



Copsites / duplitecture as tourist attractions: An exploratory study on experiences of Chinese tourists at replicas of foreign architectural landmarks in China

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to clarify the position of duplitecture/copsites in the theoretical stream of tourism authenticity. It does so by exploring the meanings assigned by domestic Chinese tourists, based on their socially and culturally held beliefs, while they interact with architectural imitations imported from alien cultures. The primary research method is an emergent qualitative design that involved in-depth interviews of Chinese tourists at the eight copsites considered in this study. The findings reveal three relevant themes. *Reconceptualization of authenticity* indicates that the concept of imitation has very different connotations in China compared to those in the West. *Cultural self-exploration* reflects an evolving stage of intercultural maturity manifested by Chinese tourists. *De-globalization* has led to cultural homogenization of the tourist spaces in China. The findings fill the lacuna in existing theoretical streams of tourism authenticity by clarifying the position of copsites and has practical implications for domestic tourism marketing organizations in China.

1. Introduction

Over the years, the brand counterfeiting market has prospered in developing countries and this is mainly related to the desirability of Western brands among consumers there. In China too, it is believed that brands of Western origin lend higher status to their users (Lai & Zaichkowsky, 1999). The same predilection is evident in the popularity of Western-style architecture across China, as the country takes a giant leap toward urbanization that has drastically transformed its landscape and society in a profound manner. Studying this drastic shift from Chinese tourists' perspectives gives the study a dual premise of considering China's importation and replication of prestigious architectural landmarks of foreign countries as toured objects, on the one hand, and analyzing the account of their touristic journeys to these replicas, on the other.

Bernhard and Duccio (2019) used the term "copsites" to reflect replicas for the monuments, group of buildings, or tourist spots that hold a distinguished position in the tourism and marketing industry for their universally accepted value and global fame. Bosker (2013) coined the term "duplitecture" to describe those urban forms that imitate Western

architectural designs and developments. Other terms used in the nascent literature on this topic are staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1976), architectural simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994), and xenophilic towns/cities (Sui, Zhao, & Kong, 2017). For the sake of consistency, this research will use the terms copsites and duplitecture interchangeably while broadly referring to these replicas broadly.

Imitation of Western architectural iconography is rapidly making its way to China's urban frontiers. Paris's emblematic Eiffel Tower has a duplicate at Tianducheng, which is in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. Australia's most notable icon, Sydney's Opera House, has a copy in Beijing. Similarly, there are imitations of other landmarks, such as the Roman Colosseum, Moscow's Kremlin, Venice's canals, and replicas of ancient towns and cities across China. Some of the replicas in China were originally built as part of the so-called "theme parks." For instance, Lanzhou, a city in the Northwestern China's Gansu province has gigantic replicas of Athens's iconic Parthenon and Egypt's Great Sphinx of Giza; these were under the Silk Road cultural relic project theme park to boost the tourism industry of the city. There are also thematic zones in major Chinese cities that are functioning communities modeled on European-American urban features. Unlike the "China towns" in the US, which

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were actually built by immigrants, these Chinese communities, designed by Chinese architects, have European- or American-style buildings (Bosker, 2013). One of China's largest metropolises, Shanghai, developed a project of *one city, nine towns* that envisaged Western-style theme towns across the Shanghai municipality (Den Hartog, 2010). Similarly, Hallstat, a small picturesque Austrian tourist village has a replica located in Huizhou, which is in Southern China's Guangdong province (Ingram & Reisenleitner, 2014). Likewise, aspects of Dorchester, a small British town, and Amsterdam, the tourism capital of Netherland, are recreated in the Chinese cities of Chengdu and Shenyang, respectively (Sui et al., 2017). Some of the replicas in China of iconic buildings are not only exact copies, but also larger in size. For instance, the replica of London's famous Tower Bridge landmark in the Chinese city of Suzhou is twice as large.

Existing research on copysites is not only scant, but also descriptive and non-theoretical in nature. With reference to China, only a handful of studies are available and they offer a limited socio-historic view of the different forms of architectural imitations in China (Bosker, 2013); others study the overall impact of these replicas on China's constructed landscape (Fan, 2009), as well as the booming economy and rapidly urbanizing society (Sui et al., 2017). The theoretical streams on authentic tourism experiences, recognize that the genuineness of tourism objects or events is not the only way of comprehending authenticity; thus, there exists a need to capture the tourist perspective (Bernhard & Duccio, 2019; Cohen, 1995; Wang, 1999). Although, architectural case studies built on the articulation between tourism and copysites (e.g., Buchrieser, 2019; Gordon, 2019; Gravari-Barbas, 2019; Padan, 2019) focused on the role tourism played in re-interpretation and re-spatialization of copysites, but they have largely remained imbedded within temporal and cultural variations of a simulacrum object with reference to the original versions of emblematic architectural heritage; therefore, giving little attention to the touristic journeys and imaginaries in relation to these copysites. Despite focusing on copysites, the staged setting can obtain first-hand experiences based on tourists' belief systems and backgrounds by obscuring the boundary between fake and real; however, there is very limited scholarly research exploring the interface between tourists' experiences and the copysites' space visited. Specifically, when seen in the context of Western cultural invigoration resonating with Chinese domestic tourists, this study embraces the more complex relationship between the subjective nature of authenticity within the staged performative setting, that is, copysites situated in the touristic journeys of Chinese tourists within the broader nexus of their social-spatial and cultural relations that mediate their touristic experiences.

This study has the following two primary objectives: i) to explore the meanings assigned to the copysites or duplitecture by domestic Chinese tourists and to clarify the position of duplitecture or copysites in the theoretical stream of authenticity by highlighting the perspectives of Chinese tourists; and ii) to understand how Chinese tourists re-negotiate their socially and culturally held beliefs while interacting with architectural landmarks imported from alien cultures. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, the literature review furnishes the theoretical background based on relevant scholarship. Next, the methodology section introduces the methods implied by the qualitative research design. The iterative thematic analysis is discussed next; it is followed by major findings of the study presented in the form of themes, principal nodes, and child nodes. Last, the implications of the results for scholars and policy makers and the potential research directions for future researchers are stated, along with a mention of the study's limitations.

2. Theoretical background

In relation to copysite tourism spaces, the tourism literature has discussed authenticity as a scholarly issue, but without achieving consensus (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). The resources on the authenticity of tourism are conceptualized as objective, constructive, and existential

(Wang, 1999). Objective authenticity has a categorical criterion in the form of the object being inherently original; further, authentic experiences are confirmed by tourists by identifying the toured object as objectively original (Boorstin, 2012; MacCannell, 1976). Thus, the objectivists consider authenticity not as something perceived by the tourists, but as arising from the fulfillment of certain standards. Under constructive authenticity, the toured objects are acknowledged as original not because they are intrinsically authentic, but because they are constructed as such in terms of imagery, perceptions, beliefs, preferences, and contextual settings (Bruner, 1991; Salamone, 1997; Silver, 1993). Thus, the authentic tourism experiences are constituted once the constructive authenticity is projected onto the toured objects; therefore, this kind of authenticity is also termed as symbolic authenticity (Culler, 2007). Both the objective and constructive authenticities are categorized as object-related by Wang (1999) because authentic tourism experiences are dependent on either the object attributes (in the case of objective authenticity) or the projected object attributes (in the case of constructive authenticity). This objective authenticity has also been discussed with reference to tourists' desire to: share the lived experiences of the local people they encounter (Lau, 2010), or at least see them leading their life (MacCannell, 1976). According to the objectivists and constructivists, the staged tourist settings and touristic experiences—the focus of this research—that do not comprise “authentic” local life and “authentic” tourism products do not share this objective authenticity.

