From this empirical research, it also verifies the great importance of physiography and climate in tourists feeling on destinations.

4.4.2 Competitiveness of Finland with neighboring countries

In order to figure out the destination competitiveness of Finland from tourists side, and solve the confusion what attracts Chinese tourists to finally visit Finland, one question is posed to interviewees by asking their fundamental motivation before their traveling. The results show that interviewees have very diverse incentives to travel. The most striking fact is that they come to travel Finland is not because of the great interest to this country, instead, the neighboring countries of Finland attracts some of the interviewees, shown as 002, 010, 004. In other words, Finland is visited as an auxiliary.

“The primary destination for me is Russia, because every friend of mine who has visited there is satisfied with their travel experience in Russia. It is just because Russia is near to Nordic countries that I want to visit these countries at the same time”. (Interview 002)

“I come travel for fjord in Norway. This my fundamental reason to have this trip.” (Interview 010)

“I expect Stockholm most in these Nordic countries.” (Interview 004)

Despite of the great expectation of neighboring countries of Finland, interviewees maintain or even increase those affirmative impressions after the trips in those neighboring countries. They reinforce the impression of nice natural scenery in Nordic countries. In order to assure the origination of such views, the interviewer further pose the question to interviewees that which country lead them to have such impression especially, the interviewees elaborate that:
“A town in Sweden called “Gränna” … It is a very beautiful place in my eyes and leave me the greatest impression…I think there is a very beautiful lake scene and I love that lake scenery with blue sky.” (Interview 004)

“The town in Norway is really amazing and beautiful. We went to their local villages… The vivid scenery gives me tremendous surprise and pleasure. The village is surrounded by mountains…” (Interview 005)

“Nordic countries are beautiful, especially fjords in Norway.” (Interview 002)

In addition to it, some tourists show the equal interest to Nordic countries, without special preference to Finland either. Those respondents regard Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland as a whole to take the trip. “To experience the slow lifestyle in Nordic countries” and “to have a cooler summer in Nordic countries” (Interview 001) are the primary motives.

Next, some interviewees claim that their friends or families desire to travel in Nordic countries, but those interviewees themselves do not have intense motives to visit Finland. Nevertheless, it is worthy to notice that the reasons why those interviewees decide to travel should be attributed to friends’ positive comments on destinations, shown as 005 and 004. Both of the interviewees mention the great influence of others’ appraisal on their final decision.

“There is no strong motivation from me. My classmates (retired people in a same community musical college) notify me that there is a chance to travel Nordic countries, and then they organize the trip. I have heard in the past that Russia Palace is quite good looking and nature scenery in Nordic countries is nice.” (Interview 005)

“My mom wants to come. She wants to take cruise. I myself have not visited Nordic countries before, but I have heard others saying the beautiful natural scenery in Nordic countries.” (Interview 004)

For the leisure tourists and business tourists, the situation seems to be different from package tourists as elaborated above. The distinction lies in both leisure and business tourists stays in Finland longer than package tourists and Finland is their dominant destination. Therefore, the motivation that attracts them to come is expected to be different with that from package tourists. The result shows that business tourists come to Finland mainly because of business trip, and leisure tourists’ fundamental
motivations include “experiencing foreign life before studying abroad” (Interview 006), and “attending friend’s wedding ceremony” (Interview 003).

In short, the competitiveness not only means the consciousness of one’s own competences and defects, but also the recognition of external environments (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). From the analysis above, it can be found that currently, the competitiveness of Finland as a tourism destination is not adequately competitive, few tourists are attracted to visit Finland just because of the country. It shows that before tourists start their journeys, they either expect the sightseeing in Finland’s neighboring countries, shown as interviews (002, 010, 004) or consider Nordic countries as one whole destination shown as interviews (001, 005). The respondents reinforce the good impression of nature scenery by Finland’s neighboring countries, mainly Sweden and Norway. In this section, it evaluates the exterior conditions of Finland competitiveness by respondents’ motivation analysis and reveals that the neighboring countries are strongly competitive with Finland in tourism industry.

4.4.3 Re-position Finland’s destination competitiveness

Morgan and Pritchard (2000: 273) highlight the necessity of a destination to unearth its own remarkable selling point, considering the easy replacement of destinations and indistinguishable travel expenses. For Finland as a destination, it is indeed urgent to position and clarify its own destination competitiveness to attract international tourists. This research is specifically targeted to Chinese tourists, and it is found out Finland’s neighboring countries are competitive and attractive to Chinese tourists. For example, Norway’s destination competitiveness lies in the natural beauty of fjord. Tourists expect highly to see fjord and stay satisfied with their trip in Norway, describing with “the beauty of it head straight to my soul” (interview 010). For Finland as a destination, most of the package tourists assert that they will not recommend friends to visit Finland, but instead they are willing to recommend others to visit Nordic countries. From this perspective, it is very essential and inevitable for us to re-consider what is the destination competitiveness of Finland to attract tourists.

First and foremost, it is postulated that the competitiveness of Finland does not lie in Helsinki, but in other cities and towns of Finland. The complaints from package
tourists contain the lack of adequate stay in Finland, visiting Helsinki only, and holding very vague impression after trips. Therefore, they do not prefer Finland than other neighboring countries by sole sightseeing in Helsinki. In contrast, other types of tourists show great enthusiasm and positive impression on Finland, particularly business and leisure tourists have a bias on other cities of Finland, which support the first argument. The examples are interview 006 and 008 as shown below.

“I would rather advise them to go some small towns in Finland, live there for several days and have a walk, rather than stay in Helsinki.” (Interview 006)

“I will recommend them travel in Finland in summer. In addition, I will tell them not only visit Helsinki, but also go to some small cities. (Interview 008)

In order to clarify the idea, the respondent 006 even give a full explanation on why she thinks Helsinki is not competitive enough for tourists, which further explore the necessity of developing and digging the alternative destination competitiveness in Finland, shown as:

“Helsinki makes me feel… quite ordinary, nothing special. I think Helsinki lacks kind of attractiveness, such as entertainment for tourists. The tourists attractions are also boring and general tourists may be not so interested in those tourists attraction places in Helsinki.” (Interview 006)

The argument from the respondent 006 is very critical and censorious. However, it reflects the interviewees’ opinion after their trips to some extent. It can explain why package tourists claim they do not have a clear impression even after the trip in Finland and neutral to negative willingness of recommendation. For example, “I have no impression basically” (Interview 005), “Rock church is unique, but other places in Finland are not so special in my eyes” (Interview 010), and “even we visit some main attractions, I feel quite plain” (Interview 004). Therefore, it is very important and necessary for tourism promoter to shift the attention to other cities or towns of Finland to develop regional tourism business in order to attract Chinese tourists.

