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# MUSIC FESTIVAL MOTIVATION IN CHINA: FREE THE MIND.

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the extent to which music festival attendance is ‘universally’ motivated or determined by the Chinese cultural and socio-political context.

A novel qualitative approach was employed comprising observation of social media conversations and ‘chat room’ interviews with members of a festival online community. Seven motivators were identified, some similar to those in Western studies but others more specific to festival-goers in mainland China.

The culturally specific motivators were identified as ‘spiritual escape’ and ‘spiritual pursuit’ and the universal motivators as ‘togetherness’, ‘love of the music’, ‘novel experience’, ‘music sharing’, and ‘educational enrichment’. This paper focuses on the two culturally embedded motivators only.

The implications of the study are that, although, growing, there are still very few music festivals featuring ‘pop’ or ‘western’ style music and these few are relatively new to Chinese people. Their attendance at them is, therefore, motivated differently to attendees at similar festivals in western countries. These motivating factors are mediated by the particular social, political and cultural factors at work in this complex country. The findings indicate that although many of the motivational factors for attending a music festival appear to be universal there are clearly factors which are culturally bound and therefore unique to the cultural context. These differences appear to be created by the social constraints, rapidly changing economy and the many contradictions inherent in modern mainland China. These conditions create a greater contrast between everyday life in mainland China and the liminal hedonistic space provided by the Festival. Further research is needed to validate these initial findings within China and to explore how rock music festival motivations differ in other non-western cultures.

**Keywords:** music festivals; leisure motivation; China; netnography; cultural motivation

**Article type:** RESEARCH ARTICLE

## **Introduction**

Music festivals in developed Western countries, such as Woodstock in the US, Roskilde in Denmark and Glastonbury in the UK, have a relatively long and flourishing history (CNN, 2009; Mintel, 2008) and consequently there have been several studies on festival-goers' motivation within the West. The push and pull model (Crompton, 1979) and escape—seek motivation theory (Iso-Ahola, 1982) have both provided conceptual frameworks and have been used in many later studies related to festivals, for example Chang (2005), Dodd, Yuan, Adams, & Kolyesnikova (2006), and Mohr, Backman, K.F., Gahan, & Backman, S.J. (1993).

These studies constitute the growing empirical body of work on festival-goers' motivation in a Western context, whereas, in contrast, there have been relatively few studies of Chinese festival-goer motivation. One of the studies in this area is Dewar, Meyer, and Li's (2001) research on the Harbin Ice Lantern and Snow Festival, which examines the reliability of Schneider and Backman's (1996) motivational scale in measuring the reasons for attending a Chinese festival and makes use of quantitative methods. They conclude that a western motivational scale can be applied in a Chinese context. However, motivations found in a Western context are unlikely to be fully generalisable to Chinese festival goers. Yang and Cai's (2007) later study employs cluster analysis to classify attendee types by their motivations at the Tongzhou Grape Pick-up Festival in Beijing, however, how and why they arrive at the motivations listed is not fully explained in their research. Research in the broader area of leisure motivation also suggests a lack of intercultural studies (Chick & Dong, 2005; Walker & Deng, 2003).

This paper therefore looks to address some of these deficiencies by exploring Chinese motivations for rock festival attendance. As the majority of previous studies have been conducted using quantitative methods, a novel qualitative approach, observation of online community discussions followed by chat room interviews, was chosen in order to access the population of interest and to provide the greater depth of explanatory data required. The growth in music festivals in mainland China suggests that an understanding of the motivations for attendance will provide an interesting lens through which to view the younger generation's view of both the festival and the lives they leave behind to attend. This exploratory study aims to add to the body of knowledge in this under researched area and to make the case for the necessity of further research to develop a greater understanding of the cultural differences in leisure motivation between mainland China and the West.

