

What's in the name "Tasmania"? A discourse analysis of Tasmania as a paradise for tourists of Chinese origin

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Abstract

A marketing campaign setting too high an expectation for tourists may do a disservice to the tourist destination. This paper is a case study of the Tourism Tasmania campaign The Last Paradise launched in February 2008 which targeted Hong Kong tourists. The paper investigates the paradisaal discourse used in the Tasmanian tourism promotion campaign and the gaps between marketing representation and consumer experiences of Tasmania. The author also compares the Western and Eastern (with a focus on the perception of paradise by people of Chinese origin) discourses of paradise. The difference in perception of paradise in Western and Eastern cultures is believed to have caused disappointments among tourists of Chinese origin who visited Tasmania. This cultural difference is supported by the study of the discourse used in 11 travelogues written by Chinese tourists during or soon after their visits to Tasmania. In addition to the disillusionment of paradise, these travelogues also reveal certain fundamental problems in making Tasmania a preferred tourist destination, such as infrastructure, service culture and attitudes of local Tasmanians towards tourists.

Key words: marketing representation, paradise, tourism, tourist expectation

Introduction

On 22 February 2008, Hong Kong's dominant television broadcaster Television Broadcasts Limited launched its first high definition travelogue which featured Tasmania. Dubbed "The Last Paradise", the program had a series of five episodes. Thanks to this program, Tasmania suddenly becomes a household terms in Hong Kong.

Due to lack of local knowledge of the host country and limited time a tourist will stay, often times he or she has to rely heavily, if not solely, on tourist authorities, official websites, guidebooks, site operators and/or travel writers for information (Chan, Ip, & Leung, 2006). What a tourist reads, thus to a very large extent, shapes his/her perception of the destination.

Tasmania was represented as a paradise in this recent Tasmanian tourist discourse. Is Tasmania really a paradise, at least in the eyes of tourists of Chinese origin? This paper will investigate the paradisaal discourse used in tourism promotion and the gap between marketing representation and consumer experiences. The author will compare the Western and Eastern discourses of paradise. The Eastern discourse will focus on the perception of paradise by people of Chinese origin. Furthermore, the paper will examine the discourse used in websites promoting Tasmania as a tourist destination and in travelogues written in Chinese and posted on the internet by tourists of Chinese origin who have visited Tasmania. Whether the Tasmanian paradisaal discourse has stood the "test of practice" (Grant & Hall, 2006) will be explored.

The investigation of tourist discourse provides insights into the gaps between perception (marketing representation of Tasmania) and reality (actual tourist experience of Tasmania). This will inform the authorities and organisations involved in marketing Tasmania as a tourist destination of a broader, more accurate and appropriate marketing representation of Tasmania. In addition, it will also identify the areas in which tourism service provisions need to be improved to close the gaps.

What is a paradise?

The Western discourse of paradise

As defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, *paradise* is "heaven". A paradise is also "an ideal or perfect place" on earth. As early as the third millennium BC, the Sumerian had images and visions of paradise in their stories and poems about the mythological hero king Gilgamesh (Armstrong, 1969). Later, Greek and Roman myths and legends also portrayed paradise as some place distant, exotic, idyllic, fertile and free from illness (Costa, 1998). Paradise in early Western literature embodies qualities such as beauty, copious environment, warm climate, relaxed pace, exotic, unusual and different (Costa, 1998). A modern interpretation of paradise or heaven is that it is what one believes will bring one the greatest joy and pleasure. It represents what one desires at a given time and place (Belk, 2000). Costa (1998, p. 304) stated that "paradisaal discourse suggests a particular type of ideal state – both geographical and psychological – which an individual may desire to experience or consume".

To a tourist, it should be a place of extreme beauty (geographically), a place of abundance (materially) and a place free of chores and worries (psychologically). As evolved over time, a common perception of an earthly paradise is that it must be either an island or an isolated mountain valley (Costa, 1998). These days, the term *paradise* is used in many tourism discourses and many tourist destinations are being marketed as a paradise including, Hawaii, the Caribbean Islands, Bali, Malta, Maldives and lately Tasmania.