On the other hand, postmodernist scholars believe that the authenticity of tourism resources is a myth because rarely has any historical monument or a building of cultural significance ever held its original state; further, the undiluted and unadulterated versions of pure form have never really existed (Bernhard & Duccio, 2019; Cohen, 1995). The authenticity and origins of the toured objects do not concern tourists, as long as they enjoy touring them (Wang, 1999). The existential form of authenticity is rapidly gaining acknowledgement among scholars. Drawing from the Heideggerian thesis, Reisinger and Steiner (2006) state that there are no authentic or inauthentic tourists; further, existential authenticity, which is experience-oriented, and, hence, transient, is only temporarily authentic in different settings. Kim and Jamal (2007) and Taylor (2001) assert that once a toured product is turned into a tourism activity, tourists do not really concern themselves about the authenticity of the object; rather, they seek their authentic selves with the help of the tourism activities in which they engage at the toured object. This makes tourism a simpler, purer, unrestrained, and more authentic activity that transcends the everyday roles of the tourists. This emotional state, regardless of its subjectivity, is real to the tourists and approachable through tourism. Therefore, because touristic experiences can be authentic, even if the tourist setting is staged, the authenticity of the toured object, that is, a copysite, is secondary. Wang (1999) further elucidates that tourists might seek not only interpersonal experiences to obtain individual moments of authenticity, but also sociability of intrapersonal experiences with friends and family members.

This research focuses on copysites in China based on architectural landmarks from alien cultures and encapsulates the tourism-activity-related function of the existential form of authenticity that has been commoditized by being transformed into consumable and saleable tourism products (Gotham, 2007). As the focus is on tourists' perspectives of these copysites, they become, once visited by tourists, an alternative source of “existential versions” to provide authentic experiences (Wang, 1999). As Chinese tourists participate in these copysite tourist spaces only through their experiences, the understanding of their authentic selves and the authenticity of the tourism environment and its constituents materializes while they interact with the copysites. However, drawing from Shepherd (2015)'s interpretation of authentic tourism experiences, it is clear that experiential moments are scarcely unfiltered and unmediated. Tourists visiting replicas are not really interested in uncovering their underlying historical accuracy and cultural clarity. For them, these replicas are performance platforms and they intend to live up to the expectations they carry in their head; hence,

they are avenues for experiencing of affirmation, and not authenticity. The copysites, thus, are performative platforms and tourists visiting them, instead of fretting over the lack of authenticity, may only experience performative deprivation once they fail to conform to the expectations symbolized by the copysite tourist spaces. In this milieu, we aim to make in-depth exploration of the touristic journeys of Chinese domestic tourists intersecting with the performative symbols of copysites. Because these copysites are a byproduct of the importation of alien cultures, they give Chinese tourists a unique opportunity to witness their life in a foreign culture; this is because an imported cultural icon in their own backyard makes them re-negotiate and re-consider their values and priorities, as well as socially and culturally held beliefs.

3. Methodology

The primary research method of this study involves conducting in-depth interviews of Chinese citizens. This is because interviews provide the flexibility to comprehend the attitudes and reflections of interviewees and interpret the information they provide (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). This study was conducted over a year—2018—through field trips to replica sites demonstrated in the exhibits. The following were the criteria for selecting the eight copysites used in this study: i) iconic status of the original architecture on which they are based; ii) popularity of the copysite structures

on China's digital and social media; and iii) the tourism prospects of the copysites that have made them attractive for domestic Chinese tourists insofar as they are not completely abandoned places and still maintain the status of an active tourist spot for visitors. A brain-storming session with 18 management students of Chinese origin studying tourism in a large Chinese university helped to zero in on the eight copysites and finalize their relevance to the study objectives; this is depicted in Fig. 1. It is pertinent to note that as a result of brain storming session, thematic mass entertainment projects such as, American theme parks like Disneyland Shanghai were not included to prevent diversion from our main research objective of focusing on architectural replications.

The copysites selected include the British Town, a theme town heavily inspired by the small British market town of Dorchester; it is located in South Western China's provincial capital of Chengdu. This development, consisting of a community of around 200,000 people, has Victorian style terraces, restaurants, churches, and cobbled streets (exhibit a). The second was the Suzhou Tower Bridge, a replica of the London Tower Bridge that stands tall over River Thames; this is a very detailed and modified replica, in which each of the four towers is 40 m high and accommodate pedestrian paths, as well as a multi-lane motorway. Further, the towers are twice the size of the original tower (exhibit b). Third, Little Venice replicates the traditional Venetian costumes of the gondoliers, as well as the canals and palaces; further, conventional European-style buildings are reproduced in the port city of



a. British Town, Chengdu



b. Tower Bridge, Suzhou



c. Little Venice, Dalian



d. Château de Maisons-Laffitte, Beijing



e. Florentia Village, Tianjin



f. Hallstat Village, Huizhou



g. Shanghai Minhang People Court



h. Thames Town, Shanghai

Fig. 1. Copysites selected for the study (Sources: a. Thomas/flickr; b. Visual China Group; c. Central European News; d. Wired; e. David Gray/Reuters; f. Travel mint; g. Associated Press; h. Wired).

Dalian in Northeastern China to offer tourists a flavor of Venice (exhibit c). Fourth, the Château de Maisons-Laffitte, modeled on the original landmark in Paris, has been recreated as a luxury hotel in the capital Beijing; it contains period sculpture, gardens, a spa, and a wine museum (exhibit d). Fifth, the Florentia village is a replica of a traditional Italian town; having plenty of fancifully decorated fountains, canals, colonnades, and bridges, it serves as a mall containing hundreds of designer-brand outlets in the port city of Tianjin in Northern China. The thematic architecture makes this place an attractive tourist draw (exhibit e). Sixth, the Hallstatt Village, originally a small tourist town in Austria and declared a world heritage site by UNESCO, is reproduced as a housing development that is emblematic of a European lifestyle resort town; it is located in the suburbs of Huizhou city in the Luoyang Boluo county (exhibit f). Seventh, the Shanghai Minhang People's Court, originally an architectural amalgamation of the White House and US Capitol building—two of the most emblematic buildings in the US—serves as a government building located in Shanghai (exhibit g). Last, Thames Town, a replica of what was originally a small British market town in London, is located in Shanghai and houses approximately 10,000 Chinese citizens. The town gives a British feel by Tudor-style homes, brick buildings, red phone booths, and a faux River Thames, among others, and attracts a sizable number of tourists (exhibit h).

Following Kim and Jamal (2007)'s approach, a pilot study was conducted to identify the targeted tourist segments, essential research questions, and design for this study. As a result, two behavioral criteria were applied to determine the targeted interviewees. First, we selected only those tourists who had visited at least one of the copysites and made more than two visits to copysites in the last 3 years. Second, because the selected copysites also included three thematic residential towns (i.e., British Town in Chengdu, the Hallstat Village, and Thames Town in Shanghai), residents of such towns were not made part of the sample; this ensured an unbiased touristic perspective. As a result, a total of 65 in-depth interviews were conducted by employing the above-mentioned criteria to recruit potential interviewees. The respondents consisted of 39 males (60%) and 26 females (40%); their ages ranged from 24 to 68 years and the average was 38. About 85% of the respondents had completed at least high school. The number of respondents recruited from each site ranged from a minimum of 6 (9%) at Thames Town, Shanghai to a maximum of 13 (20%) at Tower Bridge, Suzhou.

The targeted interviewees were approached at the copysites or in the parks, teahouses, and restaurants in the vicinity of the copysites. The research topic and purpose of the study was introduced to the potential interviewees and preliminary screening questions were asked to determine whether they meet the criteria for selection; hence, the purposive sampling approach was employed to recruit information-rich cases for in-depth interviews (Patton, 1990). After obtaining prior permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and notes were made of the important points found. Each interview lasted, on average, for 30–45 min. Two bilingual experts, proficient in English and Chinese, were recruited to prepare a transcript of the audio tapes of the interviews as well as translate the field notes.

The data were sorted and stored through NVivo and subjected to the iterative processes proposed by Huberman and Miles (1998) and Braun and Clarke (2006) and delineated by Yousaf and Xiucheng (2018). In the first stage, data reduction was achieved by producing complete transcripts of interviews and acquiring familiarity with the data by reading it thoroughly. The interview transcripts were screened and coded according to the relevant interview questions to generate a large number of conceptual nodes of solutions; further, they were categorized as principal and child nodes. In the next stage, thematic similarities were sought and coded information was organized by linking the nodes to key themes. The transcripts were rechecked many times to ensure accuracy and consistency in the coding process, and the themes were revisited to check for the presence of concurring nodes; these were later merged to form a single node. The nodes were refined, on the basis of their conceptual closeness, in such a way that the nodes within the themes and

principal nodes were related to each other, but still mutually exclusive. In the next stage, data were interpreted by reconfirming the findings after consulting the relevant literature for a more theoretically informed analysis. This overarching iterative examination of formation of themes, principal nodes, and child nodes was further refined to identify theoretical relationships and develop links with the theory and research purpose. The themes and nodes, thus generated are presented in Table 1.