Second, it is proposed that the unique experiences in Finland and tourism services with nature should be the key component of destination competitiveness of Finland.
The existed tourism developers focus mainly on Helsinki’s sightseeing and main attractions places in the capital city, which cannot be impressive and attractive from the respondents’ feedback. The typical argument is that “churches look similar among those countries” (Interview 002). However, the very Finnish activities near summer cottage such as Sauna, barbeque and other types of entertainment are very competitive and appealing to potential tourists.

“One we are invited to take sauna. We head to the summer cottage near the lake. We take sauna for 100 degree and them jump into the lake. I think the experience is quite nice, since we do not have similar experience before… We have a total new feeling of taking sauna in Finland…” (Interview 008)

“I am very impressive by their summer cottage near lake… The scenery is nice and experiences give me a thorough relaxation…” (Interview 007)

The above interviews (007 and 008) belong to the type of business tourists. As they claim, they have chances to experience those activities are largely attributed to the invitations from local colleagues. They admit that those experiences in Finland are pleasant, relaxed and impressive for them, as expressed in scripts above. However, the other tourists such as package tourists and leisure tourists in this research seem not have same experiences yet. It can be caused by either no information or knowledge about local activities, or have no approaches to get in close touch with activities. Therefore, it is underscored that those experiences and activities in nature can be developed as the core destination competitiveness of Finland, since the needs indeed exist from tourists’ side. For example:

“If I have chances, I would like to choose an in-depth travel in Finland.” (Interview 005)

“I would like to visit Finland again. I want to have an in-depth travel in Finland. I want to experience their lifestyle, the local food and so forth.” (Interview 010).

Third, the nature should be the key competitiveness of Finland. By asking the similarities and uniqueness of different tourism destinations, some respondents hold the view that there are some similarities in the appearance of churches and other architectures between Finland and other Nordic or even Eastern European countries
(Interview 002, 005). However, many respondents argue that each country has its unique features in tourism, and they do not agree that destinations are alike. For Finland, it is argued that nature is the country’s own distinctive feature. As commented:

“Finland has lots of forests and lakes, which I think is quite unique and other countries cannot be compatible with Finland”. (Interview 006)

“About the uniqueness of Finland, I think it should be its natural scenery.” (Interview 008).

Last but not least, the climate advantage in summer season should be the key competitiveness of Finland. Compared with climate in China’s cities, the summer in Finland cities is cool, bright and comfortable. Thus, it can be developed and branded to attract more Chinese tourists in hot season. From the Interview 001’s elaboration, it shows the great possibility of it. Morgan and Pritchard (2000: 277) contend that establishing emotional link between destinations and tourists is the core of building a prosperous brand. Therefore, favorable climate in summer of Finland can be branded and connected to the psychology of “enjoying a cool summer” to Chinese tourists.

“The second thing I consider is the time, or the duration of the trip. For this trip, I want it happen in August, when it is the hottest in Beijing. I think this is the suitable time to have a Nordic country trip and experience local life…” (Interview 001)

In short, the local cities or towns with typical Finnish styles, the nature and the nature related activities and experiences, and climate in summer season can be the core attractors for Chinese tourists and the main destination competitiveness for Finland. The question is raised on how to make more potential tourists know and get attracted to visit Finland. From my point view, it requires the effective destination branding. The other question is how to shift the destination competitiveness into practical action. The answer is that it requires the participation of destination management organizations, particularly tour operators, which is elaborated in the next chapter.
4.5 Destination Management Organization

Destination management organizations play important role when tourists travel in new and exotic countries or cities. They offer various services to tourists during their stay in destinations and pose undeniable influence to tourists’ perception of the destinations. Destination management organizations can be individuals or companies that connect with tourism industry (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005), for example, tour operators, hotels, transportation companies such as Finnair and cruise companies are all either direct or indirect destination management organizations.

Hankinson (2004) thinks that destination management organizations are closely linked with destination branding. The author proposes a framework on destination branding from a relational perspective. The primary services such as accommodation and management of representative tourist attractions are the center of brand experience. Furthermore, the access services in infrastructure relationship also affect the success of destination branding. These includes exterior transportation such as airplane and cruise, and inner city transportation such as bus and metro. (Hankinson, 2004)

Due to the significant role of destination management organizations in tourism industry and in destination branding, this section focuses on the systematic analysis of the performances of destination management organizations.

4.5.1 External Transportation

External transportation enables tourists to arrive Finland and they connect Finland with other countries. The common external transportation related to Finland from tourism aspects are airplanes and cruises. Chinese tourists usually take airplanes from their hometown to Helsinki, or take cruise from neighboring countries to Helsinki in this empirical finding.

Four respondents take Finnair flight to Helsinki from different cities in China, and the rest of respondents arrive their first destinations by Russian airlines, Scandinavian airline and other airlines, later they reach the destination of Helsinki by
cruise. Hence, the analysis of destination management organization starts with Finnair.

The respondents speak highly of those service in Finnair in the aspect of food, cabin crews’ customer services and onboard facilities. The experience in Finnair is fulfilling, or even beyond the expectation. Some respondents reflect that they are anxious to take a long flight and worried about the possibility of inducing motion sickness. However, the actual experience is better than the anticipations. Particularly cabin crews’ performances add value to the whole flight experience. Moreover, respondents are impressed with the refreshment offered onboard, claim that it is very unique and have Finnish features, as details shown in Interview 007 below. It proves that tourists have the strong interest and desire to experience local things during their trips, which even starts from the moment they head to their destinations. Other tourists focus on the comfort of the flight and audio-visual system.

