

**The New Class of Emerging Chinese Tourists and Sustainable Tourism  
Practices in Giethoorn**

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Master Thesis Place, Culture and Tourism  
June 2019

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**ABSTRACT**

Chinese tourists that travel overseas is a growing and relatively recent phenomenon in the tourism industry. Cultural differences between hosts and guests may arise at destinations which challenge the way tourism practices are managed. This study explores the relatively recent phenomenon of the new class of emerging Chinese tourists in Giethoorn, a small town in the north of the Netherlands. Obtaining empirical evidence in the form of qualitative interviews with both experts of businesses in Giethoorn and Chinese tourists visiting Giethoorn, this study aims to answer the following research question: How and in what ways, does the new class of emerging Chinese tourists challenge sustainable tourism practices in Giethoorn? Using thematic analysis, several issues were identified related to sustainability and the adaptation to tourists' needs, as well as Chinese tourists' concerns over food and authenticity. The results show that while experts from businesses in Giethoorn are concerned about sustainability in terms of the number of tourists, boats and parking spaces in the area, Chinese tourists focus on the type of food offered and the appearance of the town in terms of authenticity, nature and landscape, and architecture. Understanding Chinese tourist's needs and demands is key to adapt tourism practices for this type of tourists and for finding solutions which address sustainable issues in Giethoorn. This study adds knowledge about non-Western tourists and their influence in Western destinations.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable tourism, tourism practices, authenticity, Chinese tourist behaviour, non-Western tourism, Giethoorn

## PREFACE

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Linda Duits for believing in me and in the topic for this master thesis. I have learned a great deal during this past year thanks to her and all the professors from the PCT master with their knowledge, feedback, guidance, encouragement and motivation. Furthermore, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant support throughout this process; as well as my students who encouraged me week by week and were curious about how the research was evolving. Finally, I would like to thank the participants who made this thesis possible: business owners, employees, and Chinese tourists who paused their daily activities and holidays to talk with me.

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## 1. Introduction

As Asian tourism moves towards discovering new places in the world, and outbound tourism becomes the norm in China, it is not strange to find new challenges arising at destinations due to this new type of tourists (Chan, 2006). The relatively recent phenomenon of Chinese outbound tourism has made China position itself as a major player in the tourism industry (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline & Wang, 2011). The new class of emerging Chinese tourists that travel abroad for pleasure and leisure has been increasing due to the several reforms that began in the People's Republic of China (PRC) starting from 1978. Some of these reforms encouraged the promotion of both national and outbound travel amongst Chinese citizens with an increase of paid holidays as well as national holidays, and a rise in the incomes of the local population (Chan, 2006). This increase in the outbound travel of Chinese citizens poses several challenges related to sustainability, Chinese behaviour and authenticity.

As Chinese tourists gain worldwide attention (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline and Wang, 2011) and seek for "natural beauty and icons, quality infrastructure, autonomy, inspirational motives and social self-enhancement" (Sparks and Pan, 2009, p. 483), it is not strange to find them looking for special tourism locations in which any or all of the above-mentioned characteristics occur at a destination. In this sense, Giethoorn can be considered a destination that fulfils most of these preferences. The great number of Chinese tourists that visit Giethoorn adds challenges to the sustainability of this location since Chinese tourist behaviour with their different demands and needs can modify or change the way in which tourism has existed in the region.

This study focuses on the small town of Giethoorn and Chinese tourists that visit this area. In recent years, this town of 2570 inhabitants (CBS, 2018) has become very popular amongst Asian tourists and especially amongst Chinese tourists (Korthals Altes, Kleinhans & Meijers, 2018). Due to this phenomenon of the new emerging class of tourists in the area, shifting from regional tourists to Asian tourists, several challenges have emerged. According to Korthals Altes et al. (2018), there are concerns regarding the use of space: tourists invade private properties such as gardens thinking it is part of the real-life museum of Giethoorn. Other examples are that tourists have no experience on how to control boats through the canals and accommodation is scarce. However, issues concerning the over crowdedness of

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space in Giethoorn are also problematic especially for the local population who cannot move freely in their place of residence and have to pay the consequences of living in a tourist hotspot.

Furthermore, sustainable practices within the tourism industry are a growing concern in an industry that is both young and increasing rapidly shifting from an economic focus to sustainability (Budeanu, Miller, Moscardo & Ooi, 2016). Some of these sustainable practices are related to the negative effects of tourism such as overcrowded spaces and environmental concerns (Berry & Ladkin, 1997). However, there are also challenges in how to balance the growth of tourism with sustainable practices to avoid economic slowdown (Budeanu et al., 2016).

This master thesis tries to shed light on the phenomenon of the new class of emerging tourists in Giethoorn by posing the following question: How and in what ways, does the new class of emerging Chinese tourists challenge sustainable tourism practices in Giethoorn? Considering that outbound Chinese tourism is on the rise, and sustainability is a key issue in the tourism industry, it is important to examine and address these issues in order to maintain a balanced and harmonious way of life for the local population and an enjoyable experience for tourists at tourist destinations.

One of the problems in academia is that there tends to be studies that focus on the Western-centric approach to tourism studies (Chan, 2006). Therefore, there is a need to do some research on non-Western countries that engage in tourism. In this sense, this research adds societal value in the form of understanding how the new class of emerging Chinese tourists challenges the tourism industry and especially sustainable practices at tourist destinations. Furthermore, whereas most tourism studies (Maitland, 2010) focus on Western-centric tourism and in city capitals or major cities, this research adds academic value in the sense that it provides a non-Western perspective of tourism, as well as a focus on small and less known worldwide tourist locations such as towns and villages.

In order to answer the research question, qualitative analysis in the form of semi-structured interviews was conducted with both experts of businesses in Giethoorn and Chinese tourists visiting Giethoorn. With this approach, an in-depth view of what business experts and Chinese tourists think of the topic was achieved in order to expose the challenges being posed by these groups and to find specific solutions to these challenges.

The structure of this master thesis is as follows. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature and theories that underline the main topics and concepts of this thesis, such as sustainable tourism, Chinese tourist behaviour and authenticity. In chapter three the methods used to analyse the data, find the research units of analysis, as well as operationalisation and validity and reliability will be explained to show how the research for this master thesis has been conducted. Furthermore, chapter four and five present the results of the data. Chapter four shows the results section for the experts from businesses in Giethoorn showing their concerns with the new class of emerging tourists in the area. Moreover, chapter five presents the results of the Chinese tourists visiting Giethoorn and their view on tourism and Giethoorn. Finally, chapter six focuses on the conclusion and discussion, answering the research questions and linking the results to the theory. Within this chapter, a brief section on further research and recommendations has been included.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter focuses on the literature review and will explain and connect concepts and theories that are relevant to the existing topic on the phenomenon of Chinese outbound tourism in Giethoorn. The information provided in this chapter together with the different approaches from various authors is important to understand the relation between the different components and the issue at hand which the research question is trying to address. The chapter starts with the examination of sustainable tourism and its complexity, followed by the characteristics of Chinese tourist behaviour, authenticity and tourism in Giethoorn.

### 2.1 Sustainable tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism appeared in academic discussions during the 1990s and has since then gained popularity in the tourism sector (Sharpley, 2000; Cohen, 2002; Saarinen, 2006). However, it is important to look at the history of sustainable tourism in order to understand the complexity of the term in the present. According to Saarinen (2006), issues concerning the negative impacts of tourism began in the 1960s with the conception of carrying capacity. As stated by O'Reilly (1986), carrying capacity basically refers to "the maximum number of tourists that can be contained in a certain destination" (p. 254). However, within tourism studies, there are two ways in which carrying capacity can be understood. On the one hand, it refers to the maximum number of tourists that can visit a destination "before the negative impacts of tourism are felt by the host country"; and on the other hand, it refers to the capacity a destination can contain without damaging the experience of the tourists themselves to enjoy a destination (O'Reilly, 1986, p. 254). Nevertheless, carrying capacity presented several problems "both in theory and practice" and therefore gave way to the concept of sustainable tourism in the 1990s (Saarinen, 2006, p. 1122). Already in the 1980s, there was a call for environmental and sustainable issues with a political character and an economic perspective, but it was not until the 1990s when the concept of sustainable tourism started to be notable in academic literature (Sharpley, 2000; Saarinen, 2006; Berry & Ladkin, 1997). It was in the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development when a blueprint was made to implement sustainable practices for the development of tourism (Berry & Ladkin, 1997).

The concept of sustainable tourism is complex. First, as noted above, sustainability derives from the concept of carrying capacity as it relates to the maximum number of visitors in a destination before negative impacts occur and before people start to regret their experience and further enjoyment of a destination due to the amount of people in a destination (O'Reilly, 1986). Furthermore, as stated in the Brundtland Report of 1987 (a report containing principles for proposing, recommending and considering ways in which to attain sustainable development), sustainability is defined as a form of development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). In this sense, sustainability must ensure that the future generations can enjoy the cultural heritage that exists in the present day and that current tourists can enjoy touristic sites without impacting negatively in the destination and in the enjoyment of their experience. However, the term sustainable tourism is problematic in its definition and scope due to its multiple definitions coming from different angles (political, environmental, cultural, economic and social) and ideas that are related to carrying capacity (Saarinen, 2006).

There are some critiques as to the meaning of sustainability and its scope. As Sharpley (2000) states, there is a debate concerning sustainable tourism and sustainable development in the sense that there is no clear definition of sustainable tourism and that it derives from the broader framework of sustainable development. According to Sharpley, the concept of sustainable development suffers the same problem as sustainable tourism, in that it has no definite definition and can be used differently in various contexts.