## Festival-goer motivation

The majority of festival-goer motivation studies are conceptually grounded in Dann's work (1977, 1981), the push and pull model (Crompton, 1979; Dan, 1977) and the escape—seek dichotomy (Iso-Ahola, 1982) (for example, Mohr et al., 1993; Uysal, Gahan, & Martin, 1993; and Zyl & Botha, 2004). The push and pull model (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977, 1981) is well accepted in tourist motivation studies (Funk, Alexandris, & Ping, 2009; Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009; Uysal, Li, & Sirkaya-Turk, 2008) and has been applied in various cultural settings (Hanqin & Lam, 1999; Schofield

& Thompson, 2007; and Yuan & McDonald, 1990). It has also been applied in several event motivation studies within different cultural settings, for example, Zyl and Botha's (2004) study in South Africa, several studies in the USA (Bowen & Daniels, 2005; Dodd et al., 2006), and Chang's (2005) study in Taiwan. This suggests that this model is considered to be a useful tool to generally analyse and understand attendees' motivations to attend events.

Within the push and pull model, tourist motivations seem to differ in different countries and by cultural background (Uysal et al., 2008). For example, tourists from the UK, Germany, France and Japan show the same push factors but different pull factors (Yuan & McDonald, 1990). You, O'Leary, Morrison, & Hong, (2000) discovered that Japanese and UK tourists have significant differences not only on pull factors but also push factors. It seems likely, therefore, that people may also have different motivations for attending music festivals according to their different cultures.

The escape-seek dichotomy contains two domains which are seeking (intrinsic rewards) and escaping (routine environments) (Iso-Ahola, 1982). Motivation for participating in tourism or events can therefore be explained by escaping the old environment, and/or seeking the new environment (Iso-Ahola, 1982; Snepenger, King, Marshall, & Uysal, 2006). The escape-seek dichotomy has been applied in several event motivation studies, for example, Uysal et al. (1993) and Mohr et al. (1993) (study of USA), and Chang (2005) (study of Taiwan). In this dichotomy, both domains can be seen as equivalent to the push factors in the push and pull model (Snepenger et al., 2006). The focus is therefore on internal needs and emotions, but not the external influences. However, in studying the motivational differences in the Chinese context it is

important to consider the distinct external influences on the festival goers' choice to attend. For example, 'leisure' in communist China has, in the past, not been viewed positively with a traditionally greater emphasis on work and education (Wang & Stringer, 2000). 'Leisure' in mainland China has also been restricted by the economics of the Chinese society, the lifestyle of Chinese people, the policies of the mainland Chinese government, and a variety of traditions and ideologies (Xiao, 1997). Recently, Ye, Hanqin, and Yuen's (2011) study on medical tourists from mainland China to Hong Kong discovered that their motivations are very 'Chinese' specific, and are strongly influenced by the politics and policies of the Chinese government. The decision to attend a music festival is therefore likely to be quite different for a young Chinese person than for, say, a British teenager.

Li and Petrick (2006) provide a review of motivation studies in events and festivals, concluding that a generalisable motivation scale has not been developed. Similarly to Li and Petrick (2006), Crompton and McKay (1997) and Nicholson and Pearce (2001) also conclude that generic event motivations have not yet been identified implying that event-goers exhibit different motivations at different events. It is therefore highly likely that the motivations identified in a different cultural context will exhibit even greater differences and several, as yet, unseen factors. The findings of Crompton and McKay (1997), Nicholson and Pearce (2001), and Li and Petrick (2006) therefore suggest the need for more research in multiple contexts. A second consideration is that the motivations to attend events and festivals are not yet well understood. The question of 'why' has not been fully answered and further in-depth analysis is needed (Li and Petrick, 2006). A third issue in this area, also raised by Li and Petrick (2006), is the

predominance of quantitative research methods. Qualitative methods may be helpful in providing the more in-depth insights needed to address a better understanding of why people attend festivals and how the cultural context might influence this. Table 1 includes their original summary of the main motivation studies in music festivals some of which are discussed below.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

In Bowen and Daniels's (2005) study of a large multi-day annual music festival in Virginia, attendees' motivations were examined and attributed to three main aspects: discovery, music, and enjoyment. Among these aspects, unsurprisingly perhaps, music was found to be the most significant. McMorland and Mactaggart (2007) discovered nine motivators for traditional Scottish music events, and grouped attendees into four clusters: 'Modernists', 'Family and Inspiration Seekers', 'Social Pleasure Seekers', and 'Thrill Seekers'. Within these four groups, 'enjoyment' was found to be the main motivation, while 'family togetherness' was the lowest. Gelder and Robinson (2009) undertook a comparative study of motivation for attending Glastonbury Festival and V Festival, two festivals more akin to the one chosen here, applying six motivators in their quantitative research. Pegg and Patterson (2010) looked into music festival-goers' motivations to attend an Australian country music festival using quantitative research methods and, although their findings are consistent to a large extent with Bowen and Daniels (2005), why and how the resulting eight motivations were selected remains unclear. Blešić, Pivac, Stamenković, and Besermenji (2013) used twenty two motivational items developed from the literature in their quantitative research and identified four motivation categories. As well as these quantitative studies into music

