

The influence of perceived cultural distance on Chinese tourists' travel intention to Malaysia: The mediating roles of perceived risk and personality traits



Yanan Cai, Ahmad Azmi Mohd. Ariffin *

UKM-Graduate School of Business, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 November 2024

Received in revised form

7 April 2025

Accepted 28 April 2025

Keywords:

Belt and road initiative

Travel intention

Perceived cultural distance

Tourism development

China-Malaysia relations

ABSTRACT

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has enhanced Malaysia-China cooperation, boosting trade and tourism, yet limited research examines the factors influencing Chinese tourists' travel intentions toward Malaysia, particularly from a perceived cultural distance (PCD) perspective. This study integrates the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to propose a novel model analyzing how perceived cultural distance (PCD), perceived risk (PR), and personality traits shape travel intention (TI). Focusing on Chinese tourists' willingness to visit Malaysia, the study employs PLS-SEM to analyze survey data, aiming to (1) establish a new theoretical framework in travel intention research, (2) pioneer the combined application of S-O-R and SDT theories, and (3) offer practical insights to strengthen Sino-Malaysian tourism.

© 2025 The Authors. Published by IASE. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Tourism constitutes an essential component of the global economy, exerting a profound and significant positive influence on both the global economy and society at large. This is achieved through the generation of economic benefits, the promotion of diversity in recreational and cultural activities, and the creation of a substantial number of employment opportunities (Long et al., 2021). As economic globalization and international commerce have increased, tourism has become one of the leading industries in terms of international business in the world (Long et al., 2021).

As one of the largest outbound markets, China has drawn global attention. According to the China Tourism Administration's 2019 report, before the COVID-19 outbreak, nearly 155 million Chinese residents traveled abroad in 2019. Moreover, China has been the largest spender in the world for many years. Undoubtedly, Chinese tourists have become one of the most popular groups in the global market, with every destination market competing for them (Bi and Gu, 2019). With the proposal of the BRI,

Malaysia and China have built strong collaboration and significant development prospects for tourism and trade (Cao et al., 2022). China is ranked as the third largest tourist-generating country in Malaysia (MTPB, 2021). Within the Asia region, Malaysia has become identified as one of the most popular destinations for its convenient transportation, affordable prices, and friendly visa procedures (Cham et al., 2021). However, Malaysia is facing intense competition, especially from Singapore and Thailand, which are the main competitors for Chinese tourists, as well as the two key players in South East Asia's tourism industry (Cham et al., 2021). Maintaining and attracting Chinese tourists is crucial for Malaysia's future strategic tourism plans (Cao et al., 2022). Despite the enormous opportunities and importance of the Chinese outbound travel market, the volume of existing systematic or structural research on the travel intention and behavior of Chinese tourists to Malaysia, in particular, is considered very small, insufficient, and less systematic.

Chinese tourists often behave differently from international tourists because Chinese culture is significantly distinct from others (Liu et al., 2019). Therefore, to attract more Chinese tourists, researching the cultural logic behind their travel patterns, behaviors, and preferences is significant (Liu et al., 2019). Malaysia is proud of its diverse ethnicities, which comprise the original Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other minority ethnicities. Among those groups, the Chinese account for 23

* Corresponding Author.

Email Address: aama@ukm.edu.my (A. A. M. Ariffin)

<https://doi.org/10.21833/ijaas.2025.05.005>

Corresponding author's ORCID profile:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6204-8304>

2313-626X/© 2025 The Authors. Published by IASE.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

percent, ranking as the second largest ethnic group, followed by Indians (MTPB, 2021). The cultural affinity between China and Malaysia is perceived as more favorable than that between China and Thailand or Indonesia, owing to the significant Chinese ethnicity in Malaysia (MTPB, 2021). Despite this cultural advantage, Thailand successfully attracts more Chinese tourists than Malaysia (MTPB, 2021). Therefore, cultural distance, the variance between the culture of the destination and the tourist's origin, emerges as a comprehensive theoretical framework to elucidate the cultural influences on tourist behavior (Li and Kwortnik, 2021). Moreover, unlike national-level cultural distance, PCD has shown stronger predictive capability for behavioral outcomes (Li and Kwortnik, 2021). Accordingly, it is intriguing to explore the underlying mechanisms that transform perceived cultural distance into the intention to visit.

The connection between PCD and TI has been extensively discussed in academic literature, with previous studies yielding disparate conclusions: while some suggest a negative relationship, others argue that tourists may be attracted to destinations with exotic cultures (Ng et al., 2007). Ng et al. (2007) proposed that destinations characterized by high cultural distance tend to attract novelty seekers, whereas destinations with greater cultural similarity appeal more to individuals who are averse to uncertainties and risks. These findings illustrate the intricate interplay between perceived cultural distance and travel intentions, which may be mediated by additional factors. In the study by Bi and Gu (2019), the information backed with a theory that suggests cultural distance influences travelers' perceptions of a destination country's novelty and risk in both directions, hence influencing their inclination to travel there. Besides, individuals with distinct personality traits exhibit consistent and discernible behaviors. However, the application of personality traits to elucidate tourists' outbound travel intentions remains a relatively unexplored domain. This research explores the connection between PCD and the inclination of Chinese tourists to travel to Malaysia, analyses the role of PCD, and provides insights into cross-cultural tourism. It

focuses especially on the mediating function of travel perceived risk, as well as explores whether travel personality, as per Plog's (1991) psychographic travel personality framework, moderates these intricate relationships.