Following Lélé's (1991) idea on sustainable development and the separation of both parts: sustainability and development, Sharpley (2000) argues that the concept of sustainable development can be assessed by "combining development theory with the concept of sustainability" (p. 3). In this sense, it "over-simplifies the complex amalgam of political, economic, cultural and ecological processes encompassed by sustainable development" (Sharpley, 2000, p. 3). However, it is useful to understand the concepts which can then be applied to sustainable tourism. Sharpley (2000) states that there are four main theories of development: modernisation theory, dependency theory, the neo-classical counter revolution by Toye (1993) and alternative development. Furthermore, Sharpley (2000) critiques the extent to which sustainable tourism development "actually reflects the conceptual model of sustainable development" (p. 7). He argues that there are differences

between sustainable tourism development and sustainable development. Whereas sustainable tourism focuses on a “holistic, equitable and future-oriented development strategy” it is a “largely inward, product centred perspective” (Sharpley, 2000, p. 14). This means that even though it addresses “objectives of environmental sustainability”, it “does not appear to be consistent with the developmental aspects of sustainable development” (p. 14). However, as Sharpley (2000) states, sustainable tourism is a form of developmental practice since it is the motor of the economy in many countries.

Apart from the theories and critiques that derive from the concepts of sustainability and development, it is important to address other issues that are at stake within sustainable tourism. According to UNESCO (2019) and Hunt (2018), even though the tourism industry creates new job opportunities and offers a source of income to the tourist destinations, there needs to be a plan in which tourism is managed properly in order to meet the demands of a sustainable tourism. As UNESCO (2019) states, “the loss of cultural heritage, economic dependence and ecological degradation” are not the only issues that are a result of tourism but also the over crowdedness of the space and the negative impacts on the local population are some of the issues that lead towards an unsustainable form of tourism as it already occurs in Amsterdam, Barcelona and Venice (Sharpley, 2018). Furthermore, due to a great number of tourists visiting a destination, there exists a threat to the conservation of heritage therefore, violating the premise within sustainability and sustainable tourism which states that future generations must be able to enjoy the heritage of today (García Hernández, de la Calle Vaquero and Yubero, 2017). However, heritage value is not the only threat that arises from mass tourism. Korthals Altes, Kleinhans and Meijers (2018) argue that “mass tourism may result in compromising the quality of the location and may ultimately result in reduced attractiveness not only for residents, but also for tourists” (p. 3). Therefore, an increase in the number of tourists in a particular place may result in negative effects for both locals and guests. In addition, “economic values of tourism and quality of place to live” are important issues that can be addressed within sustainable tourism (Korthals Altes et al., 2018, p. 1).

## *2.2 Chinese tourist behaviour*

The Chinese population is growing in number of outbound travels as more and more Chinese can afford to travel abroad (Sparks & Pan, 2009). This increase in the number of

people travelling around the world for tourism purposes not only poses several challenges as we have seen in terms of sustainability and the environment, but also challenges the way people interact with each other. Globalisation has led to a mix of different cultures and different types of relationships between tourists and locals and therefore, an understanding of the cultures that are coming into contact at tourists' destinations is necessary in order to address and find a solution to some of the issues arising from this clash of cultures (Buckley, 2012). Focusing on the Chinese tourists that travel overseas, and specially on their behaviour and preferences when traveling, this section will explore the theory behind this new class of emerging Chinese tourists, as well as the particularities of this type of tourists.

According to Chan (2006), the economic reforms that were made in the PRC in the 1980s were key reforms that led to inbound and outbound tourism. These reforms were aimed at "rising disposable incomes [that] have triggered higher travel and leisure expenditure" and lifting restriction on tourism mobility (p. 189). Furthermore, by the end of the 1990s, the Chinese government decided to increase "workers' holidays" which was a successful attempt to boost inbound and outbound tourism (Chan, 2006, p. 190). In addition, and following this trend of Chinese outbound tourism, countries all over the world started to issue special visas for Chinese citizens who wished to travel to certain countries (Chan, 2006). With all these measures aimed at intensifying outbound tourism in China, many Chinese citizens have started to contemplate travelling as a birth right for Chinese citizens (Sparks & Pan, 2009).

Tourist behaviour or consumer behaviour is a broad term that "involves certain decisions, activities, ideas or experiences that satisfy consumer needs and wants" (Cohen, Prayag & Moital, 2014, p. 872). However, Pearce (2005) argues that the term consumer implies negative connotations. According to Cohen et al. (2014), there are nine key concepts in consumer behaviour: "decision-making, values, motivations, self-concept and personality, expectations, attitudes, perceptions, satisfaction and trust and loyalty" (p. 875). These concepts help understand the conceptual basis of what consumer behaviour entails. According to Pearce (2005), "the term tourist behaviour is useful to both link and differentiate the material from the broader yet distinctively different literature describing consumer behaviour" (p. 2). In this regard, tourist behaviour focuses on the latter part, in stating that there are different ways in which to grasp behaviour and therefore, there are "multiple perspectives on behaviour" such as an *emic* and *etic* perspective to tourist

behaviour (Pearce, 2005, p. 2). “An *emic* approach is one that takes the perspective of the participant” (Pearce, 2005, p.2). In this sense, the study of tourism behaviour through the *emic* approach focusses on the participants’ wants and needs.

Focusing specifically on Chinese tourist behaviour, we find studies such as Pizam and Sussmann (1995) who focus on different nationalities and the different tourist behaviour; Loi and Pearce (2015) focusing on the difference in behaviour between Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong behaviour; Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline and Wang (2011) who focus on Chinese tourists expectations in every aspect of a tourist trip; Sparks and Pan (2009) who focus on the attitudes and constraints of Chinese people when travelling abroad; and Chan (2006) who focuses on Mainland Chinese tourist behaviour in the context of travelling to Vietnam.

According to Chan (2006), Chinese tourists are not only travelling to Asian countries but also to Western countries, “such as France, Italy and Germany” (p. 190). Due to this trend, many “Western cities have been making their tourism services more convenient for Chinese people” to the point of even learning Mandarin Chinese to communicate better with the Chinese customers (Chan, 2006, p. 190). Furthermore, the new class of emerging Chinese tourists’ spending power is very attractive for the tourist destinations making them more interested in attracting this kind of tourists. In addition, by knowing the type of tourist behaviour Chinese tourists have, tourist destinations can better market and sell their tourist spots (Chan, 2006; Li et al., 2011).

When it comes to Chinese tourism behaviour, Sparks and Pan (2009) argue that Chinese people are more influenced by the opinions of the people around them. They argue that this is due to the fact that Chinese society is built from a collective perspective as opposed to an individualist society. In this regard, Pizam and Sussmann (1995) have done some research on the role of nationalities in consumer behaviour to see if nationality affects tourism behaviour. They conclude that Asian tourists prefer to travel in groups rather than in an individual basis. This conclusion is also supported by Chan (2006) who states that Chinese tourists that visit Vietnam must “travel in groups not less than five” (p. 191). Furthermore, Kwek and Lee (2010) emphasize that group travelling within Chinese tourists is mainly due to “various factors such as language barriers, safety reasons and ease of travel” (p. 130). However, Xiang (2013) argues that the new middle class of Chinese tourists is characterized by their independent travels and focus on attaining “achievement, mental stimulation, self-development, growth and [...] self-actualization” (p. 138). In this sense,

even though traditionally travelling in groups has been more popular and socially accepted, individual travel of Chinese tourists is considered to be a new form of travelling within Chinese tourists.

Another aspect of Chinese tourists' behaviour is that of the triple-C gaze that Pearce, Wu and Osmond (2015) propose. They state that in order to understand Chinese tourist behaviour there needs to be a "holistic and comprehensive approach" and argue that within the Chinese tourists' experiences there is an underlying influence of Confucianism, Communism and Capitalism, hence the term triple-C (Pearce et al., 2015, p. 145). Along these lines, Kwek and Lee (2010) argue that within corporate Chinese tourists, Confucianism plays a key role in establishing and developing harmony in tourist's behaviour within a group tour. Furthermore, Mok and Defranco (1999) claim that Confucianism values have determined the preferences and expectations of the Chinese people when they consume travel experiences. Therefore, the values of Confucianism, which are embedded in Chinese culture, play an important role in Chinese outbound tourist behaviour.

Cultural differences are an important aspect of the tourist behaviour. According to Li et al. (2011), cultural differences across different countries may result in different "behavioural characteristics, values, and expectations" (p. 741). This means that the current marketing strategies to attract Western tourists might not be applicable to Asian and specifically Chinese tourists. With this in mind, it is important to further research on Chinese tourist behaviour to provide specific marketing strategies that target this group.

### *2.3 Authenticity*

Authenticity is an important element of the tourist experience and it has been part of many discussions (Cohen, 2002; Chan, 2006). As Wang (1999) states, "authenticity is relevant to some kinds of tourism such as ethnic, history or culture tourism, which involve the representation of the Other or of the past" (p. 350). In this sense, authenticity is relevant in some types of tourism but not in every type of tourism, and especially when contrasting and comparing cultures and when differentiating between the Other and the past. According to MacCannell (1973), authenticity is divided into front and back regions. The front region corresponds to "the meeting place of hosts and guests or customers and service persons, and the back is the place where members of the home team retire between performances to relax and to prepare" (p. 590). This division of front and back areas of authenticity

reflects the complexity of the term in the sense that it can be viewed and perceived from different angles and perspectives. Furthermore, MacCannell (1973) coins the term staged authenticity to explain that tours arrange activities and open access to the back regions of authenticity, those that may not be accessed otherwise. In this sense, what tourists experience from the organized tours can be seen as a form of staged authenticity whereas what is shown as authentic is a mere representation and a copy of reality made exclusively for tourists (MacCannell, 1973). Critiques have been made to MacCannell's view on staged authenticity arguing that "there is never a clear-cut line between culture in tourism and culture in real life" (Chan, 2006, p. 199). In this context, the term tourist gaze comes into play since it is argued that authenticity lies in the eye of the beholder (Urry, 2001).