4. Findings

4.1. A reconceptualization of authenticity

The thing clearly discernible in the way these copysites were perceived by Chinese tourists was how the concept of imitation and copying has different connotations in China, compared to those in the West. Creativity is not considered as the act of an individual in China and, hence, imitating and replicating is not considered wrong. Instead, creating a good copy is considered as an expression of technical proficiency in Chinese aesthetic traditions (Bosker, 2013; Thompson, 2013). Skillful copying is hailed in China and a replica is considered as good as the original, if the intention is to retain the essence of the original style and take it mainstream (Wang & Rowlands, 2017). The prominence of this theme implies that Chinese tourists do not differentiate between the staging of authenticity, as in the case of copysites, and the direct experiences of the originals; this is because, according to them, the original spaces have already been corrupted by the mediating influence of time and space. Imitations or copysites are alterations needed to achieve the architectural proficiency that moves the skill forward (Bernhard & Duccio, 2019).

4.1.1. Relative authenticity

The Chinese tourists' perspective of authenticity implies that what tourists perceive as authentic in different contexts is not inferred directly from the tourism objects or the places; the meaning attached to them is the result of the consolidation of tourists' background and past experiences and the way in which tourism objects are portrayed to the tourists. Timothy and Boyd (2006) term this as relative authenticity. The emergence of this theme confirms the postmodernist perspective about authenticity not being an absolute concept (Fu, Liu, Wang, & Chao, 2018; Yi, Fu, Yu, & Jiang, 2018), but a relative one; this is because there will be variations between the authenticity tourists feel about experiencing a "copysite" and an authentic tourist site relaying authentic tourism experiences. If Chinese tourists judge the touristic consumption of these copysites as an authentic experience on the basis of their experiential consumption perceptions, the concept of what is referred to as "copysites" needs to evolve on the basis of these tourists' perspective.

Table 1
Relevant themes, principal nodes, and child nodes.

Dominant Themes	Principal nodes	Child nodes
Reconceptualization of authenticity	Relative authenticity	Tolerance for copysites Foundational split between China and the West
Cultural self-exploration	Existential guilt	Expression of lack of cultural depth Need to revitalize indigenous Chineseness
	Existential courage	Falling prey to the culture of foreign admiration Copysites are not an escapist experience
De-globalization	Destination commodification	Touristic consumerism in China Demand for glocalised touristic sites
	Cultural internationalism	Cultural exchange resource Cosmopolitanism

Moreover, Chinese tourists do not seem to concern themselves with identifying the distinction between a copysite version and an authentic version; instead, they pay attention to the context by which a tourist site is inspired and the perfection with which this inspiration has been actualized. The emergent child nodes under the relative authenticity principal node suggest that when Chinese tourists' expectations of the original cultural landmarks are met by the copysite versions, they exhibit "tolerance for duplitecture" and engage in "foundational split between China and the West".

4.1.1.1. Tolerance for duplitecture. China's view on architectural mimicry challenges the view about replication as something detestable and taboo; they imply that replication can lead the way to become a source of novelty and creativity. The existential status of imitating and replicating in China differs significantly from Western conceptions. Bosker (2013) remarks that the West is obsessed with the notion of the primacy and espouses only the original as legitimate; thus, anything that follows, whether it is copying or replicating, is seen as inferior and subversive, and, consequently rejected. In contrast, replicas in China enjoy a relatively higher status; although originality is appreciated, there is cultural esteem associated with copying and replicating. It is admired as a symbol of cultural and technological mastery, thereby creating an environment receptive to copysite structures.

"I do not think it is a copy. It is just a Chinese way of admiring the original creators. It is sort of, what you call, a tribute. This is a craft, a skill. At least, this is how we see it." (Male, 42)

(Referring to Hallstat village) "Reproducing a piece of architecture is a symbol of craftsmanship. It should be seen like this. What drives this culture is the Chinese love for appreciating the accomplishments of alien cultures." (Female, 51)

The findings make sense when seen in the context of the practices of the imperial era. The missing concept of "fake" in Chinese art and heritage during the imperial era has molded the discourse of imitation in modern-day China and the boundaries between the fake and original have become blurred (Wang & Rowlands, 2017). Wong (2017) elucidated that imitating the works of art of Western masterpieces is considered purely as an act of adaptation and innovation by Chinese artists. This tolerance toward copysites is reflected in the Chinese language, which makes a lexical distinction between the words used for the English word "copy." For instance, Bosker (2013) calls attention to "Fangzhipin," which has a negative connotation, while "Fuzhipin" is used to convey the reproduction of arts, crafts, and materials meant for learning and display. This also demonstrates the importance of relativist ethics while understanding the seemingly "unethical practices" are not deemed culturally inappropriate in some cultures; this makes questions of ethics and morals very culture-specific (Fennell, 2006; Tolkach, Pratt, & Zeng, 2017). This is the reason why, unlike the case in the West, we find tolerance toward copysites in China.

4.1.1.2. Foundational split between the West and China. China's emergence as the undisputed economic leader of the non-Western world is reshaping global power dynamics. Tselichtchev (2012) reiterates the "China versus the West" narrative by showing that China is structurally and macroeconomically much stronger than most of the countries of the West; further, the very essence of the Chinese model of capitalism and unconventional political evolution, which paved the way for China to achieve this feat, needs to be squared against the traditional stereotypical views about China. An important observation emerged from the interviews was that Chinese tourists typically addressed the West as a single entity. The narrative about the foundational split between China and the West was evident in the tourists' perceptions; they insist on cultural specificity of copysites and contextualize the inability of the West to comprehend this by using the overall framework that pits China against the West. This holds especially true, as there is evidence that

copysites are likewise trendy and popular in Western countries. For instance, the iconic architectural landmarks from Paris and Venice are being replicated in more and more US cities to cater to tourists' demand for immersive experiences (Gravari-Barbas, 2019). China's success in the economic domain fuels the perceptions of Chinese tourists that question the assumptions held by the West and attempt to understand the country on its own terms, even in matters that go beyond governance and economy.

"The people of the West do not really get it. I have been to New York and I saw replicas of buildings there as well, but they consider them as based on "inspiration" and those in China as "counterfeit" and "imitations." There is a fundamental difference in how cultural symbols are reconstructed and perceived in both cultures. One can see same prejudice toward the Chinese governance system, public policies, and politics if one uses Western lens to try to understand them." (Male, 48)

"Western people do not understand what drives this imitation culture in China. They believe that it is the fondness of the Chinese people for taking the easy route of copying instead of creatively refining their own architectural art; this is totally wrong." (Male, 33)

For some tourists, the copysites serve the purpose of physical manifestations; they showcase China's dominance on the global stage and its ability to import an entire alien culture to its shores for the benefit of its people. Therefore, it turns out that copysites in China are not always an acknowledgement of an iconic symbol of foreign culture or paying an homage to it; the idea of copying and imitating is also symptomatic of China's global reach and copysites are a metaphoric reminder to the Chinese people that China has achieved so much control and power that it can construct alien cities, towns, and landmarks. In doing so, Chinese domestic tourists accept the contradictions and intricacies inferred from the presence of Western architectural achievements in China.

"So what if a middle class Chinese cannot travel to Italy; we have imported little Italy to China (referring to Florentia village). It shows China's global impact and reach. You know, there are more tourists from China than any other country in the world. And for domestic tourists too, China owns a bit of foreign countries." (Female, 34)

Chinese tourists regarded the copysites as a transitional medium that they believe could lead to innovation in the future. China's cultural character allows the copying of those aspects of alien cultures that benefit it. Bosker (2013) highlighted the notion that the Chinese are traditionally eager to embrace the technical discoveries of the West if they benefit the country. In a similar vein, the urban landscapes and architectural engineering of the developed world is seen to provide promising solutions to the problems engendered by the rapid urbanization of China. Therefore, copysites are not perceived as a subversive architectural language by Chinese tourists.