In exploring human cognitive behavior within the realm of tourism, researchers have modified the S-O-R model to explore the impact of the external environment on tourists' behavioral intentions by impacting their emotions (Ye et al., 2024). SDT, formulated by Deci and Ryan (2008), serves as a foundational framework for comprehending human development, motivation, and well-being, will be utilized in this study, which aims to identify the mediating factors between perceived risk and actual behavior, to enhance our comprehension of risk cognition, and to furnish guidance for risk management and other policies and perceived novelty may differentially influence the link between PCD and the intention to visit a foreign country (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Accordingly, to enhance the predictive efficacy of theoretical frameworks and gain deeper insights into outbound tourists' intentions, this study integrates the SDT theory and the S-O-R model. By examining tourists' intentions from both affective and cognitive perspectives, this integrated approach seeks to provide a deeper comprehension of the variables affecting tourist behavior.

In order to bridge these gaps aforementioned, this study employs an integrated framework (Fig. 1) to examine the effects of PCD on PR and eventually influence travel intention by using personality as a moderator. The research questions are presented below:

Q1: Does PCD affect TI within the framework of Chinese outbound tourism to Malaysia?

Q2: Does public relations act as a mediator in the relationship between perceived consumer differences and tourism intentions within the framework of Chinese outbound tourism to Malaysia?

Q3: Does personality influence the relationship between PCD and TI within the framework of Chinese outbound tourism to Malaysia?

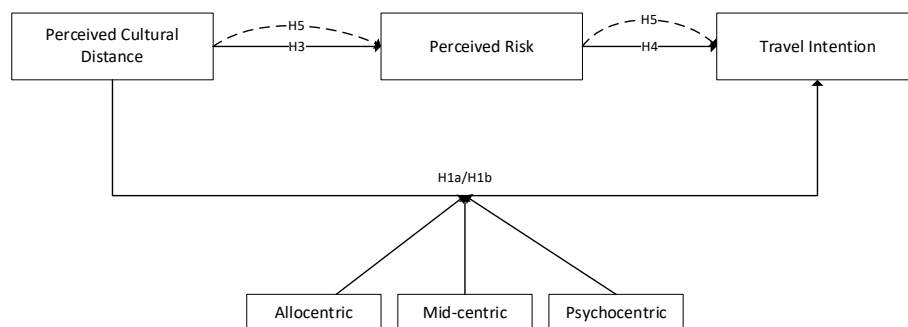


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

This article is organized as follows: Section 1 presents the introduction. Section 2 explains the theoretical background. Section 3 reviews the

relevant literature and develops the hypotheses. Section 4 describes and explains the research

methodology. Finally, Section 5 discusses the implications of the study.

2. Theoretical underpinning

2.1. The S-O-R framework

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed the SOR theory, which analyses and predicts the three stages of consumers' behavioral response to external stimuli. This provides a theoretical basis for marketing and other related fields. The S-O-R model is comprised of the external stimulus (S) as the independent variable, the internal states (O) as mediator variables, and responses (R) as dependent variables (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The framework revealed that with stimulation or a stimulus, the emotions of consumers are formed, which, in turn, evoke changes in the intention and behavior of these consumers.

Within the S-O-R framework, the perceived cultural distance serves as a pivotal 'stimulus' indicator, constituting an integral component of tourists' subjective knowledge. The construct of 'organism' is delineated by perceived risk, which is construed as subjective perceptions inherent to individuals. Perceived risk encompasses the apprehensions and uncertainties associated with the travel experience. Finally, travel intention emerges as the ultimate 'response' within the S-O-R framework, reflecting the culmination of stimulus perception and organismic processes in shaping individuals' predisposition towards visiting Malaysia.

2.2. The self-determination theory

The self-determination theory refers to a foundational structure for comprehending individuals' development, well-being, and motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), motivation can be found along a continuum of self-determination, ranging from autonomous regulation, where actions are aligned with personal values and integrated into one's identity, to controlled regulation, driven by external pressures such as rewards or punishments. At the opposite end of this spectrum lies a motivation, characterized by a lack of intention or desire to engage in activities. In recent years, SDT has been applied effectively across various domains, including consumer behavior and tourism research. Despite the prevalence of SDT in the field of outbound tourism, research exploring the motivational factors underlying this phenomenon remains scarce. This study employs SDT as a framework to conduct a comprehensive analysis of travel intention and address the existing research gap. Cultural diversity is a pivotal factor in travel decisions, preferences, and satisfaction, and serves as a guiding force in tourism planning and service optimization (Li et al., 2024). SDT accommodates these cultural nuances and has been instrumental in

studying motivation, satisfaction, and engagement in tourism. These cultural variations significantly impact tourist behaviors, satisfaction levels, and intentions (Li et al., 2024), as they influence the fulfillment of basic psychological needs. Within the tourism domain, PR is a critical factor influencing travel decisions (Xie et al., 2023). SDT underscores the role of environmental cues and situational variables in shaping self-determined behavior. Understanding how perceived risk interacts with motivational factors can provide insights into tourists' decision-making processes and risk propensity (Xie et al., 2023).

In summary, this paper adopts SDT as a theoretical foundation to investigate the motivational factors—such as PCD, and PR—that drive individuals' intentions to travel abroad.