Larsen (2014) draws upon Urry's concept of the tourist gaze and states that "tourism is a 'way of seeing' where business stages visual experiences and tourists consume them visually" (p. 305). This relates to the front and back regions that MacCannell (1973) described, because tourists consume the front regions and the local population stage their culture for the tourists at the front region, but it is at the back stage where the local population prepares the representations of their culture for the tourists. However, Chhabra, Healy and Sills (2003) argue that "what is staged is not superficial since it contains elements of the original tradition" (p. 715). In other words, what is shown to the tourists does not necessarily imply that it is 'unauthentic'.

In this regard, Wang (1999) proposes the term existential authenticity which refers to "a special state of Being in which one is true to oneself, and acts as a counterpose to the loss of 'true self' in public roles and public spheres in modern Western society" (p. 358). In this sense, the state of Being is already a form of experiencing the authentic, and therefore, "existential authenticity, unlike object-related version, can often have nothing to do with the issue of whether toured objects are real" (Wang, 1999, p. 359).

Due to the fact that authenticity lies in the eye of the beholder (Urry, 2001) and that authenticity has many perspectives, it is difficult to assess what actually is authentic and one might question if it really matters whether something is authentic or not. Furthermore, as we have seen with the different tourists' behaviours within different nationalities (Pizam & Sussman, 1995), it is possible that the new emerging class of Chinese tourists values other elements above authenticity as Chan (2006) has suggested.

## 2.4 Tourism in Giethoorn

Giethoorn is a small village in the Netherlands located in the province of Overijssel, in the north eastern part of the Netherlands. Its characteristics lie in the canals which are the main attraction of the village giving it the popular name of 'Holland's Venice', and the beautiful old-style houses which have "official heritage protection (*beschermd dorpsgezicht*) since the 1980s" (Korthals Altes, Kleinhans & Meijers, 2018, p. 14). The village is built around a canal named *dorpsgracht* and is the result of collecting peat and using canals as the main source of transportation (Korthals Altes et al., 2018). The popularity of Giethoorn began in 1880 when several artists from the Hague School, amongst them Willem Tholen, started to paint the landscape of Giethoorn which made the village famous and interesting for tourists (Museum Giethoorn, 2019). Furthermore, in 1958 the movie *Fanfare* by Bert Haanstra, was filmed in Giethoorn which resulted in another wave of tourists that were attracted to this village. Since then, tourism has been growing steadily in Giethoorn, first with national tourists and then with international tourists (Korthals Altes et al., 2018). Over the past ten years, the new emerging class of Chinese tourists has been growing in number rapidly in Giethoorn. This has been due to several political implementations from the government of the PRC, such as increased number of paid holidays and higher wages, which has resulted in an increase in outbound tourism for the Chinese people (Chan, 2006). This new emerging class of Chinese tourists poses several challenges to sustainability practices in tourism in Giethoorn.

According to Korthals Altes, Kleinhans and Meijers (2018), Giethoorn became popular amongst Asian tourists, especially Chinese tourists, due to the efforts of one of the residents and entrepreneurs of Giethoorn, Gabriella Esselbrugge. This recent increase in the number of tourists in the region, has led to several issues for residents, especially related to the over crowdedness of space, as the only pedestrian street in the village is collapsed with tourists and it is difficult to access it by foot or bicycle; and issues along the canals which are often one way and during the summer peak season are collapsed with boats going both ways (Korthals Altes et al., 2018). Other issues are related to the "liveability, security and authenticity of the village" including "the enforcement of regulations, parking, signage, improvements of paths, greenery and lighting, the sheet piling of canals, public transportation, access of emergency services, the distribution of tourist accommodation and

a new waterway ordinance" (Korthals Altes et al., 2018, p. 15). Furthermore, there are privacy issues related to tourists' thought that Giethoorn is a live museum and therefore trespass private property gardens and yards which is also a problem amongst residents (Korthals Altes et al., 2018). In this regard, information and signage are key elements in touristic areas.

Apart from the negative issues resulting from the mass tourism in Giethoorn, there also exist positive benefits from tourism in this region. The use of the land has changed from traditional uses to businesses related to tourism: ice cream shops, gift shops, boat rentals, museums and tourist accommodations, amongst others (Korthals Altes et al., 2018). This change in the nature of the uses of land and space have led to a focus on tourists' needs with the result of new businesses exclusively aimed at tourism. In this sense, tourism has not only led to the increase of businesses aimed towards tourism but has also increased job opportunities and the space to innovate in new businesses to offer products and experiences to tourists (Sharpley, 2018). In addition, due to the new class of emerging tourists from Asia, the tourist season in Giethoorn has expanded from the traditional months of Spring and Summer to a bigger tourist season from February to October (Korthals Altes et al., 2018). This means that local businesses can enjoy the benefits from tourism for a longer period and workers can have a more stable job, instead of a seasonal job. In this sense, the increase of tourists in Giethoorn has not only led to negative issues but has also contributed to boost the economy of the region by extending its tourist season for a longer period, increase in job opportunities, and more tourist spending (Korthals Altes et al., 2018).

As we have seen, there is some discussion as to the negative and positive aspects of tourism in Giethoorn. The fact that there has been a shift of tourists from Dutch tourists to European and further to international tourists from Asia has led to a shift in the way local people engage in business in Giethoorn and furthermore, it has led to challenges in relation to sustainability and the relation between hosts and tourists. This last point has to do with the fact that people from different cultures behave differently and search for different things within tourism. As Buckley (2012) argues, "there may often be cultural, historical and socioeconomic differences between residents and international tourists" (p. 531).

### 3. Methods

On a cool spring morning in Giethoorn, local businesses (bed and breakfast, restaurants, boat tour companies and tour guides, as well as shops) slowly start their daily activities for the coming tourists that are about to appear in the scene. As if it were a movie, Chinese tourists flock in groups looking for the perfect photograph scenery, the best boat tour that will take them through the most picturesque places in Giethoorn and the best restaurants in town. The tourists that arrive early, rush to boat rentals and boat tours to enjoy a ride through the canals while admiring the beautiful landscape. They take pictures in every corner trying to immortalize the beautiful scenery that lies before them. This is the experience they came to see, and they try to enjoy everything that Giethoorn has to offer before it becomes too dark to fully do so.

The choice of Giethoorn as the location in which to study how and in what ways does the new class of emerging Chinese tourists challenge sustainable tourism practices in this area has been due to the recent interest of Chinese tourists in visiting this village. Over the past decade, Giethoorn has become a popular tourist destination among Chinese tourists and this together with the natural and small character of the town, has made Giethoorn an ideal place to conduct research about the phenomenon of Chinese tourists. Furthermore, the new class of emerging Chinese tourists that travel abroad for pleasure and leisure poses challenges to the tourism industry due to their specific demands and preferences when travelling; which makes one wonder if and in what ways has this type of tourism challenged sustainable practices in Giethoorn (Chan, 2006). In order to answer the research question, the following research design has been provided.

The method selected for this research has been a qualitative approach by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with Chinese tourists who visited Giethoorn during the months of March and May 2019; and businesses that operate in Giethoorn. This approach has been chosen because it is the best way to obtain data in relation to motivations, experiences, attitudes and meaning making. According to Bryman (2012), in semi-structured interviews the interviewer starts with a list of questions or topic questions that can be answered in different order. This makes the interview to flow freely as the respondent can answer openly about his or her own point of view. In addition, the interviewer can ask follow-up questions regarding the answers the respondent has provided. By conducting in-

depth semi-structured interviews with Chinese tourists who stay at least one night in Giethoorn, this study expected to find out in what ways does their presence challenges sustainable practices in this town and how this shapes tourism in Giethoorn today. Furthermore, businesses were interviewed to find out if and in what ways their practices have changed due to the presence of the new class of emerging Chinese tourists.

### *3.1 Research units*

The research units in this study were selected in two different groups. On the one hand, owners or workers of local businesses in Giethoorn categorized as experts in several types of businesses in Giethoorn were interviewed. On the other hand, Chinese tourists visiting Giethoorn were also interviewed. This distinction was made in order to find relevant information from both parties: experts in Giethoorn and Chinese tourists. In the following sections a detailed explanation of the different groups of respondents will be presented. Interviews were conducted during the months of March and May 2019.

#### *3.1.1 Experts from businesses in Giethoorn*

The experts in Giethoorn that were interviewed were first contacted by email (checking the contact details online on the businesses' websites), if there was no response, a phone call would be made, and if this was not successful, the researcher would go directly to the business place to establish contact with the owner and explain the purpose of this research and the need for their collaboration. The different respondents belonged to different business sectors such as, accommodation, restaurants, tour guides and boat rentals. A total of five respondents participated in interviews for this study. As for the type of businesses in which the respondents worked in, two respondents were owners of accommodation services, one respondent owned a restaurant, one respondent was an employee at a restaurant and boat rental company, and one respondent was a tour guide in a boat rental company. All participants were interviewed one by one to ensure that their responses expressed their unique ideas and points of view. Participants were offered anonymity and some respondents expressed their preference to be referred to with a fictitious name while other respondents expressed their preference to be referred to with their real names.

