

Destination Image Studies: The Philosophical Roots of Geography

Shaojun Ji

Tourism College, Beijing Union University, Beijing 100101, China.

lytshaojun@buu.edu.cn

Abstract. Destination image as a line of research has been studied by researchers in different disciplines. This paper discusses the relationship between the four traditions of geography and destination image studies. It indicates that destination image studies have been to a great extent rooted in the philosophical of geography. The paper also indicates the research directions of destination image relating to the four traditions of geography.

Keywords: Philosophical roots of geography; tourism destination image.

1. Introduction

Tourism destination image as a line of research has been studied in various disciplines over the last few decades (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a). Geography, among other disciplines, provides insights on this research field through providing theoretical guidance. A review of philosophical roots of geography indicates that destination image research can be understood from four theoretical perspectives: (a) man-land tradition, (b) area studies tradition, (c) spatial tradition, and (d) humanism.

2. Philosophical Roots of geography and Tourism Destination Image

2.1 Man-land Tradition and Destination Image Research.

Although numerous definitions of *place image* exist in the literature, the central core of the concept comprises two elements: the environment and human perceptions of this environment (Saarinen, 1976). These two elements are interrelated and interact with each other, making place image a deductive aspect of the relationship between humans and the environment. From this perspective, destination image research is linked to the man-land tradition of geography. This tradition has long been concerned with human-environment relationships, emphasizing the role of the physical environment in influencing human activities and, conversely, the role of people, including their culture, in influencing the environment, ideally leading to a “balanced” approach to the understanding of people-environment interactions (Gauthier & Taaffe, 2002; Pattison, 1964). Accordingly, this tradition applies to destination image studies answering questions such as how people perceive a place based on its attributes and what meaning people assign to a place. Conversely, it could also encompass how the environment of a place is modified and the implications of this for its image.

2.2 Area Studies Tradition and Destination Image Research.

The components that combine to make up a destination image have been investigated in many studies. From the supply-side perspective, a destination projects an image using distinctive features to reflect its specific local culture and economy (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996). From the demand-side perspective, people’s image about a destination is formed based on certain attributes or characteristics of that destination (Gallarza et al., 2002). Following this clue, destination image can be understood using the area studies tradition because one of its major concerns is the characteristics of a particular place, which distinguish one place from another. This tradition seeks to describe and classify the features that shape the specific identities of geographical areas (Gauthier & Taaffe, 2002; Pattison, 1964). Geographers who follow this tradition attempt to learn as much as possible about an area and then describe and define the area by selecting its dominant features. This is the essence of regional geography. Additionally, the area studies tradition is also concerned with areal variation and

differentiation through studying pertinent phenomena of the area. In this sense, this tradition answers the following questions:

- (1) How are certain features selected for projecting a destination?
- (2) What differences are there between the projected images (perceived images) of various destinations?
- (3) What image attributes can be used to evaluate the (potential) consumers' image of a particular destination?
- (4) How can perceived image change be examined at different periods of time?
- (5)

2.3 Spatial Tradition and Destination Image Research.

The spatial tradition provides insights into destination image research in a broad sense. Depending on quantitative tools, this tradition focuses on analyzing the spatial arrangement of phenomena to explore the causes of observed locational patterns (Gauthier & Taaffe, 2002; Pattison, 1964). The description and explanation of movement—one of the essentials of this tradition—provides both the basis for understanding travel behaviours and the premise for visitors to perceive places in which they do not reside. This approach does not directly relate to destination image studies. However, many image studies recognize that people from different places will likely behave differently and have different images of the same places.

In part as an adaptation of spatial analysis, behavioural geography employs phenomenology as its philosophical basis by involving psychological concepts, perceptions, cognitive relations, and learning to understand spatial movements and patterns (Gauthier & Taaffe, 2002). Behavioural geographers are concerned not only with where something is located but also with where people think it is located. This is reflected in the study of “mental maps”—how people perceive an area based on certain landmarks, routes, boundaries, and neighbourhoods, and their behaviours in relation to these perceptions within geographical space (Gould & White, 1986). This, therefore, provides a benchmark for examining questions such as people's image formation according to the physical attributes of a place, place familiarity, and the information sources that contribute to form people's mental picture of a destination, i.e., their image of that place.

2.4 Humanism and Destination Image Research.

In addition to the aforementioned three traditions, humanism—a perspective on social theory—also sheds light on destination image research by probing social structure (Gauthier & Taaffe, 2002). Humanists study the relationship between how individuals organize their own world at the macro level and the corresponding social outcomes at the micro level. Unlike behavioural geographers, humanists emphasize specific rather than general thoughts and actions of individuals or groups in their exploration of “the psychological, emotional, and existentialist attachments that people have for specific places, spaces and environments” (Gauthier & Taaffe, 2002, p. 519). As such, they often adopt a phenomenological approach. This could provide the basis for studying certain aspects of destination image; for example, the affective component of people's perceived image of a destination, their sense of place, and individuals' attachment to a place and their induced behaviours.

3 Summary

The above analysis indicates that more than one philosophical perspective of geography can be applied to destination image research. Although some of them provide more relevant guidance than others, each perspective has its own contribution for providing a theoretical foundation to study destination image.

References

- [1]. Baloglu, S. & McCleary, K. W. A model of destination image formation, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26 (1999), No. 4, p. 868-897.
- [2]. Brawell, B. & Rawding, L. Tourism marketing images of industrial cities. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 23 (1996), p. 201-221.
- [3]. Gallarza, M. G., Saura, I. G. & Garcia, H. C. Destination image towards a conceptual framework. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol.29 (2002), No.1, p. 56-78.
- [4]. Gauthier, H. L. and Taaffe, E. J. Three 20th century “revolutions” in American geography. *Urban Geography*. Vol. 23 (2002), No. 6, p. 503-527.
- [5]. Gould, P & White, R. *Mental maps*. (2nd edition). Winchester: Allen & Unwin Inc, 1986.
- [6]. Pattison, W. D. The four traditions of geography. *Journal of Geography*. Vol. 63 (1964), p. 211-216.
- [7]. Saarinen, T. *Environmental Planning: perception and behavior*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.