festival-goer motivations, Cummings (2007) applied qualitative methods to study Australian indie music festivals and found that these music festivals can provide the music festival-goers with a sense of belonging and togetherness. It is likely that the more subconscious, implicit motivations such as this can be better identified and explored through qualitative research.

The music festivals in the studies discussed above cover a broad age range of music festival goers. For example, some studies based at country, classical, traditional Scottish, or jazz music festivals noted that the majority of festival-goers were over 35 (Formica & Uysal, 1998; McMorland & Mactaggart, 2007; Oakes, 2010; and Pegg & Patterson, 2010). Other studies of ethnic, folk, or multi-genre music festivals have shown the majority of attendees to be below 35 ( Blešić et al., 2013; Bowen & Daniels, 2005; and Gelder & Robinson, 2009). These data reinforce what we already know in that different types of music festivals attract different age groups who in turn exhibit different motivations, or the same motivations but to a different extent. These broad age ranges and differing age-related and music genre motivations are less likely to be apparent within the context of this research. The ‘modern’ music festival, regardless of music genre, is a very new phenomenon within mainland China. This new and ostensibly ‘western’ product attracts mainly younger people as they tend to be more open to new experiences. In the West attendees have matured alongside the now well-established festivals leading to a wider range of ages and a greater diversification based on music genres (rock, pop, jazz, folk etc). In mainland China the nascent festival sector presently attracts younger attendees with less experience of different musical genres. Therefore



the characteristics of youth (classified as under 35 in this study) may contribute to the uniqueness or differences of festival-goers' motivations in this study.

A number of previous cross-cultural studies have pointed to both motivational differences and similarities. For example, Schneider and Backman's (1996) study of a Jordanian festival (Jerash) concluded that cultural boundaries have little effect on attendees' motivations. Dewar et al. (2001) replicated Schneider and Backman's (1996) study to conduct a festival-goer motivation study at the Harbin Ice Lantern and Snow Festival in mainland China. They found that the motivations had greater similarity with North American studies than with the Jordanian study. Different marketing and management approaches at the two festivals may have influenced the results, but in the Harbin study, no further investigation was conducted to discover the reasons for the differences found (Dewar et al., 2001). Although the Harbin study suggests that the social-demographic differences did not contribute to the differences between the Jerash and Harbin motivations, nor did the cultural differences, it seems inappropriate to generalise these findings to other Chinese events. However, Walker and Wang's (2008) cross cultural (Canadian and Chinese) study of leisure motivations also concludes that 'from a practical perspective, cross-cultural differences in leisure motivations may be relatively unimportant' (p.192). Despite this, they, and others (e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991), do highlight potential differences in intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors related to the collectivist, interdependent culture of mainland China compared to the largely individualist, independent culture found in the West. For example, the collectivist Chinese people are more likely to hide their emotions and feelings, be constrained and dominated by the outside environment and other people's views and

expectations, fit in and conform (Gao, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Tafarodi, Lo, Yamaguchi, Lee, & Katsura, 2004; Waldie, 1980). These factors may create greater differences when the context is a western style rock music festival held in mainland China.

The relative complexity and heterogeneity of Chinese culture suggests that cultural influences on motivation within this context may be difficult to identify and generalise. However, some common values and behaviours of Chinese people have been suggested. These Chinese cultural norms include the predominance of a collectivist (We) perspective rather than 'Western' individualistic (I) motivations; a greater acceptance of inequality; a social dependence and greater level of influence by others and the social environment; a stronger motivation to conform and to maintain a harmonious social order (concern for others); a lesser motivation to pursue freedom and democracy (concern for self) and a generally lower level of satisfaction or happiness with life (Gilbert & Tsao, 2000; Hsu, 1981, 1985; Lau, 1992; McCullough, Tan, & Wong, 1986; Sun, Horn, & Merritt, 2004). These cultural stereotypes have been challenged in several studies which reveal contradictory findings in that mainland Chinese culture reflects western individualistic perspectives such as pursuit of independence, self-respect, freedom and equality (Feather, 1986; Lau, 1988, 1992; Stipek, Weiner, & Li, 1989). It is because of this apparently multifaceted and conflicting nature of Chinese culture, or cultures, that this research could not simply apply the China=collectivism, West=individualism concept, but instead, investigates how specific aspects of Chinese culture might influence festival-goers' motivations.