The interviews were conducted in the respondent's place of work (in a quiet area) or in a café. A set of questions was made prior to the interviews which has been attached in appendix A and which refers to the topic list. In general, the interviews with the experts were straightforward and provided in-depth information according to the answers they provided. However, some limitations were encountered when approaching the businesses. This was due to the busy period of spring with the great number of incoming tourists in Giethoorn. Therefore, finding respondents for this study was a complicated matter. This limitation was solved by going to Giethoorn a repeated number of times to meet the respondents or to find new respondents.

### *3.1.2 Chinese tourists in Giethoorn*

As for the Chinese tourists that participated in this study, a total of eight people were interviewed. All of the respondents were between the ages of 23 and 59 and all of them visited Giethoorn for travel and leisure purposes. Due to the complexity of Chinese names and the difference between Western names, the last names of each of the respondents has been systematically used to refer to the participants, previous agreement with the participants themselves; as well as their city of origin. Therefore, contributing to a better understanding in terms of clarity. Chinese respondents were found in the town of Giethoorn by randomly asking tourists in the streets, while taking pictures, and asking some of the guests at the hostel to participate in this research. The interviews were conducted during boat trips, at the hostel (in the case of hostel guests) and in cafés around town. The topic list of the interviews made prior to the actual interviews can be found in appendix A at the end of the document.

During the interviews, some limitations were encountered in the way to approach this group of tourists. Due to the fact that they usually travelled in groups and had a fixed schedule, it was difficult for them not to follow the schedule and set aside some time for the interviews. Furthermore, due to cultural differences it was very difficult for them to express their views. On the one hand, the language barrier was an issue, although interviews could be done in both English and Chinese, and even Spanish, Chinese people often found it difficult to express in a foreign language. Furthermore, expressing in Chinese with a non-Chinese researcher also raised some concerns for this group, in some cases. On the other

hand, due to their personality and character, Chinese people often express indirectly therefore, making the process of meaning making an arduous and often repetitive task.

### *3.2 Sampling method*

As for the sampling method, homogenous purposive sampling was conducted in this research. This is because Chinese tourists were interviewed, and they form a homogenous group of Chinese citizens who decide to travel to Giethoorn. Furthermore, as “the goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way” and not in a random basis, and as this study is interested in Chinese tourists, this type of sampling method has been selected to be the most appropriate for this research (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). In addition, the businesses operating in Giethoorn that were interviewed they, in turn, form a specific group with certain characteristics that are relevant in homogenous purposive sampling, such as the service industry in the tourism sector: hotels, restaurants and tour guides, amongst others. Therefore, this type of sampling method is the most suitable for this study.

### *3.3 Operationalisation*

As for operationalisation, the main concepts observed and explained are sustainable tourism practices, authenticity and Chinese tourist behaviour. These concepts relate to the research question and derive from the theoretical framework mentioned above. Even though qualitative analysis is made from an inductive approach, it is necessary to explain what is meant by these concepts in order to be clear on which data to later find in the interviews (Bryman, 2012). First, it is important to address what is meant by Chinese tourists in this paper. The emergence of a new class of Chinse tourists is related to the economic reforms that took place in China from 1978 and that further increased the country’s development. As a result of the economic reforms, disposable income, increased workers’ holidays and the promotion of tourism for leisure and pleasure have led to an increase of Chinese outbound tourism (Chan, 2006). Therefore, in this paper, Chinese tourists refer to citizens from the People’s Republic of China that travel abroad.

Second, as Berry and Ladkin (1997) state, sustainable practices refer to the negative tourism impact which results in overcrowded spaces and environmental issues. An effective management of such issues is key in order to preserve the environment for the future (Berry

& Ladkin, 1997). Third, authenticity is a difficult term to explain as it lies in the eye of the beholder and this may differ per person (Urry, 2001). However, there are some aspects that can be generalized as many people agree on, such as an idyllic landscape and a traditional landscape as well as architecture. This concept will be measured from the words and imageries that accompany the respondents' responses when asked about authenticity and what they consider that is authentic in Giethoorn.

Finally, Chinese tourist behaviour refers to those practices, demands and preferences that are inherent to the Chinese people who share the same cultural background. As Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline and Wang (2011) argue, Chinese outbound tourists have "particular expectations in terms of amenities and service standards" such as in "accommodations, food and restaurants, tour guides and itineraries, entertainment and activities, and transportation" (p. 741). Therefore, the fact that Chinese tourists are becoming more and more popular in Giethoorn may result in some challenges to already existing practices related to other types of tourism in the area.

Regarding the data collection process, this was done in the form of interviews to Chinese tourists and local businesses in Giethoorn. The data collection took place between the end of March until May 2019, in the town of Giethoorn in the province of Overijssel (in the eastern part of the Netherlands). The interviews took place at the local businesses where the respondents worked at and at different locations within Giethoorn and had a duration of approximately thirty minutes to one hour with each respondent. All the data collected from the interviews was recorded in audio files which were then transcribed word by word (Bryman, 2012). The resulting data was then analysed.

### *3.4 Analysis*

The analysis of the obtained data was made in a thematic analysis whereby the different themes that arise from the interviews were classified and analyzed in order to answer the research question. According to Bryman (2012), "thematic analysis is a common approach to analyzing documents (and indeed interview transcripts)" (p. 558). These themes derived from the interview transcripts after a process of coding, specifically open coding. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), open coding refers to the "interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically" (p. 12). Through this process data is then interpreted by giving the researcher new ways to interpret the data (Corbin & Strauss,

1990). The codes were then conceptualized and turned into categories. Moreover, themes were then identified by looking for topics that were recurrent throughout the different interviews, as well as by searching for similar and different answers that confirmed or contrasted with what the other participants answered (Bryman, 2012).

The themes that have been identified in the interviews are the following. On the one hand, in the interviews for the experts, the themes 'all tourists are the same', adaptation to Chinese or Asian tourists' needs, the practicalities of allocating resources and tourists, and the landscape and view in Giethoorn were selected. These themes arise from the lack of knowledge on Asian and especially on Chinese tourists which is visible in the interviews when experts express their view that 'all tourists are the same' and in the fact that few different practices have been made to make this new emerging class of tourists more comfortable, for example with language and communication in Chinese. In addition, sustainability is a key issue which is embedded in the themes on the practicality of allocating resources and tourists, as well as in the view and landscape in Giethoorn. These themes show how tourism is affecting the area and how the businesses and the municipality are coping with some of the issues derived from tourism. The view and landscape in Giethoorn are of major importance, especially for its conservation due to the fact that it is the main reason why tourists arrive in Giethoorn and the main source of attraction. This theme is also related to the themes which are interpreted from the Chinese tourists' interviews.

After analyzing the interviews by the Chinese tourists, several themes were interpreted, mainly concerned with the landscape, the image and the place itself. The themes for these types of tourists were uniqueness of place, authenticity of the location, places of the imagination and food demands. The connection between these themes lies in the fact that the Chinese people value the landscape and view of Giethoorn and separate it into three aspects: authenticity, imagination and uniqueness. This shows that the village of Giethoorn has a powerful visual aspect which is the main reason that Chinese tourists are attracted to this town, in this case. Furthermore, tourists complained about the lack of food variety and pricing which is the last of the themes identified in the interviews. This is related to the ample food culture that the Chinese people enjoy in their home country, as expressed by the Chinese tourists themselves.

### *3.5 Validity and reliability*

As stated by Bryman (2012), validity in qualitative research should be adapted to the nature of the study, since validity “seems to carry connotations of measurement” and “measurement is not a major preoccupation among qualitative researchers” (p. 389). However, qualitative research should ensure “trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). These elements have been expressed throughout the methods chapter by explaining the specifics and details of how research was conducted and in the interpretation of themes that was mentioned above. In addition, the themes selected for the research analysis have been interpreted in line with the research question searching for specific data that is related to sustainable practices and the new emerging class of Chinese tourists. In the following chapters the different themes that have been identified from the interviews with experts and Chinese tourists will be further explained and analyzed.

#### 4. Results: Experts from businesses in Giethoorn

This chapter describes the results obtained from the businesses at Giethoorn. Four main themes arose from the data: 'all tourists are the same', adaptation to Chinese or Asian tourists' needs, the practicalities of allocating resources and tourists in Giethoorn, and the view and landscape in Giethoorn.

##### 4.1 'All tourists are the same'

When asked about tourism in Giethoorn and the type of tourists that visit this village, the majority of the respondents were quite surprised at my interest in Chinese tourists, often expressing their view on tourists in a general way, without making distinctions between nationalities. For example, Robert expressed his perspective about the tourists in Giethoorn as being 'all the same' because they come from all over the world, without specifying the countries of origin of the tourists.

"The tourists come from all over the world... you can see that here, look. And it's not tourists are from China... from Asia... they are from all the world. Many people from... Arab tourists are visiting now" (Robert, tour guide).

In this sense, it appears that tourists are treated the same way no matter their place of origin. In addition, this theme is also visible in the services provided by some business owners:

"the regular services we offer any tourist... and what we value is to make their stay and excellent one... and our guests are very happy ... and that's what's important..." (Lauren, hotel owner).

Thus, tourism in Giethoorn is considered as a homogenous group and being a tourist from a Chinese background does not guarantee a different treatment from the businesses in Giethoorn.