3. Literature review and hypotheses development

3.1. Summary of the existing literature

International tourism has been paid increasing attention in the literature, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak. Some main works related to outbound travel intention in the last five years have been summarized. Previous reviews have investigated outbound travel intention in terms of various aspects (e.g. travel experience, travel motivation, risk perception, emotions) from psychological, social, and political perspectives (Zhang et al., 2022; Pai et al., 2025). However, very limited studies investigate the impacts of cultural distance on intentions to travel outbound. In the context of an epidemic, risk perception influences travel choices. However, a lack of investigation into individual risk perception hinders the understanding of behavior and the formulation of strategies. Further research is required to support the development of effective policies. In addition, most studies employed some main theoretical frameworks, including the TPB, the S-O-R model, and the motivation theory. However, combining SDT and S-O-R model to investigate outbound travel intentions is still not utilized widely.

Despite that many researchers have selected Chinese tourists as samples of investigation, Chinese tourists' intention to visit Malaysia is left overlooked in most of the previous works. This study addresses a gap in the existing literature on the impact of PCD on Chinese tourists' willingness to travel to Malaysia. It combines S-O-R and SDT, taking travel risk perception as an intermediary, and explores its influence on decision-making. The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of tourism marketing and risk management.

3.2. Hypotheses development

Cultural distance pertains to the assessment of differences between two cultural groups. In the

context of tourism studies, it evaluates how much the cultures of travelers' home nations differ from or align with those of their chosen destinations (Liu et al., 2018). According to previous studies, cultural distance is usually divided into two types: country-level cultural distance (CCD) and perceived cultural distance (PCD) which have been found to define and measure cultural distance differently (Li and Kwortnik, 2021). CCD is a quantitative indicator that is used to measure the extent of differences in cultural norms and customs between two countries. It has a number of important applications in cross-cultural management, international marketing, and other fields, as it helps to facilitate effective communication and cooperation. In the context of tourism, PCD is a concept that defines the extent to which a traveler from one culture perceives a host country's culture to be different (Liu et al., 2018). According to a previous study (Li and Kwortnik, 2021), it has been demonstrated that the PCD construct is more accurate than the CCD in forecasting certain behavioral and psychological outcomes.

Behavioral intention is something that is involved with a person's belief in a specified behavior in a specific situation. The intention to participate in tourism reflects a wish to explore a specific destination at a future date. This intention is influenced by various factors, which can aid the tourism sector in gauging demand levels and developing strategies for promoting tourism growth (Zhang et al., 2022). It has been proven to be greatly important because the intention to travel correlates with travel behavior significantly and substantially (Khan et al., 2019). When examining the connection between travel intentions and cultural distance, numerous conflicting assertions have emerged in previous studies. One point mentioned that for potential travelers, the great cultural distance is anticipated to offer chances to explore rich and distinctive culture, history, and heritage. As Bi and Gu (2019) illustrated, the destinations, whose culture is more different from the one of tourists' origin area, are more attractive. To put it another way, individuals are motivated to experience novel and different stimuli and surroundings. Under this premise, the different culture is a motivator or facilitator to travel to some specific places for tourists.

In a study conducted by Ng et al. (2007), it was found that cultural differences have an adverse effect on travel intention. The greater the PCD of Australian tourists, the lower their travel intention. Moreover, with regard to international tourism, scholars find that distant cultures induce uncertainty that reduces travelers' outbound travel intentions (Manosuthi et al., 2020). Accordingly, this study proposed the hypotheses as follows:

H1a: PCD positively affects Chinese tourists' travel intention to Malaysia.

H1b: PCD negatively affects Chinese tourists' travel intention to Malaysia.

Personality traits are long-term and inherent psychological characteristics of individuals that influence their perception, thinking, and behavior. The formation of these traits is influenced by various factors, including cultural environment, personal experience, and educational level (Cervone and Pervin, 2022). As personality accounts for individual differences and exhibits a degree of stability, it acts as a dependable indicator for comprehending and anticipating behavior (Li and Kwortnik, 2021). Numerous scholars have proposed that personality significantly affects travelers' behavioral intentions and travel choices based on personality typologies. For instance, employing attitudes as mediators, Kim et al. (2019) revealed that message-personality congruity significantly impacted visit intention. Li and Kwortnik (2021) argued that individuals with different personalities may express diverse desires for otherness, which is referred to as a change of environment. Plog (1991) the pioneer of tourist personality study, created the tourist psychographic system to explain why certain types of travelers are drawn to particular areas, such as the fact that adventures are always driven by personal curiosity and a desire to try new things.