Paradise also means a state of perfect happiness as illustrated in the terms such as shopper's paradise, surfer's paradise and gourmet paradise. In these cases, the beauty and exoticism of the place is not the most important consideration. Rather, the experiences of the participants in those places are paramount. In this paper, the author will not discuss the meaning of paradise in this discourse, as this is not that relevant to the discussion of Tasmania as a paradise-like place, in which paradise emphasises both geological and psychological characteristics.

The Eastern discourse of paradise

As mentioned earlier, the Eastern discourse will focus on the perception of *paradise* by people of Chinese origin. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, *paradise* is translated as 天堂 (pronounced as *Tian-tang*, meaning *heaven*) or 樂土 (pronounced as *Le-tu*, meaning *a land of happiness*).

There is a gap in the perception of paradise between Western and Chinese cultures. In Western culture, paradise can be heaven or it can be a place where life there is desired. In Chinese concept, *Tian-tang* is heaven, a place where people who had done good deeds in their life would go in their afterlife, and it is often times presented as contrary to hell. This contrast was brought up in the ancient Chinese books, such as *Book of Song Dynasty* by Shen Yue, *Dun-Huang Manuscript of Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* and *Riwenlu* by Li Chong. All three pieces of literature mentioned paradise and hell in a Buddhist context. In general, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam share similar views about heaven (Freke, 1996; McDannell & Lang, 1995). When *paradise* is construed as heaven, Eastern and Western perceptions are similar. It is a peaceful, worry free place of happiness and abundance. However, the Chinese concept of *Tian-tang* as a place does not encompass the other meaning of *paradise*, that is, an ideal or perfect place on earth.

The term *Tian-tang* when used in a mundane sense is closer to the other meaning of paradise in the Western concept, i.e. a state of perfect happiness. Examples include shopper's paradise, gourmet paradise and entertainment paradise. As mentioned above, this interpretation of *paradise* will not be investigated in the paper.

Le-tu, in Chinese concept, is an earthly place. It is always used in conjunction with another Chinese term 人間 (pronounced as *Ren-jian*, meaning *on earth*). *Ren-jian Le-tu* together means a happy land on earth. The mention of *Le-tu* in Chinese literature can be dated back to as early as 3,000 years ago in the classic literature *Book of Odes*, which was said to be compiled and edited by Confucius. A

prominent Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty, Du-fu, also used the term *Le-tu* in one of his poems. Similar to *Tian-tang* in classic Chinese literature, *Le-tu* is used in contrast with poor governance and political instability. In this case, the interpretation of *Le-tu* is closer to *utopia* than *paradise*.

In fact, tourism is a fairly recent concept or phenomenon for people of Chinese origin. To Chinese, tourism is a leisure activity and historically it was an activity afforded only by the gentry. Hong Kong and Taiwan started to “mass” export tourists only in the 1980s when economies of the Four Little Dragons soared. For most of the time after 1949 when the People’s Republic of China was founded, tourism was regarded as a bourgeois activity in China and outbound travel was restricted to *gan-bu* (幹部, senior party officials). Control over outbound tourism was only relaxed in 1990s gradually and with caution (Zhang, 2002). These outbound tours are mainly in the form of package tours and restricted to designated tourist destinations by the Chinese authority. In Chinese tourism discourse, *Jing-dian* (景點, scenic spots) and *Ming-sheng Gu-ji* (名勝古蹟, places of historic or cultural significance), rarely *paradise*, are the words for tourist destinations. Tourism, as perceived by Chinese, lacks the Western ideology of modern, romantic, exploratory and self bettering (Nyiri, 2006).