'All tourists are the same' was a major theme within the expert interviews. Within this theme, issues related to media influence, race and lack of knowledge towards Asian culture were also addressed.

Like Robert, Arie expressed that Chinese tourists are steadily increasing in Giethoorn but that doesn't mean that this group are a majority of tourists in Giethoorn. In fact, Chinese tourists are not a very big percentage of tourists in Giethoorn. He also addresses the influence of media in expressing assumptions about tourism in Giethoorn which do not match reality.

"And around, I think now seven years ago, the first ... tourists came from all over the world but the Chinese people or the Asian people you see when they come in you see it ... The German [tourists] are more and the Belgium also more, but you see... the Chinese people and you think oh lots of them but ... if you have nothing of Chinese people, zero, and... now we have I think twenty per cent of them so, it's a very big... it will be growing also... And in the Netherlands you have the television and the papers and that's a little bit of... not good for us because they say 'oh Giethoorn very busy, lots of Chinese tourists' and then [there] come lots of people but it's not... only Chinese" (Arie, restaurant owner).

This shows that Chinese tourists visiting Giethoorn is a recent phenomenon which at the same time, is linked to media influence and how they portray Giethoorn. As Arie states, the fact that the media has stressed the arrival of a great number of Chinese tourists in the area, shows an erroneous idea of what the place really looks like. This shows the power of media in making assumptions of the type of tourists in a location.

Furthermore, one of the reasons behind stating that 'all tourists are the same' may lie in the fact that most of the respondents did not know how to distinguish the different nationalities among Asian tourists by just looking at the people. Therefore, it was very difficult to talk about Chinese tourists when the respondents themselves did not know whether the tourists were Chinese or Taiwanese or Malaysian, for example. As most respondents expressed, they would group these types of tourists into a general category of Asian tourists. This shows that there exists a lack of knowledge towards Asian and especially Chinese tourists. However, Arie and Henry expressed that you can make a distinction between western and non-western people by their appearance.

"The Chinese people or the Asian people you see when they come in, you see it. You can see a Dutch woman maybe like you but a bit lighter... Chinese people or Asian people you know they come from there" (Arie, restaurant owner).

“Well... actually I don’t know if they are really Chinese... but I know they come from Asia, that you can see. So, I say all Asian tourists” (Henry, restaurant and boat rental employee).

Thus, there is a difficulty in distinguishing Chinese tourists from other tourists that also come from Asia. However, distinguishing people from European backgrounds and Asian backgrounds seems like something that can be done. While the respondents found ‘all tourists the same’, they did make distinctions when it came to the different practices and needs that tourists demand, for example in terms of eating practices and in the ways of communication and use of language, which will be discussed below.

#### *4.2 Adaptation to Chinese or Asian tourists’ needs*

The theme on adaptation to Chinese or Asian tourists’ needs refers to the different practices that the experts in Giethoorn have adopted in order to adapt to the new emerging class of tourists. These practices include offering different payment methods, adapting the menu and the types of food offered, and communicating in Chinese language. As noted above, even though the experts in Giethoorn mentioned that ‘all tourists are the same’ and even though they had difficulties distinguishing Chinese tourists from other Asian tourists, during the interviews it was noticeable that several businesses adapted to the different needs of especially, the Chinese tourists.

In the case of the different payment methods, Chinese people in their home country, enjoy paying through social media platforms such as WeChat or Alipay. These payment methods are exclusively for Chinese citizens; however, the system is now available in other countries in the world which the Chinese tourists can use. Stickers indicating the choice of payment via WeChat or Alipay were spotted in one of the restaurants. This indicated that some business experts are aware of the influence of the Chinese tourists and therefore offer these payment methods which are exclusive for Chinese people. In this sense the restaurant owner has adapted to the Chinese methods of payment.

“We begin with WeChat and now we have the other one... Alipay also, and um... Why we do that? The Chinese people always have cash or credit card or pin so [...] so, they can pay, but it’s nice ... to have their way to pay” (Arie, restaurant owner).

This means that some businesses are aware of the Chinese tourist and want to offer products or payment methods that are familiar to the Chinese tourists. In this case, the restaurant owner was offered the idea of providing WeChat and Alipay as methods of payment by a Chinese tour guide who visits Giethoorn frequently.

Furthermore, adaptation to tourists' needs also comes from the adaptation of the types of food offered in restaurants and hostels. For example, one hostel owner expressed the assortment of the breakfast, which is included in the price of a one-night stay, as being adapted to Asian ways, expressing that Asian customers prefer to eat warm products in the morning and it is easier for the hostel to provide certain products which are liked by Asian customers as opposed to European preferences. Moreover, she expressed the distinction between European customers and Asian customers in the sense that they are 'high maintenance' which shows that she knows some differences between Asian and European cultures and standards.

"I think... Dutch or European tourists they would be a bit more high maintenance than our current audience... if we were to mainly target a Dutch audience, I would offer different breakfast ...so we also try to think very consciously for Chinese, Taiwanese audience what breakfast do we offer... because we know that it is important that people eat something warm..." (Gea, hostel owner).

Furthermore, the way of serving the customers has changed, especially as Chinese tourists have a different eating culture as opposed to the European eating culture.

"The Asian people they... order something [and] put it in the middle and are going to [share]. In the beginning you say... Oh why is that? Why?... Now... we don't ask, we bring every time um... small plates and we... put them in the middle, [for example] we are five people, so we put ... the plates in the middle. And then its... like the tapas [meaning the fact that you share dishes]" (Arie, restaurant owner).

This shows that the fact that there is a call to provide for the different needs of the tourists is made in relation to European standards. This is expressed by Arie who has adapted to the Chinese tourists' demands at his restaurant.

Finally, the use of Chinese written and spoken language to communicate with the customers was also discussed during the interviews. As most respondents were not familiar

with speaking or writing in Chinese they could not adapt further to Chinese customers and their needs. Furthermore, the majority of experts expressed that it was not necessary to speak Chinese or have menus in Chinese as everything was in English, Dutch and often German, and Chinese customers often ordered pointing at pictures in their phones. In addition, the language barrier makes the idea of making a Chinese menu very difficult. As an owner of a restaurant expressed:

"I am one of the only ones that say we have an English menu; we have a Dutch menu; and we have a German menu. That I find it very important. Um... no Chinese [menu] ... because it it's ... I don't know what they say about it" (Arie, restaurant owner).

"sometimes it's difficult when I say 'ahh let's make another menu' but no don't make another menu because they say: 'I want to drink this and I want to eat this' (pointing at the pictures on their phone)" (Arie, restaurant owner).

Furthermore, a worker from a restaurant expressed:

"Um... no, no we don't have Chinese menu because it's very difficult to make, how to translate... so... I think it's not necessary and they understand some things [in English]" (Henry, restaurant and boat rental employee).

However, the tour guide did know some words in different languages including Chinese, which made it easier to communicate and establish a closer relationship with his customers. These words were related to the different aspects of Giethoorn that the tour guide showed in the tour: Hello, Giethoorn, coffee, tea, lake, doghouse, peat, coal, etc. Furthermore, he had some knowledge of China's landscape.

"Well... I have learnt some Chinese to communicate with the tourists... it's good to talk to them in their own language because they are like 'Oh you speak Chinese'... and then you can talk to them more and I can explain some things [from the tour] in other languages" (Robert, tour guide).

In addition, one of the business owners was aiming at targeting Asian tourists, mainly Taiwanese, since their hostel had some messages written in Chinese traditional characters (mainly used in Taiwan and Hong Kong). These messages could be seen in the

website (there is a button to view the website in Chinese), in the maps that were offered at the hostel and other messages in the hostel itself.

"In the beginning we thought it was Chinese, Chinese, Chinese... and it makes the most sense... and initially it didn't occur to me that the majority would be Taiwanese [tourists], [...] but very quickly we noticed that it was mainly Taiwanese so then for instance we decided to use traditional Chinese characters instead of the simplified ones" (Gea, hostel owner).

This shows that even though the majority of the experts in Giethoorn are not familiar with the Chinese language, there are others that do and therefore use this knowledge to target their business towards this type of tourists. Furthermore, in general there's some ignorance towards Asia, since the experts find it difficult to distinguish from which country in Asia the tourists come from and the language barrier makes it difficult for them to communicate and ask the tourists.

#### *4.3 The practicalities of allocating resources and tourists*

The practicalities of allocating resources and tourists is another important theme interpreted from the interviews with the experts in Giethoorn. This mainly refers to how boats are used in the canals and how parking is distributed across Giethoorn. In talking about sustainability most respondents were concerned about the usage of boats by tourists who had no experience in steering boats, the efficiency related to the use of the parking and the use of public transportation.

In relation to the issues about the boats, the majority of the respondents expressed their concerns with the amount and the usage of the boats in the canals and the damages that they were causing to the infrastructure and to the direction or the good use of waterways. In this sense, the fact that tourists lack knowledge on how to steer a boat causes traffic jams in the area. In addition, the fact that there are many boats in a small space of water, makes it very difficult to move and causes issues in the village.

"the amount of boats that's a big cause of concern and very tricky and also ties with European regulations for instance, because right now the amount of boats that can be rented out is capped. So, yeah, no new permits are given and this needs to be

done to keep it sustainable because you know otherwise everything will be one traffic jam and this is already happening in summer" (Gea, hostel owner).

In addition, Henry expressed his concern about the usage of boats in relation to a balance between the business of boat rentals and the enjoyment the tourists get of the experience:

"Oh, yes the boats are a problem, here we have um... a boat business but... there's always some problems, problems with the people not going the right way and then there's like some chaos... in the canals but we also have to continue to make business... And even when the canals are busy... sometimes, people still enjoy, they like it, so it's okay" (Henry, restaurant and boat rental employee).