In tourism research, particularly, Plog's (1991) travel personality scale has served as a prominent theoretical framework for assessing travelers' personalities (Hung et al., 2024). This scale provides a structured approach to categorizing individuals based on their travel motivations and preferences, offering valuable insights into how personality traits influence travel-related decisions and experiences. By incorporating personality assessments into tourism studies, researchers can better comprehend the various motivations and actions displayed by tourists, thereby informing the development of targeted marketing strategies and tailored travel experiences. Plog's (1991) psychographic model, recognized as the pioneering tourist psychographic system, has gained widespread use in the context of tourism (Bayarsaikhan et al., 2020; Hung et al., 2024). The preliminary model is divided into five types of personality: Psychological center, proximity psychology, middle (balance), proximity, and allocentricity. These reflect the differences in internal and external attention of individuals and demonstrate the diversity of personality characteristics (Plog, 1991). However, Plog (1991) simplified these classifications into three primary categories: Psychocentric, mid-centric allocentric, and allocentric. According to this model, allocentric travelers also referred to as venturers by Plog (1991), exhibit a propensity for seeking novelty, adventure, and independence. Travelers with this personality type prefer unfamiliar, exotic, and unique travel products or destinations (Bayarsaikhan et al., 2020). In contrast, those with a psychological focus tend to eschew uncertainty, adhere to the prevailing trend, and prioritize familiarity over the reduction of risk. This reflects a conservative and stable approach to travel choices (Hung et al., 2024). Middle-center travellers tend to

prefer moderate, well-known locations that offer a balance between seeking new experiences and maintaining a risk-averse market position (Kim et al., 2019). To be specific, regarding outbound tourism, tourists who avoid risk and uncertainty may be attracted to destinations with less perceived cultural distance; in contrast, places with more perceived cultural distance may be more appealing to those who seek novelty. In accordance with the model, Hung et al. (2024) discovered that individuals exhibiting heart-to-heart traits demonstrate a proclivity for cruise tours. Furthermore, personality exerts a pronounced influence on travel emotions and intentions, thereby regulating the relationship between crowding perception and travel intentions.

H2a: Allocentric tendencies moderate the association between PCD and TI among Chinese tourists.

H2b: Mid-centric serves as a mediator in the relationship between PCD and TI among Chinese travelers.

H2c: Psychocentric factors influence the correlation between PCD and TI among Chinese travelers.

Perceived risk: Risk refers to the exposure to the potential loss or the chance to experience injury or loss, a hazard or danger (Bi and Gu, 2019). The concept of perceived risk can be defined as the personal concerns that consumers hold regarding the potential risks and adverse consequences that may arise from purchasing a product. These concerns have been demonstrated to significantly influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Jahari et al., 2023). The nature of tourism services gives rise to a heightened sense of personal risk for tourists, prompting previous studies to accord greater attention to perceived risks than to objective risks (Jahari et al., 2023). Therefore, perceived risk will be investigated in this paper as an organism since it aims to explore outbound travel intentions from an individual-level perspective.

Based on previous studies, when individuals enter an unfamiliar culture, they might suffer miscommunications, friction, animosity, and even cultural conflict, which could enhance perceived risk. For instance, Li and Kwortnik (2021) pointed out that perceived cultural similarity positively influences reducing perceived travel risk in the context of culture. Similarly, Bi and Gu (2019) found that the risk perception of tourists about a potential destination was positively correlated with their PCD. In addition, scholars have investigated that the Chinese are more sensitive to potential loss in travel domains, and Chinese tourists with more similarity with potential destination will perceive less travel risk (Li and Kwortnik, 2021). Therefore, the hypothesis was proposed:

H3: PCD significantly positively affects Chinese tourists' perceived risk.

Regarding tourism, some previous research has provided strong support for the significant influence of risk perception on travel intention or action (Kim et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023). For example, Nguyen et al. (2023) suggested that in the tourism field, the perception of risk is one of the factors considered when making a decision whether or not to visit a destination. Specifically, Zhang et al. (2022) verified that cognitive and affective risk perceptions, which are two dimensions of risk perception, negatively influence intentions to travel abroad. Kim et al. (2020) investigated that the public relations response to the protests had an impact on the level of willingness among the public to visit Hong Kong. Thus, the relationship between PR and TI was hypothesized:

H4: Tourists' PR significantly negatively affects Chinese tourists' intention to visit Malaysia.

H5: The public relations efforts targeting tourists serve as a facilitator in the connection between PCD and the intention of Chinese travelers to visit Malaysia.

4. Research methodology

4.1. Research design

This study will primarily adopt a deductive approach and utilize a cross-sectional research method to investigate the relationship between PCD, PR, and Chinese tourists' intention to travel to Malaysia. PLS-SEM, a causal-prediction data analysis technique, was utilized to test the hypothesized relationships in this explanatory study.

4.2. Questionnaire development

A structured questionnaire was utilized to examine the hypotheses developed in this study. Responses were assessed utilizing a five-point Likert scale, spanning from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). To ensure validity and reliability, each measurement item adopted from a previously examined and validated instrument (Table 1) was altered to match the background of this investigation.

The questionnaire comprises a series of questions pertaining to factors such as age and gender. In order to ensure the accuracy and readability of the Chinese expressions used by respondents, the questionnaire is translated back into English. Six professionals who had mastered both Chinese and English were appointed to take the pretest to avoid significant cross-cultural differences. According to their opinions, some of the wording was changed. Subsequently, the questionnaire was submitted to Chinese experts for review and verification of linguistic consistency. A preliminary trial involving 30 samples was conducted to assess the questionnaire's validity and reliability.

4.3. Measurement Development

4.3.1. Perceived cultural distance

Perceived cultural distance, as elucidated by [Sharma and Wu \(2015\)](#), denotes the degree to which individuals from one cultural background perceive those from other cultures as distinct in terms of ethnicity, nationality, language, values, and customs. Previous research has highlighted accommodation, hygiene, and food as primary determinants shaping tourists' diverse perceptions ([Wei et al., 1989](#)). In contrast to these specific factors, [Fan et al. \(2023\)](#) delved into cultural distance across dimensions encompassing cultural retention, behavioral patterns, and social characteristics.