"We in China believe that mimicry is the sincerest form of flattery. China accepts the highest achievements of foreign cultures, and make them our own if they benefit the country. This is how China has achieved success." (Male, 34)

4.2. Cultural self-exploration

The emergence of cultural self-exploration as a theme is not surprising because cultural landmarks and monuments may not be exclusively focused on promoting external cultural discoveries; they could also further the understanding of cultural self-exploration. Cultural self-exploration is an evolving stage of intercultural maturity that leads to the development of an emerging sense of cultural identity that is not eternally fixed and, hence, regularly re-negotiated; it leads to a culturally conscious and thoughtful basis for maintaining well-founded

intercultural interactions (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). In this milieu, the concept is different from the psychological push motivation factor of “self-exploration” discussed in the literatures on travel motivations and destination choices tourism (Crompton, 1979; Yuan & McDonald, 1990). For Chinese tourists, copysites can facilitate the comparison and contrast between the home country’s cultural landmarks and the landmarks imported in the form of copysites. The findings reveal that cultural self-exploration increases Chinese tourists’ awareness of the nuances associated with their own cultural heritage and make them adopt a more mature attitude toward foreign cultures.

4.2.1. Existential guilt

According to the Heideggerian perspective, people suffer existential guilt when they are not able to realize the potential of their true self (Heidegger, 1996). The realization that there is an outstanding potential that is yet to be actualized makes people doubt their potentiality. Chinese tourists’ existential guilt manifests when the commercial aspects of tourism resources in the form of copysites of Western landmarks take precedence over the notable traditional Chinese cultural sights. The emergence of this theme is especially important because the effects of negative emotions, such as guilt, on behavior are much stronger than those of positive emotions (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Nawijn & Biran, 2018). This is because guilt is an emotional response that arises when one realizes that certain societal expectations are violated; consequently, it provokes a prosocial behavior (Basil, Ridgway, & Basil, 2006). The responses of Chinese tourists reveal that the unsettling feeling of uneasiness that precedes the guilt is exhibited in the form of emergent child node “*expression of lack of cultural depth.*” Once Chinese tourists confront this existential predicament in the form of guilt (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017), they initiate actions to redeem themselves and reconcile with their personal value system; this behavior is exhibited in the form of child node “*Revitalizing indigenous Chineseness.*”

4.2.1.1. Expression of a lack of cultural depth. The overwhelming feeling of lack of cultural depth that was found to be prevalent among Chinese tourists manifests itself in the rapid erection of Western-inspired copy-site structures across the urban and semi-urban landscape of China. The architectural buildings are emblematic expressions of the cultural identity projected by a country (Salama & Wiedmann, 2016); thus, copysites are believed to emerge more frequently at those destinations that need to reinvent themselves in order to stay competitive in the global tourism market. This is because these destinations lack tangible and intangible historical and cultural assets of global pertinence and, thus, depend on importing and recreating the commodified cultural and tourism products from other countries that have proven have to be successful (Bernhard & Duccio, 2019). Therefore, the destinations that pride themselves of more consequential heritage and history tend to avoid charges of architectural imitation.

“The presence of replica buildings throughout China makes me wonder whether Chinese culture and artifacts were enriching enough to stand the test of time. See, in China, most of these replicas have become popular tourist spots. This does reflect that European and American cultural values are more universal than the Chinese.” (Male, 26)

Another important dimension attributed to this expression of lack of cultural depth by Chinese tourists is that China borrows these dupli- tures from geographically, historically, and culturally remote civili- zations. Bosker (2013) argues that copysites in China are drastically different from those in other cultures where foreign architecture aims to yield nostalgic appropriation historically borrowed from within the same civilizational matrix with which these cultures once identified; for example, British architecture in modern-day India and Pakistan or the Beaux Arts architecture in the once-colonized cities of South East Asia.

The reproduction of these copysites is a clear indication of the intense “cultural hybridization” witnessed as the East meets the West; however, beyond this, it also reflects the cultural limits of contemporary China, where current values do not accord well with those of the past (Fujita, 2010; Li & Den Hartog, 2010). This historical and temporal incongruity within China’s own culture is alarming for some tourists, as reflected in the following quote:

“I think these replicas of original architecture will slowly make China lose its originality, identity, and history.” (Female, 30)

Moreover, Chinese tourists emphasized the reappraisal of the values of Chinese architecture and culture by taking inspiration from the West. Rowe and Kuan (2004) believe that such introspections are necessary in rescuing the Chinese traditions in the modern era. The Chinese appropriation of Western architecture represents a much-overlooked cultural context, which is related to the architectural monotony and pragmatism under the Communist government; it led to the replacement of the traditional and diversity-filled architecture of ancient China with similar looking blocks of buildings. Once an era of all-prevalent consumerism emerged in China in the late 1990s, the demand for more aesthetically pleasing housing commodity market thrived and communist-style architecture could not retain much of its appeal (Shephard, 2016). The Western-themed architecture fulfilled such consumer demands and, as a result, such inspired architecture became ubiquitous across China.

“I think we can learn in this regard a lot from the West. Unlike China, the way they secure their traditions, culture, and buildings and then make them internationally appealing to different nations and cultures show their cultural depth and self-confidence.” (Female, 31)

4.2.1.2. Need to revitalize indigenous Chineseness. People feeling a sense of guilt are believed to engage in self-reflection (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashnek, 2007). This is why guilt is regarded as a self-conscious moral emotion that facilitates pro-social and pro-environmental behavior (Lin, Kerstetter, Nawijn, & Mitas, 2014). Similar themes emerge from Chinese tourists as they continue to experience a cognitive dissonance about their endorsement of these copysites through their visits; they believe that it leads to a transgression of their cultural integrity or “Chineseness.” To overcome this, they feel obligated to conform to the disconcerting feelings of incongruity by attesting to transformative behavior (Kirillova et al., 2017); thus, they advocate the inculcation of “Chineseness” in their tourism-related experiences.

“China’s history and heritage are very old. There are more Chinese tourists visiting traditional Chinese historic landmarks, such as the Wall of China, Summer Palace, and City of God temple (Shanghai) than these replicas. So, even you have found me visiting this replica (referring to Shanghai People Minhang court), it is just based on a cultural curiosity about how a building of an alien culture looks like. When I visit indigenous landmarks of historic significance, I am in awe and totally inspired. See, there is a difference.” (Male, 46)

Therefore, instead of re-immersing to the routine roles of tourists, which allows a steady tranquilization of the predicament arising from a feeling of guilt and condemnation by conforming to socially accepted rituals (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015) i.e., patronizing to these dupli- tures, a noticeable narrative has emerged; it highlights how China’s economic rise has inculcated a sense that has made them re-negotiate and reconsider the significance of the unequivocal embracement of Western landmarks or even lifestyles, for that matter. The growing anxiety that is apparent among Chinese tourists has prompted them to secure a cultural identity of their own; further, they carry an overwhelming feeling that China needs to rediscover its own architectural achievements of the past, which they believe are comparable to those of the West.

“China has such a rich culture and heritage that it does not need to borrow styles from the West or other countries. This copysite is just a fad and soon you will see this going away. It is already happening. I mean there are reports in the media that some replica towns like the one located in Tianducheng is already a ghost place (known as little Paris, located near the city of Hangzhou). This fondness with West will soon be over and you will see plenty of authentic Chinese architectural building resurrected” (Female, 31)

4.2.2. Existential courage

According to the Steiner and Reisinger (2006)'s rendition of a Heideggerian perspective, existential courage means acknowledging the difficult choices that need to be made and coming to grips with the anxiety that follows. Existential courage—a much overlooked topic in tourism literature—is considered by Steiner and Reisinger (2006) as a productive emotion that could act as a stimulus for an authentic tourism-related experience. The Chinese tourists' perception that copysites are just an *escapist reality*, exploiting contemporary China's prevalent culture of admiring the West requires strong existential courage; this is because it prompts them to come out of the comfort of familiar territory and conventional social beliefs inculcated by the Chinese society, media, and government. Such tourists are more susceptible to experiencing existential authenticity as they confront the truth of not being able to derive the meaning of the staged reality; the resulting meaninglessness leads to anxiety that obliges them to summon the courage to face it and they create meaning by directly experiencing and actively creating the reality of which they are a part (Heidegger, 1996; Sartre, 1992). The existential anxiety operates as an alerting mechanism that signals tourism inauthenticity and keeps growing as tourists become less authentic (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015). According to Heidegger (1996), one needs courage to come to terms with situations, wherein taking the well-trodden path, in conformance with others, is the familiar option, but taking a possibility that is less widely shared leads such tourists to become involved in a unique way. Because such choices could invite disapproval and judgment from the majority who consider them appropriate, behaving authentically requires the virtue of existential courage (Mengers, 2014).