“I am especially satisfied with the drink they offer in airplane. The drink is different from that offered in other airline companies. The drink is very unique and have Finnish characteristics, such as berry juices.” (Interview 007)

The other typical destination management organization related to external transportation is cruise companies. They connect Finland with other Nordic countries or Finland’s neighboring countries, which bring conveniences to those tourists whose destinations are multiple. TallinkSilja, Viking Lines, Russian lines are representative among those cruise companies for serving Chinese tourists during their journey. The comments on cruises companies are divergent. Some tourists stand a neutral attitude to cruises. Cruises are regarded as an inevitable approach to reach other destinations and across Baltic sea, meanwhile beds and some services are offered on board. In addition, some tourists hold a positive view on cruise experiences, particularly they are satisfied with good facilities, tax-free shops, café and cleanliness of cabins. Nevertheless, some respondents express the disappointments of cruises, shown as interview 005.

“Allegedly it is the largest Russian cruise so that we hold quite high expectations. I find that the facilities inside seem to be very old and antique, which makes me lose interest to walk around.” (Interview 005)
The interview script shows that when brand reality differentiates the brand that is conveyed to tourists, the inferior consequence can be caused. Tourists generate negative mood which is strenuous to eliminate. As destination management organization is the important part in the process of destination branding, the over embellishing propaganda should be avoided. Instead, destination management organization should facilitate tourists to create rational expectation.

4.5.2 Accommodation

Accommodation service is deemed as chief service, which is the center of the brand experience in relational destination branding model from Hankinson (2004). It finds that some tourists who visit Finland have not experienced accommodation service, because they arrive Helsinki in the morning and take overnight cruise to other destinations on the same day. This situation is most likely to happen especially among package tourists.

Some tourists have the experience of living in hotels in Finland overnight. It is found out the they are pleased with services in hotels, while they are not satisfied with hardware facilities. To be more specific, some tourists point out that “breakfast” (Interview 007), “attitude or service of staffs” (Interview 006) and “cleanliness of rooms” (Interview 001) are the plus of their appraisement for hotels. However, some criticism has raised especially in hardware facilities, particularly about beds and hotel rooms, shown as follows (Interview 001, 009, 010). In addition to it, the respondents complain that hotels in Finland do not offer equivalent accessories as those in China, such as free bottles of water and wash sets, which decrease the experience of tourists.

“It is ordinary. The bed is narrow and the room is small”. (Interview 010)

“The most impressive thing for me in hotel was the bed. The bed was very soft, which was really different from hotels in my home country. It felt like my whole body stuck into the bed as long as I sat on it… I was not get used to lying in such a soft bed, but later I felt cozy.” (Interview 001)

“The hotel is just so so. It is very basic condition. There is the bed and the bath room is small… I do not feel comfortable to lie on that bed” (Interview 009)
In spite of that, the other kind of accommodation services which is summer cottage should be emphasized. One respondent from leisure tourist type mentions her experience in summer cottage and speak highly of it, shown as interview 006. From her elaboration, it can be seen that the experience in summer cottage is so nice that the respondents still clearly remember details. Not only the rooms inside are satisfying, but also the exterior environments around accommodation are impressing and pleasant. The nice experience in accommodation on the one hand adds value to the whole trip of the respondent in Finland, and increase tourist satisfaction. On the other hand, it benefits the branding of Finland and offer a new insight to tourism promoters, for example: connecting Finland with summer cottage experience.

“In Lapland, I live in wooden cottage. It is an area that especially for tourists to live, named (something like) Kulukulu. The cottage has quite nice facilities inside. The cottage is big and has two floors… I am very satisfied with the cottage to live inside. The facilities inside the cottages are quite complete and nice. Souvenirs shops, and restaurants are nearby also. The opposite side of the cottage is the Nordic zoo.” (Interview 006)

4.5.3 Tour operators

Tour operators play indisputable role in package tourists’ journey. Package tourists purchase the tourism products and services offered by travel agencies. Later, they follow those travel agenda to arrive each destination, and finally generate assessments on destinations based on their journey. One respondent elaborates the distinction between the journey arranged by travel agencies and by one own, as interview 004 shows:

“Following the travel agencies’ maybe different from the journey arranged by oneself. It is a very full and hurried schedule when following them. Maybe that is the reason why we do not have so much deep impression on Finland.” (Interview 004)

“Honestly, there is a dissatisfaction from me to our Nordic trip. The schedule of visiting each country is very unreasonable. For example, I have stayed in Finland for only 1 day, same with Denmark. The rest of time is mainly spent on transportation (to Sweden and to Norway) ... Actually, I would rather allocate more time on Finland and Denmark.” (Interview 001)
Package tourists desire to travel and experience more in Finland, but they are restricted by those fixed schedules. The current travel agencies excessively focus on one particular Nordic country, such as Norway, and ignore the country like Finland. As it elaborated, the package tourists either “sat in coach for 4-5 hour in order to visit fjord of Norway,” (Interview 001) or “took eight-hour bus to arrive one village of Norway, but it was worthy for the scene I saw” (Interview 005). Considering the length of whole trip, the time allocation for those countries are very inequitable and the journey in Finland is rather limited. As a result, it brings unfavorable conditions especially in the aspect of destination branding on Finland. Package tourist who have visited Finland do not hold a projected image on the destination, which is harmful to dissemination of information on one destination. As is proved in the previous chapter, organic sources are the most powerful tool for potential tourists to become motivated and determined to visit.

In order to execute effective destination branding in the long term, the cooperation and coordination with tour operators are very necessary. The interviewer investigates the preference and criteria on how those respondents choose travel agencies. It is found that Chinese tourists tend to choose famous travel agencies. Four out of five package tourists’ interviewees admit that they regard the reputation and credibility of travel agencies as a decisive factor. They believe that those renowned travel agencies can guarantee the trip quality to a certain extent. This psychology reflects tourists trying to reduce “the perceived risk” (San Martín and Del Bosque, 2008: 267), when they face unfamiliar destinations. In addition, tourists’ earlier experience from same travel agencies is the another vital element for them to decide whether they purchase the tourism product again. Three out of five package tourist interviewees express their viewpoints from this angle. The example is interview 010 shown as below.