Furthermore, the concept of perceived cultural distance encapsulates the intricate and multifaceted aspects of cultural divergence, including social norms, values, expectations, beliefs, and behaviors, as investigated by [Yu et al. \(2020\)](#). Consequently, the measurement approach is adapted based on insights gleaned from studies by [Wei et al. \(1989\)](#), [Yu et al. \(2020\)](#), and [Fan et al. \(2023\)](#).

4.3.2. Perceived risk

Perceived risk in the context of consumer behavior pertains to individuals' subjective assessments of potential loss, as outlined by [Park and Tussyadiah \(2017\)](#). Within the tourism domain, risk perception refers to tourists' personalized and subjective evaluations of risks predominantly influencing destination selection and, over time, inter-country tourism flows ([Jahari et al., 2023](#)). Based on previous studies, there are 17 items utilized to examine individuals' risk perceptions toward a region, which were identified from previous studies. Participants had to rate the likelihood that they would encounter certain dangers, such as waste of time, disappointment, and financial loss, in a certain country.

Moreover, [Bi and Gu \(2019\)](#) classified those items into three main risks—accident risk, adaptation risk, and result risk—to examine how cultural distance impacts international tourists' intentions to visit a destination country. Consequently, the measurement instruments for assessing risk perception were adapted from [Bi and Gu \(2019\)](#). Participants will be tasked with rating the likelihood of encountering various risks while in Malaysia.

4.3.3. Personality

The concept of personality traits, as defined by [Lee and Tseng \(2015\)](#), encompasses the combination of characteristics or qualities that shape an individual's unique character. [Plog's \(1991\)](#) personality model categorizes these traits into three primary classifications: Psychocentric, mid-centric, and allocentric, as expounded by [Bayarsaikhan et al. \(2020\)](#). There are 15 items derived from [Plog's](#)

(1991) psychographic index will be used to measure personality on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) using 15 items adapted from [Plog's \(1991\)](#) psychographic index; this scale has been widely utilized in this field of study ([Bayarsaikhan et al., 2020](#)). In the index, the overall score spans from 0 to 75: 15–42 is considered psychocentric, 43–51 is considered midcentric, and 51 and above is considered allocentric ([Bayarsaikhan et al., 2020](#)). Midcentric is not considered a moderator in this study. Therefore, the score will focus on psychocentric and allocentric. Consequently, the measurement items for assessing personality traits are drawn from the framework proposed by [Bayarsaikhan et al. \(2020\)](#).

4.3.4. Travel intention

Behavioral intention signifies a person's intention to engage in a specific behavior in the future ([Khan et al., 2019](#)). Within the realm of travel and tourism studies, travel intention pertains to the probability of tourists embarking on a journey to a specific destination within a certain period, as elucidated by [Khan et al. \(2019\)](#). Consequently, the measurement items for assessing travel intention are adapted and refined from the scales utilized by [Khan et al. \(2019\)](#).

4.4. Sampling design and data collection

Given the specific focus of this study on international travel, the target population is delineated as Chinese citizens with a propensity for international travel. This research investigates the travel choices and spending behaviors of Chinese individuals aged 18 and older, with the objective of contributing to the development of tourism. In order to qualify as the respondent, the individual must meet specific criteria:

1. The individual must have heard about Malaysia but never visited Malaysia before;
2. The participant must voluntarily travel internationally.

According to the rule of thumb, this study employs a minimum of 350 samples to establish representative samples. In addition, considering the recommendation to increase the necessary sample size by 10 to 30 percent to compensate for non-response and other limitations, such as budget and time, it is appropriate for this study to distribute at least 455 (350×1.3) questionnaires during the data collection.

Moreover, this study employs a purposive sampling method because the researcher selects respondents only based on their attributes or experiences with the elements suitable for analyzing the effect of this study ([Hair et al., 2021](#)). The distribution of the survey will be conducted at three main contact points. Firstly, the respondents will be approached by the interviewers at the departure halls of Beijing Capital International Airport (BCIA).

As one of the major airports in the region, BCIA is frequented by tourists and travelers from all over the world and therefore, can be considered a perfect field for data collection for most tourism-related studies. Even though this study is not specifically related to air travel behavior, collecting data from tourists at the airports is highly recommended to gain tourists from China. The airport's departure hall is the final contact point and the tourism experiences are still fresh in their minds to recall for the purpose

of the survey. Secondly, the data will also be collected at selected main tourist attractions around the city centre such as the Palace Museum where the tourists have ample time to respond to the survey. The questionnaire survey will be personally administered to each respondent to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the questionnaires. Finally, data collection will be conducted online by sharing the survey link to WeChat and offline by distributing the questionnaires.