To conclude based on the above discussion, further qualitative empirical research is needed to understand the factors that influence festival attendance and to explore the different cultural contexts related to music festivals. Although exploratory, through the use of one case study festival, this study intends to provide rich data, gathered through in-depth interviews, to provide a better understanding of how the Chinese context impacts upon motivations and to identify the factors, other than those identified in previous studies, that are at play.

The research conducted online interviews with festival-goer internet community members and also observed their online group conversations. It is important to note that the digital world and digital tools may affect festival-goers' motivations to attend due to a number of influencing factors. For example, online communities have been found to have an impact on community members' intention, loyalty, and behaviour, via group norms, social identity, or a sense of belonging/community (Kim, Lee, & Hiemstra, 2004; Lin, 2008; Teo, Chan, Wei, & Zhang, 2003; Zhou, 2011). Although this research is not exploring how online communities may influence festival-goers' motivations (but merely using the online environment as a data gathering tool), potential motivations which related to online community influence were not excluded.

## Study methods

This study takes a constructivist perspective in exploring festival-goers' motivations and seeking to explain the reasons behind these motivations related to the Chinese context. The approach taken assumes that motivations are socially constructed by the

attendees' own understanding, perceptions and interpretations of their festival and life experience, alongside a shared understanding of the Chinese social and cultural context in which they live (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Buchana & Huczynski, 2010). Most previous studies have tended to be quantitative using larger scale surveys and some form of factor analysis (see Table 1 above in section 2). As motivation in the Chinese context is relatively under researched, a qualitative approach may better help to determine the, perhaps subtly different, motivational factors (as found by Walker and Wang, 2008) and to explore the reasons behind them. It was also necessary for a data collection method to be developed that was suited to the population of interest (young Chinese festival goers) in terms of access and depth of data collection in a safe and comfortable environment.

Due to the geographic dispersal of the target group (across mainland China), the temporal dispersion (the need to include attendees from previous years), and the lack of a sampling frame it was decided to select respondents from the official festival internet communities created around Midi music festival. Selecting internet community members ensured that the participants had a high level of engagement with the Festival and were used to communicating online in a variety of ways. The selection of these members also led to a greater willingness to take part in the research providing a potentially rich source of data.

These internet communities are formed based on a live chat platform (QQ) popular in mainland China and similar in format to MSN messenger. QQ is the largest instant message communication network with over 79% share of the Chinese market in 2007 (Pang, Xu, & Jiang, 2006; Zhou, 2007). A further advantage of using this medium is that the recording process of communication is automatic, and the communication record can

be reviewed in detail and monitored easily whilst conducting the interviews. This record of the conversation is not amendable and can be traced allowing for the data to be verified and further reviewed as necessary.

Once the groups had been selected the first stage of the data gathering was to observe the intra-group 'chat'. This was possible as the conversations were recorded and accessible to the researcher through membership of the group. The attendee subjects were then approached and interviewed via this same live chat platform.

Similar online data collection techniques, conceptualised as 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2002), have been discussed and applied in various studies including some within the leisure field, for example Beavenab & Laws (2007), Mkono (2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), and Stebbins (2010). Some of the advantages of applying netnography are that it is often less resource intensive, more naturalistic and more unobtrusive than other offline methods (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography allows the researchers to observe community behaviours and communication which occur naturally (Kozinets, 2002). As well as the naturalistic and unobtrusive process of the first stage of data collection, conducting the interviews online allows for anonymity and therefore greater openness of response whilst mimicking the real time interaction and flexibility of a face-to-face or telephone interview. The interview responses are written by the respondent therefore avoiding transcription errors. A further advantage is that approaching attendees of previous festivals via online community groups is less disruptive to the respondent than approaching them on event sites. However, there are several challenges for the interviewer. It requires the interviewer to be able to encourage the depth of reflection and response necessary to address the research question in a virtual environment. More

importantly, it requires thorough consideration of the unique ethical issues relating to online data collection methods (Bruckman, 2002, 2006; Kozinets, 2002).