Tourism marketing representations of Tasmania

The Last Paradise is a marketing slogan for Tasmania targeting at Chinese tourists. Relevant marketing communication should support this overarching theme to create a paradise image for Tasmania. At the time when this paper is written (i.e. 8 months after the television promotion in Hong Kong), there is no corresponding promotion in the Discover Tasmania website, the official website of Tourism Tasmania. The marketing tag line on the front page of the website is “Tasmania – Island of Inspiration”. The tag line changes to “Tasmania – Discover Australia’s Natural State” for the front page of its each international site. After googling, an old portal page about The Last Paradise television travelogue was found. The first paragraph on the web page (<http://campaigns.discovertasmania.com/intl/asia/hk/paradise/index.html>) reads:

Explore an island with the world's cleanest air, freshest seafood, uncrowded roads, and pretty harbourside cities that are only a short drive from ancient rainforests, jagged mountains and crystal clear lakes and rivers teeming with wild trout. Tasmania is the Last Paradise.

There were a few more archived web pages in support of The Last Paradise campaign. The following table lists a sample of the terms used in these web pages to portray Tasmania as a paradise by themes commonly found in paradisaal discourses. In the Discover Tasmania discourse, there is a heavy emphasis on the natural environment. Terms used under the theme “beauty” are also attributed to the geological appeal of a paradise. It is worth noting that there was no mention of warm climate. As Tasmania sits in the temperate climatic zone, it will be inappropriate to advertise Tasmania as having a warm climate.

Table 1 Paradisaal discourse – sample terms used in The Last Paradise web pages

Paradisaal themes	Sample terms in The Last Paradise web pages
Beauty	Pretty, magnificent, gracious, scenic, striking views, colourful, spectacular, awesome, photogenic
Copious environment	Cleanest air, enticing gourmet, wild rivers, jagged mountains, crystal clear lakes, amazing/abundant wildlife
Warm climate	
Relaxed pace	Uncrowded roads, Relaxing pace, friendly
Exotic	Ancient rainforests
Unusual and different	Unique experiences

The Last Paradise portal page featured also a suggested itinerary and a number of package tours offered by Hong Kong based tour operators. The Discover Tasmania suggested itinerary covers places including Hobart, Port Arthur, Tahune Forest AirWalk, Bruny Island, Cradle Mountain, Dove Lake,

Mole Creek, Sheffield, Launceston, Cataract Gorge, Tamar Valley wine region, Wine Glass Bay, wild-life park, fruit farm, honey farm and cheese farm. When compared with itineraries offered by Hong Kong tour operators, places like Bruny Island, Sheffield, Launceston and the Tamar Valley wine region were not picked up by the Hong Kong tours at all (see Table 2). This indicates a discrepancy in the perception of a paradise between Western and Eastern cultures. Launceston (a quaint and historical city), Sheffield (a rustic little town known for its street murals), Bruny Island (an outlying island offering rich wildlife experience) and Tamar Valley wine region may fit the Western paradigm of paradise but seemingly lack appeal to oriental tourists, probably due to the facts that oriental people may not share the culture and history (as in the cases of Launceston, Tamar Valley wine region and Sheffield) appreciated by Westerners. The exploratory nature of Bruny Island is also out of the fascination of Chinese tourists as mentioned earlier.

The most popular (3 mentions and more) scenic places among Hong Kong tour groups are Port Arthur, Richmond and Cradle Mountain. They all fall within the Chinese definition of *jing-dian* (scenic spot) and *Ming-sheng Gu-ji* (places of cultural and historic significance). The Wine Glass Bay, which is rated among the top 10 beaches in the world, fits the Western paradise image most, that is, having a nice clean beach, clear water, sunny weather, spectacular scenery, lush vegetation, close to modern tourist amenities such as accommodation, restaurants and shops. However, it is mentioned only twice, of equal rank to the Tahune Forest AirWalk and Mole Creek (limestone caves). It is interesting to note that among the Hong Kong tours, there are altogether 11 mentions of visits to various farms (oyster, fruit, mushroom, trout, honey and cheese) offering tasting of fresh produce. This accounts for about one-third of all mentions (total 34) of places covered in the itineraries. There is an old Chinese idiom saying "People rank food heavenly high (民以食為天)". To Chinese tourists, fulfilling the gastronomic desires forms a significant part of travel. The emergence of food tourism spots which attract countless tourists domestically and internationally, such as Lei Yue Mun Seafood Village in Hong Kong, Wanfujing Food Street in Beijing, Shihlin Night Market (which features many food stalls) in Taipei epitomises the importance Chinese people attach to food.