Table 1: Survey instrument

| Variable | Operational definition | No. of items | Sample of items | Reference |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------|--|--|
| Perceived cultural distance | It is the notion of the degree to which a person from one culture views the culture of a host country as distinct (Liu et al., 2018). | 11 | PCD1. The civilization level is very different from mine. | Wei et al. (1989), Yu et al. (2020), and Fan et al. (2023) |
| Perceived risk | Perceived risk refers to an expectation of a potential loss related to inevitable uncertainty in the buying of a product or service (Jahari et al., 2023). | 17 | PR1. Your friend worries about safety if you were in Malaysia | Bi and Gu (2019) |
| Personality | The concept of personality trait encompasses the combination of inner attributes and traits that shape a person's unique character (Cervone and Pervin, 2022) | 15 | PER1: When making a purchase, I often buy a new product rather than the popular one. | Bayarsaikhan et al. (2020) |
| Travel intention | It is the tourists' likelihood to travel to a specific destination within a certain period (Khan et al., 2019). | 5 | INT1. I am planning to visit Malaysia in the next three years | Khan et al. (2019) |

4.5. Reliability and validity

Conducting a reliability test on a scale is crucial to guaranteeing the precision and consistency of measurements, devoid of bias across different samples or temporal frames (Sekaran and Bougie, 2019). In this research, reliability assessment will entail employing Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability measures, as recommended by Hair et al. (2021).

The validity of the measurement scale guarantees that the findings obtained by the tool represent the idea of interest accurately (Hair et al., 2021). Two popular methods of validity testing employed to assess the quality of an instrument in the context of business and social science research are content validity and construct validity. The relationship between the measuring items and the relevant construct is qualitatively evaluated by judges, experts, and pre-tests with several subpopulations, and this process is known as content validity (Hair et al., 2021). Content validity is the first step to determining the correlation between the measuring items and the construct. Construct validity is connected to the extent to which a group of items measures what they aim to measure. It measures the degree of systematic or non-random error freedom among the measurement items. Construct validity is evaluated via convergent validity, which suggests that the measuring items of a certain construct should share or converge a large proportion of variance in common (Hair et al., 2021).

4.6. Data analysis method

This research will utilize PLS-SEM to examine the data, given that it is exploratory in nature and presents challenges related to non-normality (Hair

et al., 2021). Moreover, this study i) evaluates a theoretical model from a prediction standpoint and includes ii) many indicators and paths (Hair et al., 2021), making it suitable for employing PLS-SEM. As outlined by Hair et al. (2021), this study is structured in two phases. The initial phase is dedicated to the validation and reliability testing of the construct, thereby establishing a robust foundation for subsequent analyses, and the second phase will deal with testing the relationships and examining the paths of the model, including measurement models, structural model, hypotheses testing, mediation analysis, moderation, and multi-group analysis. In this study, the bootstrapping procedure will be utilized within the framework of PLS-SEM to assess the mediating relationships outlined in the theoretical model. As highlighted by Hair et al. (2021), PLS-MGA stands out as one of the most recommended methods for exploring moderation across multiple relationships, particularly for examining subgroup heterogeneity. Prior to the implementation of PLS-MGA, MICOM was employed for the assessment of data uniformity, with the objective of ensuring stability and reliability, to provide support for research. Respondents will be categorized into three groups based on different personality traits: (1) allocentric, (2) mid-centric, and (3) psychocentric.

4.7. Structural model and hypotheses testing

The evaluation of the structural model entails assessing several key variables based on standard criteria. These include the blindfolding-based cross-validated redundancy measure Q^2 , the statistical significance and relevance of the path coefficients (β), and coefficient of determination (R^2) (Hair et al., 2021).

Before proceeding to evaluate the structural model, it is imperative to verify that collinearity is not a concern, following a process similar to that of assessing the formative measurement model. Once satisfactory linearity is confirmed, the evaluation shifts to assessing R^2 , which is referred to as the in-sample predictive power. Endogenous latent variables with R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 depict substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively (Hair et al., 2021). Additionally, alongside the coefficient of determination, the f^2 value serves as a criterion for predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2019). As delineated by Hair et al. (2021), effect sizes can be categorized as substantial (≥ 0.35), medium (≥ 0.15), minor (≥ 0.02), and trivial (< 0.02), indicating the functional impact of each specific independent and dependent latent construct. Finally, utilizing a blindfolding procedure, Stone–Geisser Q^2 values are used to assess the predictive relevance of the model. As recommended, Q^2 values exceeding 0.5, 0.25, and 0 respectively denote large, medium, and small predictive relevance of the PLS-path model (Hair et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

This paper developed a model to investigate the variables that influence Chinese travelers' intention to visit Malaysia from a perceived cultural distance perspective. The traditional paper-based surveys will be utilized to collect at least 455 questionnaires.

5.1. Theoretical significance

The study has several noteworthy theoretical significance, shaping a deep understanding of the intricacies surrounding Chinese Mainland tourists' travel intentions to Malaysia.

Firstly, by integrating the SDT and the SOR framework, the research establishes a robust theoretical foundation. This integration allows for a complete exploration of the cognitive processes and behavioral responses triggered by perceived cultural distance. Bridging individual psychological factors with environmental stimuli, the study provides a holistic perspective on the decision-making mechanisms of Chinese Mainland tourists.

A distinctive contribution lies in the study's approach to cultural distance. Unlike traditional approaches relying on national-based metrics, this research focuses on individual perceptions. This shift acknowledges Malaysia's multicultural identity and the significant Chinese ethnic population within its borders. The study pioneers a personalized cultural perception lens, enriching the cultural distance literature and emphasizing the importance of tailored strategies in tourism marketing.

Furthermore, the introduction of perceived risk as a mediating variable enhances the theoretical model. This conceptual extension elucidates the cognitive processes by which perceived cultural distance influences the perception of travel risk, subsequently influencing the intent to travel. This

addition clarifies a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms at play, shedding light on the nuanced decision-making dynamics of Chinese Mainland tourists.