4.2.2.1. Falling prey to the culture of foreign admiration. Existentially courageous people are able to carry opinions that are not particularly mainstream and, hence, invite judgment and disapproval from within one's social circle (Kirillova et al., 2017). The general predilections of Chinese consumers toward Western brands and lifestyle is conspicuous, but the evolution of a counter-narrative that actively condemns much deeper and complicated aspirations associated with copysites is noticeable. The emergence of this node suggests that a segment of Chinese tourists consider western architectural imitation simply as a marketing technique; this is because such architecture evokes a lifestyle that is highly admired by the Chinese people, and, as a result, sells. This existential courage makes people raise their voice against what they believe to be inappropriate; further, in doing so, they are attempting to re-discover the legitimacy of authenticity instead of experiencing the tranquilizing effect achieved by safely resorting to the staged authenticity of copysites (Brown, 2013).

“I may not be liked for what I will say, but it is true that we Chinese are an easy catch for foreign multinational companies. We take pride when our kids speak English; the foreign branded stores, food points, and so on, are more crowded than the local ones. Thus, tourist bodies think that Chinese are an easy catch, let's apply this proven formula to touristic sites as well by building copy towns and copy architectural buildings.” (Male, 32)

The growing fascination with Western built forms is not a new phenomenon in China, as Chu (2018) points out. This enchantment with the architecture of Western civilization can be traced to the 1920s and

1930s in metropolises, such as Shanghai and Hong Kong. The strong imagery of West in the earlier part of the previous century was used as a means to construct particular imaginaries in a broad discourse of development and serve as a catalyst for social and cultural change. This discourse of development underscored the difference between the declining and passive East and the modern and dynamic West. However, what concerns Chinese tourists the most is that in spite of the reversal of the geopolitical dominance of the West in the last century to a certain extent because of the rapid ascendency of China in economic and political stage, the Chinese population continues to remain under the influence of Occidentalized narratives of Western modernism and progress.

“There is a trend in China of admiring foreign culture, so people think, you know, that things with foreign association are better than the indigenous ones. It is not just the architecture, it is the same with the consumer brands. A foreign-origin brand is valued more than the domestic brands. These are not the real buildings. So I cannot get the real experience, I could only imagine, mentally simulate that I have visited, for example, Florence. This culture of duplication has arrived from the gap in economic development between China and the Western countries. So actually, if you cannot access or experience real foreign cultures, you will become eager to experience them through duplicates.” (Female, 34)

The residential prices in foreign named communities are significantly higher than those in communities with a domestic name (Sui et al., 2017). The reproduction of whole European-styled towns and communities is explained by Puldoski (2014) as a reflection of the demand from the burgeoning Chinese middle class, which aspires to the tranquility, charm, and ambience of the Western world although they cannot afford to actually live there. Moreover, Bosker (2013) points out that Western-themed towns represent an entire lifestyle that is symptomatic of success in contemporary China and is usually highlighted by real estate agents in their marketing of these towns. This is why occident-inspired residential places sell faster, and at far higher prices, than the traditional monotonously built blocks of high-rises. China's copying of the West in the previous century has led to the development of a psychological void that has made the Chinese people less assured of their traditional Chinese culture and they fill this void by owning Western brands and exhibiting a penchant for Western-style architecture (Sui et al., 2017).

4.2.2.2. Copysites are not an escapist experience. The experience-oriented characteristics of existential authenticity proclaim that tourists are no longer concerned with the origins of the tourist site or the authenticity associated with it, as long as they yield satisfying touristic experiences (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). While this holds true for some of the tourists sampled, a segment of Chinese tourists perceive copysites as unreal. This is understandable from the postmodernist perspective of existential authenticity; it is possible that individuals have unique characteristics. Tourists make a courageous attempt to act authentically. Another thing worth noting is that these copysites do not even provide an escapist reality to the tourists. This segment of tourists had already seen the original sites and are able to make a distinction between the staging of authenticity and the direct experience of the original versions. For them, the escapist experiences of imagined places never come to fruition because they are unable to stay true to themselves and achieve immersion in the so-called “fictional world” (Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010). The liminal space provided by touristic site makes tourism an unparalleled state of being that varies from the ordinary state; it allows tourists to break away from the everydayness of their routine life and ponder peculiar matters of existence (Brown, 2013). The outright rejection of copysites by this segment of tourists implies that they are not perceived as an alternative source of “existential versions” of the original sites and, hence, do not qualify as furnishing authentic experiences

to Chinese tourists.

“(Referring to the Thames town in Shanghai) I do not think it is worth the billions of RMB spent to sell this tourism experience to the Chinese people. It isn’t real. When you visit, you will see red scouts walking on the streets and red telephone booths and some buildings that aim to give this impression of an English town. But, in the end, it is all staged. I don’t really understand the purpose of all this counterfeiting” (Female, 34)

“(Referring to the Chateau Maisons-Laffitte, Beijing) You could tell from a distance that it is not original. The original building has certain surrounding elements of a wine estate that provides it with an ambience. This standalone replica looks out of place. The original buildings had some genuine history, which makes it more valuable. These buildings are like a movie—all theatricals and no substance” (Male, 33)

A replica perceived as “not real enough” has the potential of becoming unpopular among the visitors (McManus, 2016). This tourists’ response to unpalatable representations of replicas is akin to the typical consumer response to counterfeit brands whose artwork is aesthetically inferior to that of the original brand (Lessing, 1965).

4.3. De-globalization

As globalization deconstructs nations, it has led to cultural homogenization in which the Western consumer cultural values are more prevalent and everything is appraised in terms of its market value (Arnould, Price, & Zinkhan, 2003). The selective image-making for tourist consumption is making destinations redefine culture and heritage as a commodity that can be bought and sold on the market (Wirth & Freestone, 2003). The perception of this particular segment of Chinese tourists toward copysites gives the impression that the large-scale destructuralization of tourism environments to make them more attractive for tourists’ consumptions has actually commoditized the meaning of local cultural products. The commercial aspect is given so much prominence that its effects on the disintegration of local Chinese culture are being overlooked.

4.3.1. Destination commodification

Hughes (1995) describes the destination commodification as a process through which diverse and distinct destinations eventually come to have similar and standardized characteristics and identities. The commoditization of tourism resources may drive or constrain the co-construction of tourism experiences, as noted by Cohen (1995, 1988). Tourism resources, such as copysites, that are transformed because of commoditization can still authentically fascinate tourists if they are able to maintain their necessary characteristics. However, a noticeable discourse emerged from the interviews with Chinese tourists; according to them, destination commodification was seen to serve corporate economic interests primarily driven by the consumerism of Chinese society. The global extension of this commodification perspective is believed to homogenize the cultural differences and, hence, transgress the territorial demarcation by alluring people into consumption practices that are predominantly exploited by corporations for their economic interests (Hughes, 1995). The second child node uncovered in the thematic analysis was the acknowledgement of how Chinese tourists’ commodification was seen as a way by Chinese tourists to construct touristic images that facilitate discrimination against the indigenous Chinese lifestyle; this is because the commodification of a place with Western symbols may be seen as a vehicle for diluting the local cultural identity (Cole, 2007).

4.3.1.1. *Touristic consumerism in China.* As the tourism industry is expanding, a modern Western consumerist ethos is being disseminated to the non-Western world; this facilitates the commercialization of social

spheres beyond the conventional demarcations of economic domains of influence, thereby engendering greater commodification of touristic sites (Cohen, 2012). The shift of consumerism from the externally oriented conspicuous manifestations of objects to experience-oriented and human-centric expression (Schulze, 1997) has made tourism the most appropriate avenue to exemplify contemporary consumerism (Wang, 2004). The rise of touristic consumerism in China is not an isolated event; rather, it emerged as a result of a wide range of political, social, cultural, and structural transformations in China (Wang, 2004). The country’s per capita spending on cultural consumption and entertainment represents 11.2% of the total consumer spending; further, this proportion has been continuously rising each year (Ministry of Culture and Tourism China, 2019). The growing consumerism in Chinese society is fueled by accelerating economic growth and an expanding middle class that is increasingly well-versed economically; this has led the tourism industry to cater to the touristic expectations and take part in the commoditization of China’s tourism resources.