Furthermore, some respondents expressed the idea of new systems to track the boats and control the routes, in order to find a solution to the traffic originated by the boats. This shows that the local government is taking a step into finding solutions to these problems and the local population is aware of this.

"there are plans to make, yeah to try for instance to add, and this is something they [the local government] definitely want to do, they are going to do this in the next months I think, to add software on the boats to be able to chart where certain boats are on certain, at any given times, how busy certain parts of the water are so that people can choose a different route because actually there are still big stretches where there's plenty of space you know?" (Gea, hostel owner).

Thus, even though there are issues with the usage of boats in the area and with sustainability, the local government and the people of Giethoorn are aware that the problem exists and that measures are being taken.

Concerning the parking and the use of public transportation, most respondents were mainly concerned with the parking, expressing that it could be more efficient in order to aid in the allocation of cars and space for a more sustainable village. The complexity of this issue lies in the fact that there are different parking areas which are in different areas and the tourists who come by car are not aware of this. Therefore, cars move around the outer area of the village from one parking to another in search of a parking space. Some of the respondents who were concerned with this topic, related the issue to the use of public transportation and the need for a type of shuttle bus which could ease traffic congestion in

the village. However, other respondents stated that they did not see an urgent matter in this regard due to the fact that many tourists arrive to Giethoorn by tour buses and therefore the issue concerning the parking space is much less.

"Well, traffic and parking are problematic... but so far most of the Chinese tourists I see... they come by bus but not the public buses, these are special buses that come from Amsterdam or... other places... but... but there is always space for them and they know where to go [park]" (Lauren, hotel owner).

Thus, allocating boats in the small canals and cars in the different parking spaces in Giethoorn are the main issues concerning sustainability in the village. This means that due to tourism, certain parts in Giethoorn are busy at specific times.

#### *4.4 The view and landscape in Giethoorn*

The last theme of the experts' interviews is related to the view and landscape of Giethoorn. In this regard, the way the village looks and the status it has of protected village is the main source of attraction for tourists but also raises concerns as to how signs should be managed in the village. This theme is related to the previous one in that it also relates to issues of sustainability; however, it has been separated from the previous them due to the fact that the view and landscape of Giethoorn are intrinsic aspects of the village and the allocation of resources such as boats and parking spaces is something which is extrinsic to the village of Giethoorn.

In relation to the protected status of the village, all the respondents expressed that this aspect was the most significant. This is because the 'looks', style and general view of the village with traditional style houses and nice gardens and canals, is the reason people visit Giethoorn. Therefore, there is a need to protect it from becoming too touristy to the eye and to maintain the landscape of the place in as much as possible. This idea often clashes with the fact that Giethoorn is a tourist village and there needs to be some signs which indicate routes, places and main spots such as visiting points or accommodation and other services. In this sense, even though all tourists were in favour of maintaining the landscape of the place, some of the respondents stated that some sort of reference as in signs for directions and signs of businesses should be made visible for the tourists.

"also the village now is... you cannot say it's a museum but the houses you cannot do anything about it. The government says this house you have um.... [you cannot change it]" (Arie, restaurant owner).

Furthermore, Lauren adds:

"it's good to keep the houses in its traditional way and the nice gardens because ... the tourists like this, that's why they come, so I think this is very important to maintain it like this" (Lauren, hotel owner).

When talking about signs and the landscape the majority of the respondents expressed that the signs were a problem, because they were not standard and there were too many signs; however, they also expressed that signs are important to find what you are looking for.

"And when you ask, 'what do you like most?' [referring to the landscape of Giethoorn], of course you say this I like it more (pointing towards a picture without the signs). Of course, of course. But that is not possible, when I.... when you see this building, you must have a sign of what it is, because you must do something. And when you have a bed and breakfast, small one and you want to... when you have a reservation you come there, you must find it" (Arie, restaurant owner).

Thus, there seemed to be some issues concerned with the balance between the use of signs and the ways in which these signs should be managed.

This chapter that began with an outline of the main themes interpreted from the data obtained from the interviews with the business owners and employees, has presented an analysis of the themes and ideas that have been recurrent throughout the interviews. In this sense, the most outstanding and important topics were those related to the type of tourists in Giethoorn, adapting to Chinese tourists' needs, allocating resources, and the view and landscape in Giethoorn. As can be seen from the analysis of the results, most experts in Giethoorn at a first glance view Chinese tourists as tourists in general without distinguishing them as Chinese tourists per se. However, they then make some distinctions by addressing them as Asian tourists which shows some lack of knowledge of this type of tourists that exists in Giethoorn. Furthermore, some business experts later explained that they did find differences in the way Chinese tourists behaved during daily activities such as dinning and

that experts who were aware of this learned from the customers and changed some of their practices towards Chinese tourists, hence the theme adaptability to Chinese or Asian tourist's needs.

As for practicality of allocating resources and tourists, experts in Giethoorn expressed this in two ways: the usage of boats and parking spaces were major issues in this town. However, it seems that these issues are not solely related to Chinese tourists but to tourists in general. Finally, the view and landscape in Giethoorn are important for the conservation of the town and this, in turn, is what tourists search for when visiting Giethoorn.

## 5. Results: The new class of emerging Chinese tourists in Giethoorn

According to the interpretation of the data from the interviews with Chinese tourists visiting Giethoorn, the main themes that were interpreted from the interviews were the places of the imagination, the uniqueness of the place and authenticity of the location. Although, these themes overlap to a certain extent, they are explained under separate headings due to the way the interviewees expressed these ideas by making a distinction or comparison between the three topics.

### 5.1 Places of the imagination

The theme places of the imagination refers to the image Chinese tourists construct of Giethoorn in their minds. According to the respondents this is done in different ways. First, by means of photographs of Giethoorn found in travel guides and in social media, and secondly, through the relation between the slogans that are promoting this village: 'the Venice of the north', 'Dutch Venice' or 'Holland's Venice'. Furthermore, the images of Giethoorn resembled those of paintings, movie locations and sceneries, as well as fairy tales where one can imagine the characters of a movie or tale. This theme is related to the other themes: authenticity of the location and uniqueness of place in the sense that the way the Chinese tourists imagine this village is related to their view on authenticity and uniqueness of the village.

The pictures of Giethoorn portrayed in travel guides and social media were the starting point for the imagination of the Chinese tourists to develop an idealized or romanticized picture of Giethoorn. These images were mainly related to the landscape of Giethoorn, but also to the architecture.

"When I saw the pictures from my friends, I thought I have to go there! It is so pretty and cute. I saw this [village] was called the 'Dutch Venice' ... and I thought ... this is really romantic with the houses and the canals..." (An, Xiamen).

Other respondents stressed the relation of Giethoorn with movie locations. In this sense, the landscape resembled those of movie settings.

"it seems as though Snow White and the seven dwarfs are going to appear at any moment from these houses, don't you think so? It just looks the same background" (He, Hong Kong).

According to Reijnders (2009), places of the imagination refers to locations from TV programs or movies which are “physical points of reference to an imagined world” (p. 1). Even though none of the respondents of this study was familiar with the movies and documentaries which are related to Giethoorn (*Fanfare*, 1958 and *Ni Hao Holland*, 2015), they did have an idea or an image of what Giethoorn was like due to pictures that they had seen posted on social media or in travel guides. In this sense, places of the imagination as described by the respondents refers to their personal image or idea of Giethoorn by means of photographs posted on social media or travel guides. However, as we have seen, some of the respondents also expressed the resemblance of the landscape with movie locations which is related to what Reijnders (2009) means with the term places of the imagination.

### *5.2 Uniqueness of the place*

The theme uniqueness of place makes reference to the appearance and peaceful and natural environment of Giethoorn. These themes emerged from the adjectives that were used to describe Giethoorn and its unique character in relation to the landscape, the canals, the architecture and the gardens. All of the Chinese respondents commented on the appearance of Giethoorn. The respondents understood Giethoorn as a unique place from the image of the town itself. The main elements mentioned were the flowers, gardens, bridges, canals and architecture of the houses in the area.

“Giethoorn is very unique because it has landscape, nature and beautiful houses... it is totally different from Chinese traditional villages” (He, Hong Kong).

In this sense, He from Hong Kong, sees the uniqueness of Giethoorn by comparing the landscape and scenery with that of other villages in China.

Furthermore, other Chinese respondents in this study viewed Giethoorn as a unique village that could only be found in the Netherlands and differentiated it from other villages that can be found in their home country.

“Unique for me is something different that you cannot see other places... like Giethoorn is very different from China or Chinese villages... because... the style of the houses and the architecture is ... it must be Dutch style and traditional style because the roofs are very old... and you add the canals and the nature it makes everything... very unique and special... not possible to find in another place...” (Wang, Shenzhen).

In this sense, unique not only refers to the appearance of Giethoorn, but to the style of the architecture and the comparison of this town with other towns or villages in China.

Therefore, for Wang from Shenzhen, what made the place unique was the fact that Giethoorn is a place that can only be found in the Netherlands, making reference to the Dutch and traditional style of the roofs and houses.

Furthermore, the composition of both the canals and the houses made Giethoorn a unique place.

"it is very unique place with the canals and the nice houses... you can enjoy the place and everything is pretty and beautiful... with perfect houses in a perfectly looking village. It's like a dream come true or a fantasy" (An, Xiamen).