Plog's (1991) psychographic travel personality framework adds another layer of sophistication to the study. By investigating how travel personality moderates the relationships within the theoretical model, the study acknowledges the importance of individual variations. This contribution advances the understanding of how personal traits may shape the strength and nature of associations between PCD and TI.

In conclusion, the study's theoretical contributions are multifaceted, encompassing the integration of established theories, nuanced exploration of cultural distance, introduction of perceived risk as mediator, examination of the moderating role of travel personality, application to the Belt and Road Initiative context, and the provision of empirical evidence for multicultural settings. These contributions collectively contribute to a complete understanding of the variables affecting Chinese Mainland travelers' intentions to visit Malaysia.

5.2. Managerial significance

The findings of this study assist Malaysian tourism managers in developing an understanding of the tourism market and consumer behavior, enabling them to refine their strategies and services and promote the growth of tourism.

First, one of the primary managerial significance lies in the detailed understanding of individual perceptions of cultural distance among Chinese Mainland tourists. The findings from this study would suggest how Tourism Malaysia should adopt a culturally tailored approach in its marketing materials. Managers can leverage this insight to make informed decisions on content creation, ensuring that marketing materials resonate with the diverse cultural backgrounds of the target audience. This cultural tailoring not only enhances the emotional connection with potential visitors but also aligns marketing strategies with the cultural preferences of the Chinese Mainland market.

Second, the study underscores the significance of addressing perceived risks, particularly related to cultural differences and safety concerns. Managers at Tourism Malaysia can use this information to proactively develop and implement risk mitigation strategies. By incorporating messaging in marketing campaigns that emphasizes safety and cultural accommodation, managers can mitigate potential concerns and create a positive perception of Malaysia as a secure and welcoming destination. This proactive approach enhances the overall attractiveness of the destination, aligning with managerial goals of increasing visitation and positive brand perception.

Third, the recognition of travel personality as a moderating factor provides managers with a

valuable tool for enhancing the appeal of Tourism Malaysia. By acknowledging and catering to diverse travel personalities, managers can strategically personalize travel packages, activities, and services. This contributes to a more inclusive and satisfying experience for Chinese Mainland tourists, aligning with managerial objectives of encouraging positive word-of-mouth recommendations, as well as repeat visits. The study's insights provide a foundation for managers to design and implement personalized strategies that resonate with different segments of the target market.

Fourth, the study's application to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) context highlights the managerial opportunity to align marketing strategies with broader geopolitical initiatives. Managers at Tourism Malaysia can strategically position the destination within the BRI framework, showcasing its cultural richness and collaborative efforts with other BRI destinations. This alignment enhances the destination's appeal and supports managerial goals of fostering a unified and culturally diverse travel experience. Collaborative initiatives within the BRI context can elevate Tourism Malaysia's standing in the eyes of Chinese Mainland tourists, contributing to increased visitation.

List of abbreviations

| | |
|----------------|--|
| BRI | Belt and Road Initiative |
| PCD | Perceived cultural distance |
| PR | Perceived risk |
| TI | Travel intention |
| S-O-R | Stimulus-organism-response |
| SDT | Self-determination theory |
| PLS-SEM | Partial least squares structural equation modeling |
| TPB | Theory of planned behavior |
| CCD | Country-level cultural distance |
| PER | Personality |
| INT | Intention |
| BCIA | Beijing Capital International Airport |
| MICOM | Measurement invariance of composite models |
| PLS-MGA | Partial least squares multi-group analysis |
| Q ² | Stone-Geisser Q-squared value |
| R ² | Coefficient of determination |
| f ² | Effect size |

Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the anonymity of their responses. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. The survey data were collected and analyzed in a manner that safeguarded confidentiality and respected the privacy of all participants.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Bayarsaikhan T, Kim ST, and Gim THT (2020). International tourists' destination choice differences according to Plog's personality types: Analyzing the case of Mongolia based on the recreation opportunity spectrum. *International Journal of Urban Sciences*, 24(4): 485-515.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/12265934.2020.1771195>
- Bi J and Gu C (2019). Cultural distance and international tourists' intention to visit a destination. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 24(8): 839-849.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2019.1635503>
- Cao Z, Xu H, and Xian BTS (2022). Chinese tourists in Malaysia: An analysis of spatio-temporal behavior based on tourism digital footprints. *IEEE Access*, 10: 122047-122060.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2022.3217916>
- Cervone D and Pervin LA (2022). *Personality: Theory and research*. John Wiley and Sons, Hoboken, USA.
- Cham TH, Lim YM, Sia BC, Cheah JH, and Ting H (2021). Medical tourism destination image and its relationship with the intention to revisit: A study of Chinese medical tourists in Malaysia. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 17(2): 163-191.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2020.1734514>
- Deci EL and Ryan RM (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology*, 49(3): 182-185.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012801>
- Fan DX, Qiu H, Jenkins CL, and Lau C (2023). Towards a better tourist-host relationship: The role of social contact between tourists' perceived cultural distance and travel attitude. In: Woosnam KM and Ribeiro MA (Eds.), *Theoretical advancement in social impacts assessment of tourism research*: 15-39. Routledge, London, UK.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003413196-2>
- Hair JF, Hult GTM, Ringle CM, Sarstedt M, Danks NP, and Ray S (2021). *Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using R: A workbook*. Springer Nature, Berlin, Germany. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80519-7>
- Hair JF, Risher JJ, Sarstedt M, and Ringle CM (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review*, 31(1): 2-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2018-0203>
- Hung K, Ren L, and Zhang Y (2024). Can personality influence people's Intention to cruise? The role of personality in Chinese propensity for cruising. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 20(2): 403-429.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2023.2214382>
- Jahari SA, Yang ICM, French JA, and Ahmed PK (2023). COVID-19 and Beyond: Understanding travel risk perception as a process. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 48(3): 449-464.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2021.1937450>
- Khan MJ, Chelliah S, Khan F, and Amin S (2019). Perceived risks, travel constraints and visit intention of young women travelers: The moderating role of travel motivation. *Tourism Review*, 74(3): 721-738.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-08-2018-0116>
- Kim H, Yilmaz S, and Choe Y (2019). Traveling to your match? Assessing the predictive potential of Plog's travel personality in destination marketing. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 36(9): 1025-1036.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2019.1683485>