“I am the VIP membership of Caissa travel agency. I think the quality of tourism product offered by this company is great. Even though it is expensive compared to its counterparts, I feel satisfied with it from my past experience. (Interview 010)

Despite those two factors mentioned above, one respondent fully disclose the process on how she selects travel agency in action, shown in interview 002. It is proposed that compared to prices, tourists pay attention to the perceived quality of
the experience on destination. In other words, increasing number of Chinese tourists are willing to pay for tourism product with rational price, rather than only pursuing the cheapest price with enduring poor services.

“I have generated some ideas on what countries I want to visit, before I start to search for travel agencies. I compare each famous travel agencies’ tourism package on my ideal destinations. Generally, I observe whether the whole schedule is clear and reasonable, whether it includes main tourism attractions or historic sites. At last, I compare the prices. Only those travel agencies offer similarly good quality of tourism package will I select the products with relatively cheaper expenses.” (Interview 002)

To conclude, destination promoters should make an effort to reach cooperation with local prominent and famed tourism agencies. For the sake of destination branding on Finland, those collaborations between tour operators are very essential. The negotiation and cooperation should be highlighted on the aspects of extending travelling duration in Finland as well as exploring more competitive tourist attractions and services for visitors.

4.5.4 Public infrastructure related to tourism

As Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) contend, any participants that have direct or unintended connection with tourism can be considered as destination management organizations, which also applies to city officials. Public infrastructures are managed by government department, so it is connected to destination management organization. In the last part of this chapter, the public infrastructure related to tourism is examined in order to provide insights for government improving infrastructure construction for tourism purpose.

First, the inner city transportation is discussed. It is found that package tourists usually fetch each main tourist attraction by a fixed coach, so that they do not have comments on inner city transportation of Finland. By contrast, leisure tourists and business tourists need to use local transportation during their trip in Finland, so that they propose their own views regarding inner city transportation. Generally, respondents affirm the “cleanliness” (Interview 003), “punctuality” (Interview 006), and “geniality and affability” of bus drivers and local inhabitants (Interview 003,
006, 008). Nonetheless, respondents propose the drawbacks of mass transit from two aspects. One is the language barriers to tourists, the other is the frequency of transportation. To be more specific, the respondents elaborate that:

“It is not easy to use public transportation as a backpacker in Finland. They do not have English instruction in bus and bus stop. There are only Finnish and Swedish. I feel quite frustrated and inconvenient…” (Interview 003)

“The frequency of bus in Finland is very different from it in China. The timetables of buses almost remain same, or even more constant at weekend than normal working days… In Finland, buses become less frequent at weekends, so that it is very inconvenient to travel somewhere at weekends. (Interview 006)

Similarly, tourists also point out that streets in popular tourism areas lacking the necessary instruction signs in English, which is another main language barrier they meet during the trip, shown as interview 003 below. As a result, tourists have to rely on the communications with local pedestrians to ask for help. It should be noticed that even though the local inhabitants are willing to help tourists in most cases, it should not solely rely on it and neglect the problem. For the better development of tourism industry in Finland and attractiveness of Finland as a destination to tourists, the infrastructure of street nameplate, guideboard, instruction inside bus in English version are necessarily built for international tourists.

“It is quite difficult for us to find the tourist attractions, since there is no English on road name either. I have to ask passer-by to find the targeted places. Anyway, the local people are nice and helpful…” (Interview 003)

In addition, the other public infrastructure related to tourism should be mentioned in public lavatory. The relatively scarcity of public toilets with large group of tourists (Interview 009), the occasional unpleasant odor inside lavatory (Interview 004) and the expensive charges (Interview 002) consist of main complaints of public lavatory in the aspect infrastructure from tourists. Among them, the complaint of high price for taking toilet from tourists should be paid attention to.

“The problem is that they ask too much money for taking toilets… From exchange rate, we use 1 euro which equals almost 7 RMB for only using toilet. By contrast, in China it only take 0.5-1 RMB, and most places are free of
Talking about per capital income of Chinese, it is about 450-700 euro in a low to medium level. I guess it is much lower than Finnish salary… In this sense, it is very expensive to go toilets when travel in Finland. Lots of tourists in the same travel schedule with me decide to skip using toilets, waiting till back to cruise.” (Interview 002)

The above interview script reflects how tourists think on public lavatory in Finland to some extent. Even though the salary level that respondent 002 mention cannot be regarded as accurate and flawless, the gap of purchasing power and price level between Finland and China indeed exist, and should not be denied. The insufficiencies of public toilets with high charges for package tourists might perform as one part of unfavorable images of Finland.

“About public toilets, I usually go shopping mall to use toilets, since it is relatively easily to find one in shopping mall… The public toilets in fast food restaurants are no clean” (Interview 006)

“I do not think there are too big problems in public toilets. Compared to the situation in China, it is no so easy to find toilets here.” (Interview 009)

The above interview scripts seem to be paradoxical about the ease of finding public lavatory during the trip from the tourist sides. However, the background of tourists should be noticed. The individual tourists who visit family (e.g. interview 006) know that they can go toilets by entering into shopping mall or fast food restaurant, because they have local friends who can notify those individual tourists. In contrast, for normal tourists, it is challenging to find public toilets since there is no local acquaintances to hint them. In addition, tourists have to go shopping mall or fast food restaurant to find tourists but no other options, which reflects the fact of scarcity in public toilets. Therefore, the construction of public toilets especially in main tourism areas in Finland should be considered seriously. For the countries that have mature tourism industry, such as Japan and Switzerland, they have already developed very advanced and comprehensive tourism related public infrastructure, and Finland should learn from them to improve own public infrastructure for tourists.
5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Answering research questions

Since more and more Chinese tourists choose to have outbound tourism, they bring considerable fortune and boost local economy not only in tourism industry, but also in the aspects of transportation, accommodation and catering. In this sense, many countries’ governments realize the great potentials of Chinese tourists and make obvious efforts to attract them. Practical measures have been taken, such as facilitating the visa application process for Chinese applicants and strengthening the marketing to potential Chinese visitors by establishing tourism bureau in China. Finland also seizes the opportunities and attempts to entice more Chinese tourists. Under this circumstance, this research chooses to focus on the destination branding of Finland to Chinese tourists. The main research question is:

*How Finland can be branded effectively toward Chinese tourists?*

In order to answer the main research questions, three sub questions are proposed with the logical sequence. To begin with, it is important to figure out the current destination branding approaches. On the basis of it, the main research questions have the possibility to be answered well. Moreover, knowing how tourists think and evaluate the destination is very necessary. By acquiring their ideas, destination branding can be more accustomed to the targeted tourist groups. Three sub questions, therefore, are shown as follows:

(1). *How is the destination branding accomplished in relation to Chinese tourists?*

(2). *How does Finland as a destination entice Chinese tourists?*

(3). *What operations can Destination Management Organizations do to attract more Chinese tourists to visit?*

The first sub question can be answered through two perspectives. One is from the viewpoint of tourism promoters, the other is from actual tourists. Currently, Finnish
tourism bureau mainly use three channels to branding Finland. They are trade marketing, media and public relation, and the last one is branding directly to consumer. In trade marketing, it is targeted to tourism operators and travel agencies in China. Finnish Tourism Bureau endeavors to build connections between Finnish partners and Chinese travel agencies by inviting them attending workshops and meetings. They also make great efforts to introduce Finland tourism resources and even organize observation delegations to Finland. In media and public relation channel, tour promoters in Finnish Tourism Bureau cooperate with key opinion leaders, bloggers, and other Nordic countries’ tourism bureaus to conduct marketing. TV programs are made to popularize Finland as a destination.

For branding Finland directly to potential Chinese tourists, the common approaches that Finnish Tourism Bureau have taken is to operate Wechat account and Sina Weibo account, to launch articles or posts in order to familiarize readers with Finland. The destination branding strategies of Finnish tourism bureau concentrate on four parts, Helsinki areas, Lapland, lake areas and islands. The emphasis of branding Finland is laid differently, which depends on markets. To Chinese tourists, Finnish Tourism Bureau stresses the importance on branding Helsinki and Lapland. It is believed that Chinese tourists prefer to visit more renowned tourism attractions, so the branding operation is biased on Helsinki and Lapland for Chinese market.

From the perspective of actual tourists, it is found that the effect of those branding activities from Finnish tourism bureau to potential tourists is limited. Most interviewees claim that before they arrive Finland, they do not get information about Finland as a destination from Wechat or Sina Weibo accounts operated by Finnish Tourism Bureau, and they also have not seen TV shows that introduce Finland. Only one respondent mention that she might get information on those channels, but she does not remember the exact sources. Nevertheless, it is found out that tourists’ images on Finland come from Internet and online forums, chatting with friends and tour books to a large extent. Even though the destination image and destination branding seem to be separate notions, the previous scholar points out that there is no obvious distinction between establishing a destination image and the branding of the destination in current researches (Cai, 2002). Therefore, from the side of tourists, it is found that the branding of Finland is accomplished largely by organic channels,
including Internet and travel forums, the casual talk with friends about the destination, tour books. It is also mentioned by tourists that the information about traveling in Finland is rather lacking, and the information is restricted to Helsinki and Lapland. The tourism information about other Finland cities are deficient.

The second sub question is asking how Finland as a destination can entice Chinese tourists. From the empirical research, it is found out that Helsinki is the inevitable destination city to visit for all kinds of tourists, no matter package tourist, business tourist and leisure tourists. The endowed tourism resources, especially the heritage and culture resources (Dwyer and Kim, 2003) in Finland are the main contents in sightseeing schedules for Chinese tourists, represented by Helsinki Cathedral, Rock church, Sibelius Park and Suomenlinna. Each tourism attraction has been evaluated and commented after the trip in order to know whether it can entice Chinese tourists. Among them, it is found out that Rock Church wins the reputation of uniqueness and becomes the most impressive element during the visitors’ trip in Finland. Nevertheless, for tourists who have visited other European countries, they are likely to give a neutral and negative attitude on Helsinki Cathedral. As to Sibelius park and Suomenlinna, it is worth to mention that tourists are often attracted by natural scenery inside the attractions.

The index of brand loyalty, namely willingness of recommendation and re-visit (Oppermann 2000, Chi & Qu, 2008) can further reflect the attractiveness of Finland as a destination. It is found that package tourists tend to regard Nordic countries as a whole, and they are willing to recommend other to have a Nordic trip. However, the willingness of recommendation for Finland is negative or vague among package tourists, since they have only one-day trip in Finland and have deteriorated or unimproved destination images after the trip. The willingness of re-visit depends on people, and some of them contend that the in-depth trip is expected. However, for other types of tourists, namely business tourists and leisure tourists, the willingness of recommendation and re-visit is very optimistic. Therefore, some features can be summarized on what indeed attracts Chinese tourists.

It is the found out the attractiveness of Finland for Chinese tourists is in Finnish town or cities that preserve more native atmosphere, rather than Helsinki. For leisure and
business tourists who visit at least two Finnish cities, they argue that they will actively recommend people to visit other cities in Finland. One reason is that other cities or towns in Finland is better preserved the Finnish features than Helsinki. The other reason is that tourist attractions in Helsinki do not properly reflect the uniqueness of Finland as a destination, except Rock church. In this sense, it can also explain why some package tourists complain that after visiting Finland, they still have very unclear image on Finland.

In addition, tourists are attracted by unique experiences and tourism services with nature in Finland, shown in empirical findings. The very Finnish style activities such as sauna and barbeque in summer cottage indeed impress tourists who have experienced it. Those respondents admit that the experiences are pleasant, relaxing and impressive. Considering the great pressure in Chinese daily life, these experiences can moderate the tiredness and stress from their daily life. In the same vein, the nature in Finland is the remarkable destination competitiveness of Finland, which entices Chinese tourists. Some respondents propose that the churches and other architectures between Finland and other European countries seem to be alike, which cannot raise their excitement when visiting them. Nevertheless, they are amazed by great nature, lake scene and good environment in Finland. Therefore, these elements can entice Chinese tourists.