In this sense, the composition was important but so was the idea of a perfect village. In addition, this idea of unique place makes this respondent think of "a dream come true or a fantasy" which is a theme related to places of the imagination mentioned above.

Finally, for other respondents, the uniqueness of the place was expressed by the remoteness of the village in contrast with cities as well as by the special elements such as thatched roofs:

"[the most important elements of Giethoorn are] the remoteness to cities, the canals as well as the architecture... For me the buildings with thatched roofs were very special and beautiful. And the whole composition of buildings, countryside and animals is awesome" (Chen, Shanghai).

This means that for Chen from Shanghai, the unique character of Giethoorn was not only the appearance, but also the distance from the cities. In this sense uniqueness goes beyond appearance and includes elements expressing a contrast between cities and the distance between them.

In contrast, one respondent expressed that Giethoorn was not unique or special.

"I thought the place was more beautiful as my friends explained... but after [arriving at Giethoorn] I see that everything is the same... [as other places in the Netherlands] if you see other places in the Netherlands... then it is not that special" (Yu, Qingdao).

This suggests that a place can be special if it is the first time you see it or if it is something new; however, if it contains elements that you see very often in different areas of the country it becomes standardized or normal. In this sense, it seems that Yu from Qingdao had already seen many places in the Netherlands which resembled that of Giethoorn and therefore he was not impressed when he visited Giethoorn.

As a whole, the way Chinese tourists understood Giethoorn was through the appearance of the place with the combination of key elements such as the canals, architecture and the landscape, as well as the remoteness of the place, which made this village unique for them.

### *5.3 Authenticity of the location*

The theme authenticity of the location resulted from the various ways in which the respondents expressed their views on Giethoorn. Throughout the interviews, the Chinese tourists talked about Giethoorn not only as a unique location but also as an authentic place. Therefore, this theme is related to the previous one but also to the following theme on places of the imagination. This is because Chinese tourists have an image of what Giethoorn is or should be like before their trip to this village and as they visit the village with the experience, they adjust the view of Giethoorn to what they had imagined previously. Moreover, for the Chinese tourists, uniqueness is a form of authenticity in the sense that you cannot find the same village in another place. However, authenticity is also related to concepts such as 'typical Dutch', slogans that describe Giethoorn, Dutch paintings and references of the past.

The slogans which promote Giethoorn and which appeared in the different travel guides that the tourists consulted prior their trip were: 'the Venice of the north' and 'Holland's Venice'. These slogans aimed at marketing the region, divulge an image of Giethoorn that can be compared or contrasted to Venice. In this sense, when coming across these slogans, some of the respondents expressed their desire to visit Giethoorn and made a comparison with Venice and their idea of Venice.

"I thought it would be more like Venice, more fancy or touristic... like they say in the tour guides, for example I saw Giethoorn is the 'Holland's Venice', but it is more natural... more countryside style, and this feels like the real place not a touristic place" (Lin, Shanghai).

In this sense, Lin from Shanghai compares Giethoorn to Venice and finds that it is different because there are less tourists in Venice and therefore does not seem touristic enough. However, the idea of less tourism in the area gives her a sense of visiting the 'real place'.

Another idea related to authenticity that was expressed during the interviews was that of 'typical Dutch'. This expression was pointed out by the majority of Chinese respondents who in different ways talked about how Giethoorn was 'typical Dutch'. In this case, 'typical Dutch' was mentioned in relation to the landscape and traditional style buildings.

"typical Dutch, like grasslands and cows and pretty houses with pretty animals for example the cows or some horses" (He, Hong Kong).

"the houses here are typical... their style is Dutch because they have the roof like... straw? So these houses don't exist in other parts of Europe" (Yu, Qingdao).

"typical Dutch seems like the landscape of fairy tales [referring to the landscape in Giethoorn]" (Lin, Shanghai).

This means that authenticity is related to the idea of 'typical Dutch' which at the same time is considered in several ways: natural landscape, building styles and landscape resembling that of fairy tales.

Furthermore, other respondents expressed her view on Giethoorn as 'typical Dutch' adding to the authenticity of the village by mentioning Dutch paintings. When asked what 'typical Dutch' meant, An responded:

"I mean that it is very nice and cute with the beautiful houses, well-maintained... as well as the gardens. I think it's the combination with the countryside view and the canals that makes Giethoorn a paradise place... Actually, the countryside view is very typical of Dutch paintings, that is also why I say typical Dutch" (An, Xiamen).

In this sense, authenticity is linked to Dutch painting and the landscape in Giethoorn which shows that authenticity is related to an image that the tourists have in their minds prior to the trip. However, other respondents expressed their views on authenticity by relating the term with the past and how people lived in the past.

"authentic for me is a how you see the village as it was before... like when the people from 1920 lived their life with the canals and their boats for transportation... so yes, I think it is still quite authentic" (He, Hong Kong).

According to Wang (1999), authenticity occurs within specific types of tourism which portray "the representations of the Other or of the past" (p. 350). In this sense, some of the respondents coincided in that Giethoorn was an authentic village of the Netherlands. Thus, authenticity is related to the natural view or countryside and to the composition of houses, canals and countryside which makes Giethoorn 'typical Dutch', as well as to the architecture and the old elements of the way of life that is portrayed in Giethoorn.

#### *5.4 Food demands*

Food demands was the last main theme identified from the interviews. This theme is related to what the Chinese tourists consider is missing in Giethoorn which is a diversity in types of food and their price. All the respondents without exception mentioned the need for more food options and venues, such as restaurants, food stalls or food trucks in the area which provide different types of food at different prices. This is linked to the rich food and eating culture in China, where there are many options to choose from. All the respondents expressed in different ways that the cuisine in Giethoorn was very 'informal', 'boring', 'dull' and 'the same' as everywhere else in the Netherlands, which shows the lack of innovation in the type of food offered in the village.

One of the ways in which this demand was made was in relation to the food choices found in Giethoorn with those found in China.

"In China you can find a lot of different snacks and things to eat... anywhere... even in remote places but here it seems the food culture is very formal, and you have to go to restaurants which are very expensive, right? In Giethoorn I see you can go to restaurants but no food stalls or snacks are being sold. And then when you go to a restaurant here you only find sandwiches for lunch and very expensive..." (Wu, Xiamen)

Moreover, when asked about what is missing in Giethoorn, An expressed her concern about the price and the informality of lunch:

“More restaurants in different price ranges. Everything is very expensive and very informal. The Dutch restaurant we went to has only sandwiches for lunch...” (An, Xiamen)

Thus, having sandwiches for lunch is something that is considered informal taking into consideration that in China people have abundant warm meals with different dishes to choose from. In this sense, the different culinary cultures become a concern for this type of tourists. Moreover, for Chinese people the diversity of foods being offered in a place is very important to them.

This chapter has presented the results from Chinese tourists that visited Giethoorn during the time of the interviews. The themes interpreted in this chapter have been those of places of the imagination, uniqueness of place, authenticity of the location and food demands. According to the analysis, Chinese tourists have an idea prior their visit to Giethoorn which is made after seeing some photographs of the place and after seeing some slogans. Chinese tourists value and visit Giethoorn due to the unique nature and character of the place. Furthermore, concepts such as ‘typical Dutch’ and slogans marketing Giethoorn as ‘the Venice of the North or ‘Holland’s Venice’ are important for Chinese tourists and are the reason they visit this town. In addition, authenticity is also an important aspect of their visit and is expressed in relation to the aforementioned themes and ideas of landscape, slogans, ‘typical Dutch’ concept as well as in relation to the past and how people lived in an earlier time. Finally, the theme on food demands depicts Chinese tourist’s comments on the lack of food options and choices in Giethoorn.

## 6. Conclusion and discussion

This study has investigated experts from businesses in Giethoorn as well as Chinese tourists in Giethoorn to determine how and in what ways, does the new class of emerging Chinese tourists challenge sustainable tourism practices in Giethoorn. This research has aimed to pinpoint the different challenges that exist in the town of Giethoorn, to conciliate in sustainability discussions and to contribute empirically to the existing literature about sustainability and the new emerging class of Chinese tourists by presenting the case of Chinese tourists in Giethoorn. In regard to the different challenges that exist in Giethoorn, this study has demonstrated that first, the lack of knowledge and understanding of the different Asian tourists that visit the area and therefore the difficulty to pinpoint Chinese tourists, has resulted in making generalizations about the tourists and some sort of ignorance towards Chinese tourists in particular. This tends to suggest that an adaptation to Chinese tourists' needs is superficially made as most of the experts of businesses in Giethoorn are not aware of the type of customers they deal with. As Chan (2006) states, Chinese tourists "are the most eye-catching groups [and] are also making impacts on the transnational touristic culturescape" (p. 188). This suggests that as the experts in Giethoorn are not aware of the type of tourists they deal with; they cannot assess and find solutions to the challenges and impacts that this type of tourists pose.

Second, regarding sustainable practices, most of the issues were concerned with the over crowdedness of the place at certain points in time, in terms of parking and the use of the boats as well as the signs which affected the landscape of Giethoorn. These issues, however, were mainly focused on the general tourism rather than on Chinese tourists in particular. These issues reinforce the idea of the negative impacts of tourism which pose a threat to the heritage and sustainability of the place as argued by García Hernández, de la Calle Vaquero and Yubero (2017).