“The greater affordability of people means that people have access to the resources and can now buy and experience things, such as travelling abroad, that only a few could do 10–15 years ago. However, even if some do not have enough money to travel abroad to see these architectural marvels, they can always visit them in China. I think it’s a good way for us to experience something and it is worth the travel.” (Male 51)

As the focus shifts to the economic regeneration of destinations, the cultural elements that are deemed undesirable and unproductive for promotion of a specific destination are being replaced to modify the perceptions about a place (Wirth & Freestone, 2003). An inevitable consequence of commodification is that the commodity-driven tourism industry may cultivate only false touristic consciousness. However, the Chinese tourists do not lay the blame on the administrative bodies for this change; this is because the people themselves value the consumerism that has led to the social and cultural transformations in the touristic landscape. With the growing affluence of the Chinese middle class, more disposable income is available to the people for consumption of touristic sites; the tourist industry has responded by developing up-market touristic facilities and Western-themed architectural landscapes to create a liminal tourist space that is starkly differentiated from the everyday life of Chinese tourists (Cohen, 2010). Inauthenticity often emanates from the commodification process that furnishes a phenomenon an alienating exchange value translating the architectural language from local into global one (Halewood & Hannam, 2001). In this milieu, commodification is viewed as something negative that devalues the tourism experience or cultural activity. This is encapsulated in the following excerpts from the interviews with Chinese tourists;

“China is slowly becoming a capitalist country. One may argue why no theme town that adapted the architectural styles from different dynasties of China’s past became as popular as the West-inspired theme towns, but the truth of the matter is that the indigenous styles does not have a demand in modern-day China. So, what sells is being sold and being bought” (Female, 48)

4.3.1.2. *Demand for glocalized touristic sites.* The “out of time and out of place” homogenization of places replaces the distinct historical and cultural characteristics that once gave a unique identity to these places (Selwyn, 1990). The consumption-led destination commodification dilutes the territorial integrity of places. The tourists referred to the lack of immersion of the Chinese lifestyle in these copysites; thus, the symbolic content of the Western cultural relics appears to be incongruent. It is relatively easier to imitate Western architectural landmarks, but duplicating the culture and lifestyle of some places is a highly complex matter. The inadequacy of Western cultural values makes these architectural copysites incongruent with the Chinese lifestyle. The dismal

failures of some of these copysite architectural landmarks and towns reflect how social and cultural integration with local lifestyle is necessary to achieve successful imitation. As reiterated by Nieuwenhuis (2010) the popularity of Western-style imitation in thematic zones and tourist spots in China merely reflects their “Disneyfication” because such spatial marks are culturally decontextualized and mere manifestations of capital operations and consumption.

The remarkably rapid urbanization in China is regarded as unprecedented in human history (Ren, 2013). The massive urban consumerization in China can be appreciated from the fact that by 2030, Chinese consumers are estimated to account for 12 cents in every dollar of worldwide urban consumption (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016). The growth and development of these urban areas in the last few decades match what the US was able to achieve over the last 2 centuries. However, the downside is this that the rate of urbanization has outpaced the urbanization of Chinese people (Sui et al., 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising to come across voices within China that emphasize the exploitation of the country’s traditional heritage to develop a contemporary style of architecture that is uniquely Chinese instead of imitating Western styles. However, one of the arguments against this is that the rate of development in China was so rapid that it did not provide enough time for the traditional architecture to materialize (Hobson, 2017). Moreover, Western-themed architecture garners exorbitant attention in local and international media, giving such copysites publicity and exposure that is worth millions of dollars (Shephard, 2016).

“I found it difficult to admire these replicas. The urbanization of cities has led to the growth of these replicas. I think our cities are getting westernized at a faster rate than the people themselves. Whatever it is, this represents a huge disconnect between the architecture and indigenous lifestyle.” (Female, 36)

“When you see it in totality, the place (British Town, Chengdu) seems like a misfit in a large Chinese city like this; I feel the situation can be made better by adaptations that incorporate the traditional Chinese style.” (Male 33)

The reason for the emergence of this theme is that Chinese tourists have a conventional tendency to disregard originality and demand a more localized version suitable for the national taste (González, 2008). The interaction between the global and the local spawns a hybrid globalized version of cultural forms of touristic interests (Roudometof, 2005). Morales (2004) also concurs by stating that the initial attempts to launch Flamenco performances imported from Spain met with many changes to the original version to appeal to a pan-Chinese audience. Another reason is that scholarly literature on tourist behavior regards Chinese tourists, in general, as leisure tourists (Jiang, Scott, & Ding, 2019; Su, Swanson, & Chen, 2016a, 2016b) who are more concerned with the hedonistic experiences of the tourist site, rather than learning about, and seeking immersion in, the very essence of the tourist site (Tsauro & Huang, 2018). This is the reason they seek adaptations catering to local tastes that enhance their experiences at the site visited. Moreover, they seek conformity with the stereotypical expectations of the tourist site; so, in the case of copysites, once they are imported to China, they may no longer be interested in authentic versions and expect indigenous elements incorporated to the copysites, as indicated in their comments. This incompatibility makes Chinese copysites more conspicuous; as Bosker (2013) reasons, the architectural imitation is also occurring in countries, such as the US, but the Chinese case draws more attention because American architectural imitations of British and Irish styles fit into the lives of people who share a similar geocultural genealogy. However, these imitations are seen as culturally very alien in China.

4.3.2. Cultural internationalism

This theme represents a significantly different manifestation of tourists’ views, wherein copysites are regarded as an important cultural

resource to facilitate cross-cultural understanding. Cultural internationalism was considered as a broader internationalist movement for cultural reconstruction with economic and political focuses to promote intercultural exchange and connect people through the shared culture (Iriye, 1997); it was a response to the adversity induced by the extreme nationalism exhibited in World Wars I and II (Jobs, 2017). Appadurai (1990) terms this as deterritorialization when the “imagined world” consisting of a landscape of places and human identities is reconstructed owing to the unrestrained flow of technology, finance, information, and ideas. The cross-cultural understanding is facilitated by the association between culture and place that undergoes a continuous process of transformation in a way that restructures spatial basis of tourism resources by decontextualizing them from the existing relations based on local references (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009). Wang (2020) refers to the cultural internationalism function of tourism wherein cultural practices, places, and identities are positioned in a way that expands their scope and they are lent legitimacy by tourism channels (Brenner, 2004). In this emergent theme, Chinese tourists refer to the copysites as culturally internationalized objects, as proposed by Wang (2020) and Brenner (2004), and detached from their original localities of origin; thus, they capture the zeitgeist of a truly globalizing world. Such architectural manifestations can construct new cultural discourses. Therefore, in some way, they support the UNESCO’s principle of cultural internationalism, that is, the world’s cultural heritage belongs to the global community as a whole, and not just to the originating culture (World Heritage Committee, 1994).

4.3.2.1. *Cultural exchange resource.* The spatial practices of Western traders from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century in China show how architecture framed the cross-cultural relations between the West and China (Farris, 2016). Traditionally, architectural landscapes are regarded as a crucial aspect of diplomatic activity and cultural exchanges. These architectural imports serve as an important avenue for carrying out cultural and social activities and imparting cultural education to the indigenous population (Xiao & Ni, 2019). McManus (2016) notes that the copysites serve an additional function of educating the tourists about the original sites. The replication of Austria’s Hallstatt town in the Guangdong province of China has, since its completion, not only contributed to increasing its awareness as a UNESCO’s World Heritage site, but also played a pivotal part in making this small town a major tourism attraction for tourists, the majority of whom hail from China (Ingram & Reisenleitner, 2014). The copysites, therefore, serve as a valuable cultural exchange resource that facilitate multicultural learning essentially by ensuring that the achievements of the ancient cultures in their original country of origin are made available to broader audiences.