The third sub question is asking what operations destination management organization can do to attract more Chinese tourists. Destination management organizations (DMO) are decisive elements in constituting tourists’ experience in one destination. From the aspects of tour operators, accommodation, transportation as well as tourism related public infrastructure, the performances of destination management organization are evaluated.

First of all, in the aspect of tour operators, journeys in Finland should be arranged more reasonable and time allocation of visit those Nordic trips should be relatively equitable. Interviewees of actual tourists in this research contend that they have over abundant schedules and the whole trip is too hasty. Generally, tour operators assume that Chinese tourists like visiting as many as tourism attraction as possible, and trips are designed to be hurried to meet such demands. However, the empirical finding
shows that the trend has changed gradually. Chinese tourists desire to have an in-depth trip in one exotic destination, since the increasing number of tourists have visited many countries. They start to pay more attention on the quality of trips instead of just pursuing the quantities of tourism attractions that are visited. Moreover, the interviews with actual tourist reflect that the duration of tourists staying in Finland is very short, especially compared with other destination (e.g. Norway and Sweden) in Nordic trip. The imbalance of time allocation in different destinations leads to the insufficient traveling experience in Finland and unimproved destination images from tourists after journeys. Therefore, tour operators should extend the tourism duration for package tourists in Finland and explore more compelling activities and tourism attractiveness to impress tourists.

In the aspect of accommodation, those hotel facilities should be improved and necessary accessories should be considered to add in. Respondents in this research have shared their opinions on the experiences of accommodation. It is found that respondents are satisfied with the service, such as cleanliness of hotel rooms and attitudes of hotel staffs, but they also point out the drawbacks of accommodation, especially on hotel rooms and beds. The conditions of hotels are not as good as that in China. The accessories such as free bottles of water and washing sets should be taken into consideration in order to increase the satisfaction of tourists. Moreover, the accommodation of summer cottage should be developed to Chinese tourists, it can not only offer unique living experience to tourists and but also benefit the branding of Finland, such as connecting Finland with summer cottage experience in tourists’ mind.

In the aspect of transportation, there is a general satisfaction on Finnair due to the great service and onboard facilities. Nevertheless, respondents have divergent opinions on the cruise experience and complain that it is not as good as their expectation. The brand reality has to be emphasized so that cruise companies should convey the reasonable images of themselves, rather than overstate the cruise experience and facilities. In addition to the external transportation, the inner city transportation in Finland, especially in popular tourism cities, needs to be improved. For example, the Next Stop Announcement System inside bus should be used to facilitate tourists who have self-organized expedition, and the mass transit at
weekends in some rush seasons can be more frequent for tourists. As respondents claim, the absences of stops announcement in English in buses bring great inconvenience to international tourists, and tourists have to seek help from bus driver or passengers.

In the aspect of tourism-related public infrastructure, the guideboards and street nameplates in English are very necessarily added, especially in main tourism cities. Similar to the condition of lacking bus stop announcement in English, the absence of street nameplate in English brings language barriers to tourists who have independent trips in Finland. Under this circumstance, it is suggested that guideboards that point to the directions of main tourism attractions can be set. For example, from the city center of main train stations, the guideboard can be built to show through what directions tourists can arrive to specific tourism attractions. By setting guideboard and street nameplates in English, it is beneficial to tourists who have the sightseeing by walking. The popular tourism destination such as Japan applies to the same approach and attracts more backpack travelers. In addition, more public lavatory should be built near main tourism attractions in Finland. As it shows, the complaints consist of the scarcity of public lavatory for large group of package tourists, the occasional odor and expensive charges from public lavatory. In this sense, the tourism-related public infrastructure can be improved especially in this aspect. In order to clarify the key points on what operations that Destination management organization (DMO) can do to attract more Chinese tourists, the Table 3 is made to summarize those ideas.

Table 3. Summary of the answers to sub question 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMO</th>
<th>Measures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tour operators</td>
<td>• Extend the tourism duration in Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rationalize the time allocation in different Nordic destinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explore compelling activities and tourism attractiveness in Finland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Accommodation | • Improve facilities and offer necessary accessories (e.g. washing sets)  
|               | • Develop summer cottages as accommodation to tourists |
| Transportation | • (External transportation)  
|               | Create reasonable expectations to tourists, avoid exaggerating onboard facilities  
|               | • (Inner city transportation)  
|               | Increase the frequency of mass transit at weekends in rush tourism season in main tourism cities  
|               | Use the Next Stop Announcement System in English |
| Tourism related public infrastructure | • Build more public lavatory in main tourism areas with low charges to tourists  
|                                           | • Build the English guideboards and street nameplates that show directions to main tourism attractiveness |

After answering all of those sub questions, the main research question can be solved. The question is:

*How Finland can be branded effectively toward Chinese tourists?*

To start with, the channels of branding directly to Chinese tourists can be more diverse. It is recognized that tourists tend to search for the destination information through Internet and online travel forums as a top priority, thus tour promoters can get use of those platforms to popularize Finland. To be more specific, tour promoters can edit and add more detailed introduction and photos to those main tourism attractions, as well as those attractions that are relatively unknown to the public. Tourism promoters can enrich the information especially in some popular online travel forums in China, such as Qyer and Mafengwo. It is highlighted that the introduction of Finland in those online travel forums should not solely rely on the travelling experience shared by visitors who have been there, since the majority of tourists are not familiar with Finland and only visit the attractions that are famous. As the empirical finding shows, the online information concentrates on Helsinki and Rovaniemi only, and the tourism information on other places in Finland are unavailable and limited. Nevertheless, there are many tourism attractions that are worthwhile to explore in Finland. Therefore, the role of tour promoters to enhance
the destination’s introduction of Finland in those travel forums become necessary and significant.