Third, the adaptability to Chinese tourist behaviour was the theme which was most discussed. Even though the majority of the experts treated tourists as 'all tourists are the same', they did make some distinctions when talking about Chinese tourists and the services provided for them. In this sense, specific Chinese payments and services as in sharing dishes were visible during the interviews. This shows that experts were aware of the increase in the number of Chinese tourists in the area and adapted to their needs. Moreover, the

adaptations were made in relation to European standards, for example when a respondent expressed the similarity between Chinese behaviour eating practices and the Spanish tapas. This confirms to a certain extent Chan's (2006) line of thought in which Western countries adapt their tourism services to meet tourists' needs.

Furthermore, Chinese tourists expressed their visit to Giethoorn as a unique, authentic town as well as an imagined or ideal place. First, the elements described under the theme places of the imagination was mainly interpreted as the way in which Chinese tourists envisioned Giethoorn through the photographs that they saw via social media or travel guides as well as by the slogans that promoted the town. These photographs developed their curiosity to visit Giethoorn. Furthermore, some of the respondents found a relation between Giethoorn and movie settings expressing that the landscape resembled that of movies or fairy tales. This is in line with Reijnders' (2009) idea of places of the imagination, in which locations of movie settings evoke an imagined world.

The second theme uniqueness of place referred to the appearance and the natural environment of Giethoorn concerning landscape and the overall composition of buildings, canals and beautiful houses. This overlaps with the third theme about authenticity of the location which further adds a dimension on what Chinese tourists mean with the term authentic. In this case, Chinese tourists envisioned the authenticity of the place by relating it to the slogans, the concept of 'typical Dutch' and the past. This is in line with Wang's (1999) perspective on authenticity which is made in relation to "the representations of the Other or of the past" (p. 350). Finally, in relation to Chinese tourist behaviour, all the respondents expressed the demand and the necessity to offer food diversity in Giethoorn. This is related to the strong food culture that Chinese tourists have in their country.

As a whole, talks on sustainability were very different between the experts of businesses in Giethoorn and the Chinese tourists in the area. The former focused on issues of lack of space and over crowdedness of some areas, generalising tourists as 'all tourists are the same'; whilst the latter were more interested in the visual aspect of Giethoorn and the way the town is represented in the travel guides as well as the further comparison and experience of the real place. Furthermore, in relation to the food practices and food demands of the Chinese tourists, both experts and Chinese tourists in Giethoorn had different opinions of what was being offered in Giethoorn. On the one hand, most experts in Giethoorn were not aware of the demands that Chinese tourists had regarding food and did

not change their view on what to offer. However, the two experts that were aware of the different eating habits of Chinese tourists did adapt their practices or adapted the food being offered. On the other hand, all the Chinese tourists commented on the lack of food choices and the pricing. This means that even though some businesses are changing their food choices and practices these are not enough to suffice Chinese tourists' needs.

### *6.1 Theoretical implications*

This study has contributed to the different theoretical approaches proposed by different scholars. First, it adds to the growing phenomenon on Chinese outbound tourism by exposing the small town of Giethoorn as a recent Chinese tourist destination in the Netherlands. While tourism in Giethoorn presented by Korthals Altes, Kleinhans & Meijers, (2018) mentions the significant rise of Asian tourists in Giethoorn, it does not address specific issues and concerns regarding Chinese tourists. In this sense, this study has contributed to build on existing literature about Chinese tourists. Furthermore, it leads to widening our understanding of Chinese tourist behaviour in Western destinations by showing what Chinese tourists seek for when travelling abroad and what their needs and demands are in these destinations. Moreover, it builds on existing literature on sustainability and development by expanding our knowledge on how Chinese tourists behave at Western destinations and how business experts manage different practices and issues that arise from the contact with this type of tourists. Finally, this study contributes to the few existing literature on non-Western tourism shedding light upon the particularities and influence of non-Western tourism in Western destinations.

### *6.2 Further research and recommendations*

Some of the limitations encountered during this study were related to the lack of literature on non-Western tourism and tourism in Giethoorn. It is believed that due to the small town that Giethoorn comprises the organization and plans for development in the tourism sector are still being developed and therefore some issues are difficult to address. Furthermore, interviews with Chinese tourists were an arduous process since it was very hard to establish interaction and some trust issues arised between participants towards the researcher, which were solved in some cases when communication could be done in Chinese language. In addition, due to the busy season of the town of Giethoorn at the time

that the interviews were conducted, many of the people who were contacted for interviews, later declined their participation for this study and new participants had to be found. Therefore, interviews during a less busy period such as in the winter season might have been more successful. Furthermore, it would be interesting to address the same phenomenon of Chinese tourists and the challenges they pose in a different location which has some similarities with Giethoorn. For example, choosing another town in another country. This would make an interesting comparative study.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Thesis Interview Topics: Experts from businesses in Giethoorn**

#### **Tourism in Giethoorn**

1. When did you realize Chinese tourists were a major crowd of tourists in Giethoorn?
2. Why do you think Chinese tourists visit Giethoorn?
3. In your opinion, what do you think Chinese tourists look for in Giethoorn?
4. Has Giethoorn changed since the “mass” arrival of Chinese tourists? In what ways?
5. Do you think Giethoorn offers a traditional/authentic view/landscape of the Netherlands? In what ways?
6. How do you think Chinese tourists “discovered” Giethoorn?

#### **Tourism practices**

7. What does your business offer to tourists in general?
8. Does your business offer special products to Chinese tourists?
9. Have you/your business adopted special practices related to the new emerging class of Chinese tourists? (example: website in Chinese, Chinese menu, different types of food, use of language...).
10. Does your business attract more Chinese tourists or national tourists or other types of tourists?

#### **Sustainable tourism**

8. Do you think that tourism in Giethoorn is sustainable? In what ways?
9. In your opinion, do you think tourism is a priority here in Giethoorn? Why?
10. Do you think the local population is affected by tourism? In what ways?
11. Does your business offer any special or different practices for locals and for tourists?
12. Are you afraid that Giethoorn might become too touristy and face negative effects like in Barcelona, Venice and Amsterdam, but in a much lower scale?

#### **Chinese tourist behavior**

13. In your experience, how do Chinese tourists behave?
14. Have you experienced that Chinese tourists demand certain products?
15. Have you adapted your business to meet Chinese demands?
16. Do you think Giethoorn has changed significantly due to the fact that Chinese tourists are a major type of tourists in Giethoorn? In what ways?

## **Thesis Interview Topics: Chinese tourists in Giethoorn**

### **Personal Questions**

1. What is your nationality?
2. Place of residence when you visited Giethoorn?
3. How many times have you visited Giethoorn?
4. How many days have you spent in Giethoorn?
5. How did you get here: alone, organized tour etc.
6. And by what means? (car, tour bus, public transport...)
7. What does your schedule look like? Which activities did you do? (boat tours, etc.)
8. Were they all planned in advance or did you decide once you got there?
9. How long are you staying in the Netherlands? and which other places did you go to (Keukenhof...)?

### **Tourism in Giethoorn**

10. Why did you visit Giethoorn?
11. How did you decide to visit Giethoorn?
12. When did you first hear about Giethoorn?
13. Did you visit Giethoorn because you heard or saw some advertisement or because you saw it in a travel guide or other reasons?

### **Tourist behavior**

14. Why did you decide to visit Giethoorn? (Main interest in visiting Giethoorn?)
15. What elements are the most important for you in Giethoorn?
16. What were you looking for when visiting Giethoorn?
17. Why do you think Giethoorn is so popular amongst Chinese tourists?
18. Where you looking for specific arrangements or facilities made for Chinese people or in Chinese language?

### **Authenticity**

19. What did you expect to find in Giethoorn before arriving?
20. Were your expectations met? In what ways?
21. What are the positive aspects of Giethoorn as a tourist place?
22. What are the negative aspects of Giethoorn as a tourist place?
23. Is there anything missing in Giethoorn?
24. What impression do you have of Giethoorn? Is it mainly a tourist place?
25. Do you think locals are comfortable with the tourism in Giethoorn? In what ways?

## Appendix B

### Themes & Coding

#### Themes for the experts of businesses in Giethoorn:

- 'All tourists are the same'
  - No distinction between nationalities
  - Asian vs. Chinese
  - Type of tourists
- Adaptation to Chinese or Asian tourists' needs
  - Adapting menu
  - Payment options
  - Language
- The practicalities of allocating resources and tourists
  - Usage of boats
  - Parking spaces
  - Use of public transportation
- The view and landscape in Giethoorn
  - Protected village
  - How the village looks
  - Use of signage

#### Themes for the new emerging class of Chinese tourists in Giethoorn:

- Places of the imagination
  - Movies
  - Paintings
  - Photographs
  - Fairy tales
- Uniqueness of place
  - Appearance
  - Peaceful and natural environment
- Authenticity of the location
  - Typical Dutch
  - Slogans
  - Traditional
- Food demands

## Appendix C

### Overview of (anonymous) respondents

#### 1. Experts in Giethoorn

(Fictitious) name	Gender	Place of Residence	Occupation
Arie	Male	Giethoorn	Restaurant owner
Gea	Female	Giethoorn	Hostel owner
Robert	Male	Giethoorn	Tour guide
Lauren	Female	Giethoorn	Hotel owner
Henry	Male	Giethoorn	Employee at a restaurant and boat rental

#### 2. Chinese tourists

Surname	Age	Place of Residence	Occupation
An	-	Xiamen	Student / freelance writer
Chen	28	Shanghai	Private company employee
He	35	Hong Kong	Journalist
Lin	23	Shanghai	Student
Wang	55	Shenzhen	Businessman
Wu	25	Xiamen	Flight attendant
Yu	59	Qingdao	Businessman
Zhang	-	Beijing	Student