“Having only seen the replica and not actually visited the original structure in London, The Suzhou Tower Bridge has developed in me a curiosity and interest to visit the original in the future and educate myself about traditional British architectural styles.” (Male, 28)

“I have learned a lot about Florence and Italian lifestyle just by visiting the Florentia Village Tianjin site and I have never been to the original structure. It broadens your scope and provides cultural education.” (Male, 36)

“This town (Hallstatt) is just 2 hour journey from Guangzhou. It is a nice a one-day getaway on a weekend. The whole alien feeling of a small European town in Austria is captivating. As I have never been to Europe, the place gives a feeling of what the actual place would have looked like; this has aroused more curiosity to visit the actual place.” (Female, 38)

Traditionally, China has been exceptionally good at absorbing various aspects of other cultures, including art, music, technology, economic systems, and architecture (Shephard, 2016). The copysite

structures manifest familiarity, knowledge, and a profound understanding of the foreign cultures as there was limited knowledge of the original architectural sources. Here, the parallels between brand imitation/counterfeiting and duplitecture can be drawn as there is sufficient evidence in the literature that counterfeiting can have positive aftereffects on consumers as it enhances the brand awareness, especially in emerging markets (e.g., see Wu, Gong, & Chiu, 2016); further, one of the primary reasons for the success of counterfeit brands in China is the relatively limited knowledge about authentic brands (e.g., see Wang, Wang, Keller, & Chan, 2017).

4.3.2.2. Cosmopolitanism. It is believed that the replicas of the architectural landmarks of the West are an effective way to endorse cities' cosmopolitan image at the world stage (Xue & Zhou, 2007). The emergence of a common architectural language has led to the construction of similar landscapes with recognizable international symbols and styles aiming to convey a cosmopolitan image (Pallasmaa, 2011). In contemporary China, the copysites depict China's aspiration to connect with other countries around the world after a long period of isolation (Morris, 2013). The Western-themed architectural replicas get unprecedented media coverage and copysites are deemed as one of the ways that towns and cities get recognition in national and international media. Invaluable publicity and exposure is gained by Chinese cities once they incorporate elements of a distant culture in their own cosmopolitan identity (Shephard, 2016). The emergence of this narrative reflects the fact that these copysites are perceived as a valuable addition that manifest the contemporariness of modern-day China by connecting the international markets with the Chinese cultural industry. Thus, copysite spaces are capable of exhibiting architectural communication in a way that goes far beyond their spatial presence.

"These buildings (Florentia) bring an international feel to Tianjin city as they showcase the city's ability to absorb distinct architectural styles from different time periods and geographical settings." (Male, 31)

"Hallstat town in this county (Boluo) has made Huizhou city famous worldwide. Every weekend this small county is hustling with activity with people coming from Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Huizhou and other places of Guangdong province. You may notice plenty of Laowais (Foreigners) as well. Out of nowhere this place is globally recognizable when it was not even known in China before." (Female, 45)

"I don't mind coming across such modern artistic places (Chateau Maisons-Laffitte, Beijing) in China. This shows that China is connecting with other countries and achieving the stature of Western countries." (Male, 40)

5. Conclusions

This study examined the interface of tourists' experiences and tourists' belief systems about copysite spaces. A rigorous iterative process revealed the emergence of relevant themes, principal nodes, and child nodes. The intriguing questions that arise from this research drive research and debate on the topic of authenticity. The emergence of the *relative authenticity* theme implies that, compared to the West, the notion of *authenticity* holds different meanings in the Chinese context, where architectural imitation has historically been considered as a manifestation of the technical proficiency and mastery in furthering the existing skills. These findings augment and extend the scholarly works of Bosker (2013), Wong (2017), and Bernhard and Duccio (2019) by drawing inferences from a qualitative assessment of the experiences of Chinese tourists. While the touristic experiences reveal that, instead of consciously distinguishing between copysites and authentic versions, Chinese tourists are more mindful of the context inspiring copysite

spaces and the extent to which this inspiration is integrated in the copysites. Further, copysites serve another important cultural function for Chinese tourists by being a symbolic gesture of China's global reach and changing power dynamics; it has conferred irrefutable authority to China's attempt to demonstrate that it not only can afford to re-create iconic landmarks of foreign cultures, but also reproduce complete towns and cities.

The *cultural self-exploration* theme reflects the inter-cultural maturity of Chinese tourists. This aspect of domestic tourists in China has not received much attention in contemporary tourism literature, specifically in the contextual setting of the copysite tourist spaces, providing opportunities for cultural interactions. These interactions not only make Chinese consumers more culturally conscious of their own cultural heritage, but also help them adopt a more mature attitude toward foreign cultures. Traditionally, tourism is considered as an avenue to facilitate cross-cultural understanding (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005); however, how copysites are able to provide a culturally conscious foundation of well-founded intercultural interactions is a novel aspect covered in this study. The *de-globalization* theme rests on the ascension of touristic consumerism in China was the result of its wider structural transformations (Wang, 2004). This tourist segment perceived copysites as a product of the tourism sector's destructuralization that served corporate economic interests and was further aided by rising consumerism in the Chinese tourism industry. As a result, the tourism sector is being commoditized with the emergence of copysite structures that realign tourist spaces with pre-defined expectations of tourists to make them more attractive. Therefore, in hindsight, copysites characterize China's aspiration to connect with other countries, which, as enunciated by Morris (2013), is prevalent among Chinese owing to long periods of isolation from the outside world in the past; it explains the Chinese predilection toward absorbing various aspects of foreign cultures (Shephard, 2016). In this sense, copysites serve as valuable cultural exchange avenues for Chinese tourists, thereby promoting a multicultural understanding.

The results of this study contribute to the emerging domain of copysites tourism by reflecting how existential guilt and existential courage act as a stimulus for authentic tourism experiences when tourists are behaving less authentically. Scholarly work on existential guilt recognizes it as a negative emotion (Kirillova et al., 2017; Nawijn & Biran, 2018) and existential courage as a productive emotion (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006); further, both have a strong influence on the desire to behave authentically. The results open up a debate on copysites providing an impetus for the realization of wider sociocultural effects. Guilt, for instance, emerged as an emotion on a continuum that materialized once the prevalence of the commercial viability of Western copysites over conventional Chinese cultural sights was noticed by Chinese tourists; they began doubting the cultural depth and consequentiality of cultural heritage. The cognitive dissonance and feelings of uneasiness that follow make them engage in self-reflection; thus, they were able to reconcile themselves with this disconcerting state by advocating the indoctrination in *Chineseness* by making indigenous cultural artifacts and architecture more marketable to Chinese tourists. Along the same continuum, existential courage drives tourists to re-discover the legitimacy of the staged authenticity of Western inspirations, stemming from the recent realization of the gigantic global stature of China; further, it makes them question or, at least, review the explicit embrace of Western inspirations, even after the rise of China and its challenging of the geopolitical and economic dominance of the West in the previous century. The copysites were not simply viewed as just another component of the brick and mortar landscape; instead, deeper aspirations were associated with them in a milieu marked by the general predilection of the Chinese people toward the prevailing Western lifestyles and artifacts imported from the West. Taking a lead from the work of Brown (2013), Kirillova and Lehto (2015), and Heidegger (1996), it can be inferred that an enormous amount of existential courage is required to discover the authentic self that is required to go against the

conventional beliefs regarding Chinese supremacy, global ascendancy, and economic rise; doing so can lead to the realization that the Chinese population continues to remain under the influence of Western modernism.

Second, it is believed that the commodification process leads to inauthenticity (Cohen, 2010; Halewood & Hannam, 2001) because the territorial integrity of a place is compromised. The findings relayed in this study open up a debate on whether the quest for authentic tourism experience is something too much to ask amidst the destructuralization of tourism environments. We refer to the concept of de-globalization to enunciate this destructuralization as a process of cultural homogenization; further, in this process, Western values are predominant because of their ability to evaluate things in terms of their market value. The resultant touristic consumerism engendered during the process leaves little room for the exploration of authentic tourism experiences. Because copysite tourist spaces are merely performative platforms, and as reiterated by Shepherd (2015), people look for the affirmation of their experiences with them, instead of questing for underlying historical accuracy. Therefore, as long as copysites as performative platforms are able to conform to the touristic expectations, the question of authenticity is secondary.