### *The Festival Case - Midi Music Festival*

Midi Music Festival is a three-day outdoor live rock music festival, which is often held more than once each year in different locations and usually during the Chinese national 'May Day' holiday in May in Beijing, and the China National Day holiday in October. Domestic and overseas bands are invited to participate in the Festival, and attendees are welcomed from all over the world, although most are young Chinese rock fans. Midi is run by Beijing Midi Music School (private) and Beijing Midi Performance Company (private), and it has a consistent 13-year history up to 2013. In 2007, it was reported that there were more than 350,000 people counted by entry times (Beijing Business Today, 2009). Midi is the longest running and largest non-government music festival in mainland China (Beijing Business Today, 2009). As well as being the largest and longest established Midi is a pioneer of the music festival industry in China and contains many western festival characteristics (e.g. rock & pop music, outdoor, camping, alcohol). It therefore provides a suitable context for this research and is a highly appropriate case study for comparison with research undertaken at festivals in the West. Although, there are no official published statistics on this festival internal data made accessible to the researcher shows that 98% of the attendees are recorded as under thirty five years old, a similar 'youth' dominated profile to equivalent western festivals.

#### *Sampling*

The Midi internet community consists of twenty one groups, which are formed

based on different provinces and cities across the whole of mainland China (the groups are dynamic, with the numbers of group members increasing or decreasing from time to time). Only twelve of the twenty one groups were accessible at the time of the research as the monitors of several other groups were unwilling to approve access. Other groups already had the maximum number of members and therefore it was not possible for the interviewer to join them. As two of the groups are from the same location they were classified as one group here, leaving eleven different groups according to their regions. The wide geographic dispersion of the groups, with only one being in the Festival host city, suggests that many of the participants travel as tourists to the Festival. This further evidences the aptness of using theoretical perspectives from both tourist motivation studies and more specific event motivation studies.

The twenty two research participants were chosen by randomly selecting two people from each of the eleven groups. An interview invitation and consent form was then sent out to each selected member and whenever an interview invitation was not accepted, random selection was employed again until there were two consenting participants from each appointed group. After twenty in-depth interviews (between forty five minutes and one hour forty minutes long and with most lasting over an hour) it was felt that sufficient data to explore and identify the main motivational factors had been gathered and little new knowledge was being discovered. As previous themes were being repeated and no new comments relating to motivation were being elicited a further two interviews were conducted to ensure that data saturation had been achieved (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). This appeared to be the case resulting in a total of twenty two comprehensive typed interviews.

The twenty-two participants were aged between 19 and 29 (two were below 20, six were between 20 and 24 and four were 25 and above); two were from the Festival host city and twenty from other regions in mainland China; three were female and nineteen male; and frequency of attendance varied between first time to five times. The sample therefore provided an appropriate representation of festival attendee age ranges, geographic location and frequency of attendance. The gender split, however, was not representative of the festival where, although there are more males than females this is closer to a 60/40 ratio. The responses from the three females were considered separately but did not differ significantly in themes and emphasis from those of the male interviewees.

### *Research Instruments and Procedures*

The main objective of this research was to explore the motivations for attending Midi. To achieve this the first stage involved observation of internet community members' communication with each other in the group chat room. Five of the Festival internet community groups were randomly selected and their conversations observed for five weeks covering the period shortly before and then during the Festival. This process is akin to observing a group of people “talking” in real time without the researcher interrupting them. Their conversations were recorded in a written format in the chat room, along with the usernames of the ‘speakers’ and the time that they “talked”. Their conversation records were saved automatically in the same format in the chat room message record board, so that the conversations could be reviewed afterwards. This observation helped to understand the focus and context of their conversations about the



Festival and was used to develop the wording of the interview questions and probing statements. The ethical issues arising from online observation, of which the anonymity of informants is of the most concern (Bruckman, 2002, 2006; Kozinets, 2002) were ameliorated by maintaining the anonymity of the names of the internet community groups and the group members, and through not using direct quotations from the observed chat (Bruckman, 2006).