Next, the content of branding Finland can be expanded, rather than restrict to Helsinki and Lapland. In terms of Finnish cities, many cities are worthy of tourism development and branding. To be more specific, Tampere, Turku, Porvoo, Kemi and Savonlinna can be considered to popularize to potential Chinese tourists as prospective destinations in Finland. Many thematic travel can be initiated and branded. For instance, Särkänniemi Amusement Park in Tampere can be marketed as the tourism attractiveness for family trip, young couples and students. The observation tower inside the amusement park can be branded focally to tourists who desire to have a bird eye view of typical Finnish scenery. Moreover, for historic and culture trip, Luostarinmäki Handicrafts Museum in Turku, Kansallismuseo and Ateneum in Helsinki can be branded to potential tourists. For tourists who want to have enjoy nature and native life, Porvoo and Savonlinna should be branded. Considering that Finland is not a popular and familiar destination to Chinese tourists, branding Finland in a broader extent can accumulate the knowledge of Finland and offer prospective tourists more choices.

Thirdly, the psychological link between potential Chinese tourists with Finland as a destination should be built. Tour promoters should endeavor to conduct destination branding of “Relaxation”, “Cool summer” and raise tourists’ emotional link with Finland. Currently, the fast paces of modern life in large cities of China not only increase the purchasing power of Chinese citizens, but also bring pressure on them. Chinese tourists start to pursue a relaxing and worthwhile trip to unwind. Considering the hot and wet summer in some cities in China, it will be a potential chance for Finland to attract Chinese tourists to have a comfortable and refreshing summer trip. Therefore, building the emotional link and rooting key word such as relaxation and cool summer in consumers’ mind can be the focus on branding Finland, despite of the long-term efforts needed.

Last but not least, the cooperation with destination management organization can be strengthened for the effective destination branding of Finland. It is aware that organic channels are the most influencing tool to form the destination image and attract
perspective tourists to come. Organic channel is represented by experience sharing with friends. Thus, the quality of trips in Finland needs to be emphasized, guaranteed and improved in order to have a good reputation when the message is conveyed by word of mouth. It requires the cooperation with travel agencies in China and tour promoters of Finland. On the basis of fully exploring the destination competitiveness by tour promoters, the attractive schedules can be designed with joint efforts. Currently Finnish tour promoters regard winter trip and northern light as the key competitiveness, and branding Helsinki and Lapland as crucial content. However, as is shown above, there are more aspects can be branded. In addition, collective destination branding can be strengthened depending on the time and occasions. For instance, Finnish tourism bureau can cooperate with Finnair to distribute the brochures that introduces Finnish tourism resources and contact information of those local tourism activities suppliers. It is found out that when tourists depart from homeland and head to the destination, the tourists’ interests of knowing Finland get stronger so that branding will be more efficient onboard.

5.2 Findings and theoretical implications

The study contributes to the tourism development in Finland and destination branding in tourism research field. Based on the understanding of previous academic achievements and new findings in the empirical parts, a new model is proposed in this thesis, since the research is abductive by nature.

As shown in Figure 7, the destination branding is a cyclic process, constituted by two parts. To start with, the destination branding participants convey messages to perspective tourists, based on the destination images that are hoped to deliver to targeted groups and the destination competitiveness that are recognized by message senders, shown with blue arrow. Gradually, tourists are attracted to visit destinations that are branded. In the second phase, tourists generate their own images and understanding on the destination by their experience and observance during their actual visiting, as shown in yellow arrow. In this process, tourists become cognizant of the features of the destination by comparing with previous tourism experiences in other destination, and it can be reflected by either the uniqueness or characterless. Destination management organizations get involved in both the first phase and the
current phase. In this period, destination management organization have direct impact on tourists’ experiences of trips, which form the judgment of the destination and brand reality. The extent of brand reality leads to the different behavioral intentions of tourists. If the actual tourism experiences are inconsistent with the expectation and the perceived destination images, it leads to the negative behavioral intentions, recognized by willingness of recommendation and re-visiting. The second phase of destination branding is mainly carried out by Word of Mouth, represented by travelling experience sharing on destinations. Destination images are established in the minds of listeners who are unfamiliar with the destination, as well as its competitiveness. In the second phase, the destination branding is more powerful since it largely influences potential tourists’ action and decision on destination visiting. In this sense, the process of destination branding is recurring.

Figure 7. Model of destination branding process.
This model contributes to the study of destination branding filed in four aspects. First, it acknowledges the effect of Word-of-mouth in popularizing and branding a place, especially in tourism industry. Many previous scholars have confirmed that the influence of this channel is dominant and powerful (Gallarza et al. 2002; Beerli and Martin 2004, Gover et al. 2007) in dissimilating information about destinations. In this research, the interview data also verify the great importance of this channel. Second, the model helps to re-consider the concept of destination branding. In existed researches, the destination branding is regarded as the marketing activities launched by tour promoters (Blain et al. 2005). However, it is found out that the tourists who visit the destination play the undeniable role in conveying messages that can raise emotional response, expectation, and establish the destination image for those who have not visit the same destination. Those elements mentioned as emotional response, expectation and image are key contents in the definitions of designation branding proposed by Blain et al. 2005. In this sense, the definition of the term can be improved.

In addition, the model attaches the importance of destination management organizations in the branding process. It is proposed that tourists’ local traveling experience is indispensable to the destination management organizations. Destinations and its destination management organization collectively build the destination images in tourists’ mind and exhibit the destination competitiveness to them. At last, the research also shows that destination competitiveness is the crucial component of destination branding, which is overlooked in previous studies.

5.3 Managerial and social contributions

The managerial and social implication lies in the in-depth thoughts shared by tourists on the destination, which offer insights for better and more effective branding on Finland as the destination. In the past, the researches usually apply to questionnaire to collect data, which set certain scales in advance. Respondents finish the forms passively by marking the choice that is most near to their thoughts. In this research, tourists are encouraged to express their their viewpoints on tourism attractions and sightseeing experience just after their visiting, so that the ideas are very fresh and clear. When the confusions are raised, the researcher can pose further questions to
tourists, so that detailed explanations can be get and misunderstandings can be avoided. Those viewpoints from actual tourists can make tour promoters realize how visitors think about the destination and what can be developed further to attract tourists, which is beneficial to the next action.