Third, the inconsistent touristic attitudes of Chinese tourists were noticed along the following two continuums: (i) those who believe that de-globalization and tourist consumerism in China have immersed the emergence of copysites in Chinese tourist landscapes and (ii) those who vouch for architectural glocalization to make copysites congruent with the indigenous style for better immersion and acceptance. The latter viewpoint stems from the belief that the preservation of indigenous culture and heritage is possible by contextualizing architectural replicas with local references. The polarized attitude can be ascribed to the psychological void created by centuries-old isolation; further, the impoverished economy during the last century has filled the Chinese people with the desire to connect with the external world by adopting a more cosmopolitan view. Thus, aided by the soaring disposable income of China's middle class, tourism spending is one of the avenues that attracts excessive spending; however, the middle class wants to hold on to its cultural identity that is asymptotically expressed by architectural presentation. The shift in attitude occurs when tourist consumerism competes with the realization that destinations with consequential history and heritage, such as those of China, tend to avoid architectural imitation. As a result, this conflict is superficially resolved by Chinese tourists demanding glocalized versions of architectural importations.

Fourth, while understanding Chinese copysites, one needs to differentiate between self-colonization and architectural importation. The former refers to the traditional Chinese belief that artificially mimicking a Western landscape conveys a notion of architectural mastery (Wong, 2017); further, as noted by Xiao and Ni (2019), it has the ability to control the object by replicating it and projecting China's growing technological superiority, infrastructural proficiency, and financial viability to challenge the existing scheme of things by figuratively relocating European and American urban landscapes to China. The latter concerns the contemporary Chinese perspective of acknowledging the influence of Western cities and their architectural achievements by importing these architectural marvels to underscore the country's progress and global ascension. Future research streams on copysite tourist spaces, especially in China, need to focus on these perspectives and on the emerging segment of tourists, uncovered in this research, who want to abridge the importation and adaptation through an understanding of the cultural differences between China and the West. The copysites as cultural resources, facilitating cross-cultural understanding marks a departure from the conventional understanding of copysite spaces as embodying low cultural values.

Fifth, the study augments the domain of relativist ethics by furnishing a logical explanation of how ethics may be culture-specific and why, unlike in the West, no ethical dilemmas are encountered by Chinese tourists when they endorse seemingly "counterfeit products."

Tolkach et al. (2017) argue that Chinese tourists generally do not mind consuming counterfeit products if there are no negative consequences. Using utilitarian logic to justify ethical dilemmas has been endorsed in consumer research (Fennell, 2006). Relativist ethics is useful in understanding relative authenticity deemed as culture-specific and, hence, corroborates and further extends the postmodernist take that authenticity is not an absolute concept; this is because of the culture-specific intricacies involved in interpreting copysites. Such decipherment of copysite tourist spaces makes more sense when seen in the context of the current boom in China's innovation and technology sector; the boom is believed to stem from the culture of product and technology replicas in an earlier phase that acted as a medium for transitioning to the contemporary innovation environment.

Last, the findings of this study question the widely held conventional notion that tourist spaces are lineal spaces offering a break from everydayness (Brown, 2013; Cohen, 2010). In contrast, we posit that tourists tend to take their beliefs and personal value systems with them wherever they go. For instance, the emergence of the "China versus the West" narrative reflects that, as regards copysites, an ongoing parallel comparison of the West against China, which is reshaping global power dynamics, is perpetually occurring in the tourists' minds. Chinese tourists are highly cognizant of their country's perceptions in the West, particularly in the US; its inability to comprehend Chinese-specific cultural norms heighten the perceptions of the widening gap between the West and China. As mentioned earlier, it also reflects a perverse contradiction, where, on the one hand, there is an unequivocal embrace of Western icons and lifestyles; on the other hand, China's global rise as an economic powerhouse has engendered a growing dissonance among Chinese tourists that Chinese cultural integrity is being jeopardized owing to the growing commoditization of the tourism industry.

There are implications for the Chinese domestic tourism market too. First, the results indicate that there are substantial segments of Chinese tourists that are ready to patronize the commoditization of the local cultural heritage. China is geographically a huge country with a rapidly growing domestic tourism market; it registered 5.54 billion trips in 2018, a 10.76% growth over the previous year, and generated an annual income of USD 764 billion from domestic tourism alone (Ministry of Culture and Tourism China, 2019). This presents an opportunity to potentially develop tourist spaces focusing on the local cultural heritage. Second, there are many takers for glocalized copysites. The immersion of "East meets West" engenders a new kind of architectural landscape that borrows the best from both cultures; further, based on the interview responses, it can be said that there is a huge market for glocalized copysites in China. As Chinese tourists have the predisposition to demand localized versions in copysites that conform to their stereotypical expectations by incorporating indigenous elements, architectural glocalization may become a uniquely Chinese feature in the future and tourist space developers need to take notice of this.

Third, the initial buzz created by the Western-themed architectural replicas cannot be ignored. The respondents' awareness about major replica tourist spaces is attributable to the media coverage copysites receive in the local and international media. The publicity and buzz could be used to their advantage by tourist spaces developers to attract potential visitors and exploit the market. Fourth, expectations associated with copysites should be managed carefully. As explicated earlier, the tourists visiting copysites are interested in expectation confirmation rather than the cultural and historical accuracy of the copysites. In this milieu, unnecessarily hyped expectations may do harm to the copysites; further, visiting tourists may not be able to experience authenticity at the copysite tourist space. Lastly, tourist space developers need to pay attention to inadequate service personnel and tourist guides observed at the copysites selected for this study. Conventionally, it is believed that tourist guides and support staff assist in developing meaningful connection to the tourist sites contributing to the destination commodification and popularization (Ap & Wong, 2001). Tourist space developers need to develop active information desks and volunteer guides

and impart them with adequate training regarding the cultural and historical aspects of the original architectural icons and those facets which are incorporated in copysites. As tourists do not only interact with physical design but also with the socio-spatial surroundings of the tourist space and tourist guides possess the ability to localize the tourist spaces by folklorizing and ethnicizing (Salazar, 2005), enhancing overall immersive experiences of the tourists with the site.

6. Limitations and future research

The theoretical and practical contributions of this study need to be qualified by pointing out some limitations in the research design. Qualitative research design was helpful in uncovering underlying themes and conceptual nodes. However, future research could use quantitative techniques to formulate constructs and hypotheses, considering the theoretical themes identified in this study and confirm the generalizability of these findings. Moreover, the copysites selected in this study were all relatively successful commercially and popular tourist spots among the target audiences. There are copysite tourist spaces that did not succeed in attracting tourists' attention; the most notable among them is Little Paris in Tianducheng, near Hangzhou. Future research should focus on these towns—domestically referred to as “ghost towns”—from touristic perspectives; further, a comparison with the findings of current study could furnish interesting insights. Moreover, this study only focused on copysites of architectural landmarks in China imported from alien cultures, however there are indigenous replicas in China based on Chinese history and culture. Future research should focus on Chinese tourists' interactions with positioning of these indigenous copysites vis a vis the imported copysites. Lastly, as copysites are gaining popularity in more and more countries, the culture of architectural replicas in Western countries need to be studied as well to understand whether tourists in a multi-culturally diverse society e.g., USA behave differently as compared to the tourists in China.

Impact statement

The findings relayed in the present study help contextualize copysites as cultural resources, facilitating cross-cultural understanding, this perspective marks a departure from the conventional understanding of copysite spaces as embodying low cultural values. This study augments the domain of relativist ethics by furnishing a logical explanation of how ethics may be culture-specific. Such decipherment of copysite tourist spaces makes more sense when seen in the context of the current boom in China's innovation and technology sector; the boom is believed to stem from the culture of product and technology replicas in an earlier phase that acted as a medium for transitioning to the contemporary innovation environment. Moreover, this opens up a wider debate on whether the quest for authentic tourism experience is something too much to ask amidst the destructuralization of tourism environments and stipulate that, as long as copysites as performative platforms are able to conform to the touristic expectations, the question of authenticity is secondary. Lastly, the immersion of “East meets West” evident in the findings, engenders a new kind of architectural landscape that borrows the best from both cultures; further, it can be said that there is a huge market for localized copysites in China and elsewhere.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Salman Yousaf: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.
Xiucheng Fan: Data curation, Formal analysis.

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