Table 2 Comparison of itineraries proposed by Discover Tasmania and offered by Hong Kong tour operators

Places of interest	The Last Paradise itinerary	Jetour Holidays	Miramar Travel	S.K.Y. Travel (Cruise)	S.K.Y. Travel	Total (for HK tours only)
Hobart	1			1		1
Mount Wellington				1		1
Port Arthur	1	1	1	1	1	4
Richmond		1	1	1		3
Tahune Forest AirWalk	1	1	1			2
Bruny Island	1					
Burnie				1		1
Cradle Mountain	1	1	1		1	3
Dove Lake	1	1				1
Mole Creek	1	1			1	2
Sheffield	1					
Launceston	1					
Cataract Gorge	1				1	1
Tamar Valley wine region	1					
Wine glass bay	1			1	1	2

Wildlife park	1		1	1		2
Farm stay		1				1
Oyster farm		1	1	1	1	4
Fruit farm	1		1	1	1	3
Mushroom farm				1		1
Trout farm			1			1
Honey farm	1				1	1
Cheese farm	1				1	1

Chinese consumers' perception of Tasmania

A tourism discourse will not be complete without also looking at the subjective consumers' perspectives. A total of 11 online travelogues written in Chinese by tourists who had visited Tasmania were identified. The words these tourists used in their travelogues describing their impression of and experiences in Tasmania were studied. Most of these travelogues were written by the tourists either during their holidays in Tasmania or soon afterwards. These travelogues were written out of the tourists' own initiatives and there were no guideline as to how and what they should write. This is quite different to the case of a structured survey or questionnaire when the respondents are directed to arrive at a certain conclusion. This free style expression should better reflect the tourists' views of Tasmania. These travelogues are representative examples rather than exhaustive.

Positive and negative comments of these tourists are summarised in Table 3. Positive dictions used most often are: beautiful, natural, clean, fresh air, no pollution, quiet, relaxing and rustic. Most of these are descriptives of the environment, natural scenery and wildlife, which correspond to the Chinese paradigm of *Jing-dian* (*scenic spots*). One tourist mentioned that Tasmania is a *Le-tu* (land of happiness) and used "Eden of Australia" as the caption of her travelogue. None described Tasmania as a paradise.

Positioning Tasmania as a paradise might set an expectation too high for oriental tourists and a mismatch in reality may lead to disappointment. One tourist said:

Tasmania is known for its natural scenery. Many tourist guidebooks described it as a place that can only be found in heaven and beyond the earthly realm. However my impression is that while it is true that Tasmania has beautiful scenery and it exudes a rustic and natural atmosphere, the tourist guidebooks have overstated its beauty.

(Hong Kong Chinese, February 2002)

Another tourist, who visited Tasmania after watching The Last Paradise television program, had only bad remarks. She explicitly mentioned in her travelogue about the television campaign:

Thanks to Eason Chan (the star celebrity in the television program), now everybody knows Tasmania... Eason Chan's Tasmania is another world – under the camera, there are green mountains, clear water and nice scenery. The Last Paradise – what an enticing name for the program! I brought with me high expectation... The weather was unpredictable, the tour guide could not care less and the scenery is ordinary, like elsewhere in Australia.

(Hong Kong Chinese, March 2008)

Despite that, most of the tourists found Tasmania's scenery beautiful and natural. A few of them regarded Tasmania similar to New Zealand. Some of them compared Tasmanian towns to towns in England or Europe. In this regards, Tasmania fails to offer tourists an unusual and different experience as one would expect for a paradise.