- Kim MJ, Lee CK, Petrick JF, and Kim YS (2020). The influence of perceived risk and intervention on international tourists' behavior during the Hong Kong protest: Application of an extended model of goal-directed behavior. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 45: 622-632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.11.003>
- Lee TH and Tseng CH (2015). How personality and risk-taking attitude affect the behavior of adventure recreationists. *Tourism Geographies*, 17(3): 307-331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2014.1000955>
- Li Y and Kwortnik R (2021). Chinese tourism to the United States: The role of perceived cultural similarity. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 17(3): 323-340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2020.1781724>
- Li Y, Guo ZQ, Hua HY, and Li W (2024). An empirical analysis of cultural differences in overseas tourism: How do they affect self-determination theory (SDT) needs by age? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 99: 101936. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.101936>
- Liu H, Li XR, Cárdenas DA, and Yang Y (2018). Perceived cultural distance and international destination choice: The role of destination familiarity, geographic distance, and cultural motivation. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 9, 300-309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2018.03.002>
- Liu Y, Huang K, Bao J, and Chen K (2019). Listen to the voices from home: An analysis of Chinese tourists' sentiments regarding Australian destinations. *Tourism Management*, 71: 337-347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.10.004>
- Long F, Aziz NA, and Ngah AH (2021). How does face culture influence Chinese gen y's outbound travel intention? Examining the moderating role of face gaining. *Tourism Review International*, 25(4): 371-384. <https://doi.org/10.3727/154427221X16245632411926>
- Manosuthi N, Lee JS, and Han H (2020). Impact of distance on the arrivals, behaviours and attitudes of international tourists in Hong Kong: A longitudinal approach. *Tourism Management*, 78: 103963. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.103963>
- Mehrabian A and Russell JA (1974). *An approach to environmental psychology*. MIT Press, Cambridge, USA.
- MTPB (2021). *Malaysia tourism statistics*. Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, Putrajaya, Malaysia.
- Ng SI, Lee JA, and Soutar GN (2007). Tourists' intention to visit a country: The impact of cultural distance. *Tourism Management*, 28(6): 1497-1506. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2006.11.005>
- Nguyen HM, Phuc HN, and Tam DT (2023). Travel intention determinants during COVID-19: The role of trust in government performance. *Journal of Innovation and Knowledge*, 8(2): 100341. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2023.100341> **PMid:PMC9884625**
- Pai CK, Guo C, and Chen H (2025). Exploring the factors influencing tourists' outbound travel intentions in the post-COVID-19 era. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 21(1): 133-155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2024.2314222>
- Park S and Tussyadiah IP (2017). Multidimensional facets of perceived risk in mobile travel booking. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(7): 854-867. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287516675062>
- Plog SC (1991). *Leisure travel: Making it a growth market ... again!* John Wiley and Sons, New York, USA.
- Sekaran U and Bougie R (2019). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach*. 8th Edition, John Wiley and Sons, Hoboken, USA.
- Sharma P and Wu Z (2015). Consumer ethnocentrism vs. intercultural competence as moderators in intercultural service encounters. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 29(2): 93-102. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-12-2013-0330>
- Wei L, Crompton JL, and Reid LM (1989). Cultural conflicts: Experiences of US visitors to China. *Tourism Management*, 10(4): 322-332. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177\(89\)90011-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177(89)90011-3)
- Xie C, Zhang J, Chen Y, and Morrison AM (2023). The effect of hotel employee resilience during COVID-19: The moderation role of perceived risk and challenge stressors. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 46: 101087. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2023.101087> **PMid:36741920 PMid:PMC9886732**
- Ye D, Cho D, Liu F, Xu Y, Jia Z, and Chen J (2024). Investigating the impact of virtual tourism on travel intention during the post-COVID-19 era: Evidence from China. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 23: 1507-1523. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-022-00952-1> **PMid:36466580 PMid:PMC9707137**
- Yu J, Li H, and Xiao H (2020). Are authentic tourists happier? Examining structural relationships amongst perceived cultural distance, existential authenticity, and wellbeing. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 22(1): 144-154. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2324>
- Zhang J, Huang R, Chen Q, and Zhao G (2022). Post-pandemic outbound travel intentions and preparations of Chinese residents: The effects of media coverage and risk perception. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 51: 156-164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.03.007>