Moreover, the thesis gets the information on how destination branding is currently conducted by practitioners in destination branding. The opinions from practitioners can be compared with the opinions acquired from visitors. Thus, the suggestions to improve the current destination branding can be achieved. For instance, the destination branding of Finland can shift attention to other cities in Finland and have different tourism themes. To be more specific, the cities such as Porvoo, Tampere, Turku can be branded and developed for tourism purpose. Helsinki and Lapland are not only choices for tourists to come. In addition, many resources in summer can be used to attract tourists, so tour promoters should not focus on Santa Clause village and northern light in winter trip only.

In short, the thesis enlarges the content on what can be branded in Finnish tourism industry, and testify the effect of former destination branding channel. Moreover, the research finds solutions on how to brand the destination more effectively.

5.4 Reliability and validity of the research

Reliability and validity can be understood as the extent of “trustworthiness, rigor and quality” in one qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003: 604). In this research, the methodology on how to obtain the data is fully elaborated, and the researcher make the analysis based on the empirical data that is collected. Thus, the reliability and validity can be tested as follows.

Validity is commonly divided into internal validity and external validity (Merrian, 1995). External validity seeks to figure out the extent on how generalizable the results of the current research to the later work (Yin, 1989: 43). In order to answer this question, Merrian (1995) suggest that using think description can improve the external validity of the research, which means offering readers the enough illustration and description about the phenomenon and let them judge research
findings with the reality. In this report, the respondents are selected randomly, including tourists with different purpose, namely business tourists, leisure tourists and package tourists. Under this circumstance, it avoids the possibility of single tourists’ type to speak dominantly and further induce unilateral views on the research questions. In this sense, the external validity can be guaranteed.

As for the internal validity, scholars have different views on measuring it. Yin (1989: 43) contends that it is limited to “causal or explanatory studies” that testing how factor X resulting to factor Y. Under this circumstance, the internal validity cannot be tested in this research, since no casual relationship is studied. Nevertheless, Merriam (1995:54) argues that internal validity is about how consistent the theoretical frameworks and researchers’ measuring and observing, in other words, “the notion of reality”. If this research applies to Merriam’s (1995) view on internal validity, the research guarantees the internal validity by triangulation approach. This research gets use of various sources of data to reach internal validity, by interviewing different kinds of tourists, staffs in destination branding institutions and collecting secondary data.

The reliability of the research refers to the repeatability of a study in order to get the same results (Merriam, 1995). One method to achieve reliability, according to Yin (1989: 45), is to clarify each step with lucidity and to implement the study just as someone watch over it. In this study, the researcher elaborates carefully on how the data is acquired with details and negotiates with the supervisor about the research on a regular basis. In this sense, the reliability of the research can be ensured to some extent. Despite of it, scholars point out the limitations of qualitative research on the reliability, arguing that the assumption of reliability is to reach same result with a recurrent approach, while “measurement and observations can be repeatedly wrong, especially where human beings are involved” (Merriam 1995:55). Fundamentally, the objective of the qualitative research is to generate understandings (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). It should not be narrowly focus on having same results, rather, it should be regarded as having two explications to the phenomenon (Merriam, 1995).
5.5 Limitations and suggestions for future study

This thesis is completed by 12 data that in composed with different types of tourists and practitioners in Finnish Tourism Bureau. The interview data offers relatively comprehensive viewpoints from different groups of people. However, the amount of interview data is still relatively limited, which may effect the generalizability to some extent. For instance, the question related to induced marketing channels may have different answers. From the current interview data, most of the interviewees claim that they do not get in touch with marketing materials that from Finnish Tourism Bureau. However, the effect of induced marketing channels may appear, if there are abundant respondents to participate in the research.

The future research can shift attention to the field of destination branding through individuals. Currently the research on destination branding is organizational focus, but this study finds that branding of a destination relies heavily on people, such as communication with acquaintances. In this sense, the future research can explore further on how to get use of tourism information disseminated by individuals to accomplish destination branding. Moreover, the other direction of future research is the relationship of destination competitiveness and destination branding, since it is regarded as separate research field before this study.
REFERENCES


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Interview questions to Chinese tourists

1. Describe your traveling experience
   1) How long do you stay in Finland?
   2) What cities do you visit?

2. Destination management organizations
   1) Are there any activities or sightseeing experiences in those cities that impress you?
   2) In the aspects of activities, the hotels, the restaurants in those cities, what are your comments?
   3) When you are in Finland (e.g. Helsinki, Tampere), how do you feel their public infrastructure generally?
   4) How about other public infrastructure?

3. Destination image and destination branding
   1) Before you visit Finland, through what channels do you know about it?
   2) What is your image before you come Finland?
   3) After you arrive Finland, is there a huge gap between your expectation and the reality, and in what aspects?
   4) As a visitor to Finland, how does this country make you feel (e.g. excited, relaxed, fascinated)?

4. Destination competitiveness
   1) What are the fundamental reasons that motivate you to travel here?
   2) How do you feel about Finland in general, as well as those Finnish cities you have visited? What characteristics do they have in your eyes?
   3) Compared to the other countries you have visited before, do you think there are some similar or unique parts between Finland and other countries? In what aspects?
5. How do you choose travel agencies? Why do you decide to pay for this journey package finally? (The question targets to package tourists only)

6. Brand loyalty or behavioral intention
   1) If your friends and relatives ask about your travel experience, are you willing to recommend them to have the same journey as you have? What will you recommend to them?
   2) Are you willing to travel in Finland again? What do you want to experience in Finland next time?

APPENDIX 2

Interview questions to staffs in destination branding institutions

1. When does Finland Tourism Bureau start to market and brand Finland as a destination toward Chinese tourists, and through what channels?

2. Are there any differences or specific focus in the aspect of contents in those different channels, or are the contents same in those channels?

3. What is the effect of popularizing Finland through those channels, and can it be reflected by data?

4. As a tourism related practitioner, how do you regard Finland? Compared to other countries or destinations, what are the competitive advantages of Finland as a tourism destination?

5. What is the destination image of Finland in your eyes?

6. Do Finland Tourism Bureau cooperate with other corporations (e.g. travel agency, transportation companies, hotels) to execute marketing campaigns about Finland together? Can you introduce what cooperation current is ongoing?