Table 3 Sample terms used in online travelogues of tourists of Chinese origin

Place of origin	Time of visit	Places visited	Positive comments	Negative comments
Hong Kong	Jun 2001	Hobart, Wine Glass Bay	Beautiful and natural scenery, quiet, spacious, relaxing,	Cold, rainy
Hong Kong	Feb 2002	Hobart (joined a local tour to lakes, rainforest, waterfalls and mountains)	Beautiful scenery, clean air, no littering, sunny, enjoyable,	Cold weather, hassles booking domestic flights, overstatement of the beauty of the places, language barrier
Hong Kong	Jun 2005	Launceston, Cataract Gorge, Ross, Hobart, Cadbury factory tour, Salamanca, Mount Field, Russell Fall, Huon Valley, Tasman Peninsula, Port Arthur	Beautiful and natural scenery, clear water, no pollution, close to wildlife, relaxing, cheap and fresh oyster, Launceston is like a small English town, towns European like, Eden of Australia, <i>le-tu</i> ,	Very cold, rainy, small airport (like a dead city), small domestic aircraft (safety concern), expensive, poor road conditions, poor road signs, a local with bad driving manner
Hong Kong	Jun 2007	Hobart, Cadbury factory tour, Port Arthur, wildlife park, Tahune Forest AirWalk, Launceston, Cataract Gorge	Beautiful scenery, clean air, no pollution, impressive rainforest, good fun, good food	Cold, rainy, Port Arthur looked run down, rental car broke down 3 times, sloppy repair and poor service, poor road conditions, disappointment at quality of a particular restaurant
Taiwan	Nov 2007	Wine Glass Bay, wildlife park, Hobart, Cadbury factory tour	Beautiful scenery, clear lakes, colourful rocks, poetic, quiet, relaxing, rustic	Rainy weather, mobile phone (Optus) network not working, difficult to find a restaurant at night, expensive, no receptionist at motel, danger driving at night (because of wildlife on roads), highways are like rural roads
Taiwan	Dec 2007	Hobart, Salamanca market, Port Arthur, Richmond, wildlife park	Beautiful scenery (but similar to New Zealand), interesting wildlife, good food, nostalgic, rustic	Cold, unpredictable weather, expensive
Hong Kong	Mar 2008	Abalone farm (joined a tour)		Bad weather, poor tour guide, natural landscape not as spectacular as claimed, poor food, bad experience
Hong Kong	Mar 2008	Launceston, Tamar Valley wine region, Cradle Mountain, Dove Lake, Sheffield, Ross, Hobart, fruit	Beautiful and natural scenery (like New Zealand), good wine, good food, nice beaches	Unpredictable weather, cold, pace too slow

Place of origin	Time of visit	Places visited	Positive comments	Negative comments
		farms, Swansea, Bicheno, Wine Glass Bay, penguin tour, oyster farm		
Hong Kong	Apr 2008	Hobart, Launceston, Cataract Gorge, Port Arthur, Wine Glass Bay, Sheffield, Cradle Mountain, Montezuma Falls, Nelson Falls, St Columbia Falls, Mount Field, Ross, wildlife park, penguin tour, chocolate factory, fruit farm, lavender farm (joined a tour)	Beautiful environment	
Hong Kong	May 2008	Launceston, Tamar Island Wetland, Cradle Mountain, Narawntapu National Park, Bicheno, Wine Glass Bay, Mount Field, Bruny Islands,	Plenty wildlife, quiet villages, beautiful beaches, rugged coast line, nice journey	Cold, Short day light, danger driving at night (because of wildlife on roads)
Hong Kong	Aug 2008	Hobart, Tasman Island, Tahune Forest AirWalk, wildlife park	A beautiful island, nice scenery	Expensive

A study of their negative comments reveals that the cold, rainy and unpredictable weather is the major shortcoming. Many of the other negative remarks are service or people related. While the Tasmanian tourism authorities can have little control over the weather, there is certainly room for improvement with regard to infrastructure, service culture and people's attitude towards tourists.

One tourist described her experience driving on the road:

We passed the bridge and then went up the peak slowly. When we passed the crest and started to descend, at this point, a sports car crossed the double lines attempting to overtake. Just when this car passed, the guy gave us the finger and yelled "Fxxx you, so slow".

(Hong Kong Chinese, June 2005)

This same tourist also mentioned about poor road conditions and poor road signs in her travelogue. More than half of the tourists on self drive holidays mentioned about the danger driving in Tasmania because of factors such as poor road conditions, poor road signs, no lights on the roads, windy country roads, wildlife on the roads at dark and highways not up to international highway standards. Another infrastructure issue mentioned by the tourists is the unreliable mobile phone network. Some of the tourists were unimpressed by the service culture of Tasmania. As mentioned earlier, one tourist had an indifferent tour guide and she was bitter about her experience in Tasmania. One got to a motel to find no receptionist there and there was no mobile phone coverage. At one point he was worried that he and his friend might have to stay overnight in the car. One mentioned the terrible car mainten-

ance and service of the rental car company. Some stated that quality of restaurants varied a lot; there was a lack of varieties of restaurants and restaurants close early. It is again worth noting that all except two mentioned about food in their travelogues regardless whether their comments are positive, negative or neutral. This further accentuates the point discussed earlier that Chinese attach great importance to food.

Disappointments of the tourists could be a result of wrong marketing messages and could also be attributable to cultural differences in the perception of paradise. Earlier research on Japanese tourists in Hawaii indicated that individuals from non-Western societies may not have the same paradisaal experiences (Keown, 1989; Nitta, 1992).

In this paper, there is no attempt to compare the places these tourists visited with the suggested itinerary of The Last Paradise campaign. This is mainly due to the fact that many of these travelogues are not travel diaries and thus lack details of the places they visited. Rather, they are expressions of the tourists' impressions and views of Tasmania.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Despite disappointments expressed by some of the travelogue writers, overall impression of these tourists about Tasmania was positive. For those who expressed disappointments, most of their very first disillusionments were related to what they had expected and what they actually saw upon arrival. They anticipated a "paradise". However, most said that Tasmania is beautiful but not as striking as a paradise. In some cases, the disappointments escalated to frustrations when the tourists experienced unpleasant encounters such as poor weather, unfriendly services and being treated rudely, which left a bitter taste with these tourists.

Managing expectation is an art. While the tourism authorities should promote the best sides of Tasmania, overstating can lead to disappointments. One of the recommendations to make Tasmania a desired tourist destination for tourists of Chinese origin is for the tourism authorities to revisit the existing promotion campaign strategy and reposition Tasmania to portrait an image closer to reality in the eyes of the Chinese tourists. The author personally finds the line "Tasmania – Discover Australia's Natural State" better than "The Last Paradise" in marketing Tasmania to Chinese tourists. This gap, as mentioned earlier, could be attributed to the cultural differences in the perception of paradise.

The analysis of the travelogues also reveals certain fundamental problems facing the Tasmanian tourism industry, such as infrastructural support, service culture and people's attitude towards tourists. As these are outside the area of discourse analysis, the author will not elaborate her recommendations here. Particular areas that worth attention are:

- Improvement in mobile phone coverage,
- Improvement in road signs,
- Promotion of dining facilities,
- Promotion of a hospitality culture,
- Education to tourists about safe driving in Tasmania.

Whether a place is a paradise is in the eyes of the beholder. The perception of paradise also differs from culture to culture. This paper discussed the differences in paradisaal discourse in Chinese and Western cultures which may have possibly contributed to some of the disappointments of Chinese tourists in Tasmania, as evidenced by the travelogues analysed.

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