In the second stage interviews of approximately one hour long were undertaken. Questions related to the study were asked one by one, similarly to face to face or telephone interviews, where a question is asked, the participant answers and a conversation develops. To 'ask' and 'answer' the questions, the researcher and participant both typed words and sentences on the communication board, and all messages were instant (i.e. conducted in 'real time'). At the end of each interview the communication record was saved, re-read, and then analysed. The interviews were semi-structured with the core question 'why did you attend Midi?', and further probing questions to explore the emerging motivators. Indirect questions using the third person were employed, such as 'why do people attend Midi?' (Evans, Jamal, & Foxall, 2006) as well as 'storytelling' questions such as 'what impressed you most in Midi?' and 'could you please tell me a story about something that happened at Midi?' (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Socio-demographic information was also gathered including age, occupation and number of visits to Midi. Two pilot tests interviews were undertaken and as a result of these, several changes were made to the interview questions. These included adding further probing questions to obtain the underlying rather than merely surface motivations.

## *Data Analysis*

The typed interview records were analysed using thematic analysis techniques, further enhanced by interim summaries and self-memos (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Saunders et al, 2007). Four procedures were followed: data reduction, coding and theming, recognising relationships between different emerging codes and themes, and building theories and explanation (Guest et al, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saunders et al., 2007). Firstly, interview records and group conversation records were exported into Microsoft Word documents, and then all records were filtered; only records related to motivation were kept for further analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These were then analysed looking for content which suggested recurring themes within motivations (Guest et al, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994) related to previous motivation studies and any emerging differences. Quotations and other content in the records relating to motivation were coded and classified into the resulting identified motivational themes (Guest et al, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These themes were inter-rater checked by a second researcher analysing the same data (Saunders et al., 2007). Similar themes emerged from both analyses. Finally the data was revisited to explore the reasons behind the different emergent motivation themes with an emphasis on identifying how these were related specifically to the social and cultural Chinese context.

## *Limitations*

As an exploratory, single festival based study employing online data collection

methods, there are clearly limitations to the research presented here. Firstly, during the sampling process, only twelve sub-groups were successfully accessed out of a potential twenty-one, which means attendees or group members from other regions in mainland China were not approached. Secondly, the research approached attendees who attended the Festival in previous years, therefore memories of what initially motivated them to attend may have become modified. Thirdly, since the research employs online data collection methods, the identities of community group members and interview participants cannot be guaranteed as true (Kozinets, 2002), although the validity of their experiences and feelings was improved through triangulation within the interviews and from the community group data.

## Discussion of findings

Analysis of the interview transcripts and observation of the intra-community conversations revealed seven motivational themes (outlined in Table 2). It is important to note that these seven motivations are not totally independent of each other, and that clusters of them occur in all cases. A template of motivational themes was firstly developed from the transcript relating to the first interviewee. This template was then employed in the analysis of other interview cases. During the analysis from the second cases to the last case, the template was developed with the addition of more motivational themes and the merging of others. The seven motivational themes identified in this study are summarised as spiritual escape, spiritual pursuit, togetherness, love of the music, novel experience, music sharing, and educational enrichment. These themes are

discussed below and illustrated by quotations (translated into English) taken from the interviews. The remainder of the paper then focuses on the two themes, 'spiritual escape' and 'spiritual pursuit' which appear to deviate most from previous festival motivation studies.

As the medium of data collection may have influenced the responses, the interview transcripts were further explored to see if membership of the online community affected motivation to attend. It is recognised that online communities can influence community members' behaviour, intention and loyalty to the Festival by developing community norms, social identity and a sense of belonging (Kim et al., 2004; Lin, 2008; Teo et al., 2003; Zhou, 2011). Furthermore the sharing of experiences in an online community can reinforce or indeed change both memory and attitudes as would the reliving of the experience with friends offline afterwards (Hirst & Echterhoff, 2012). However, it did not appear that themes within the data were related to or directly influenced by the nature of the online community in this case.

\* please insert Table 2 about here

Several of the identified motivators, such as 'togetherness', 'love of the music', 'novel experience' and 'educational enrichment', listed in Table 2 reflect the findings of other research into festival attendee motivation and therefore appear to be somewhat universal. It could be argued, therefore, that these merely reflect basic psychological processes which operate regardless of culture and other external factors (Berry,

Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002). For example, ‘togetherness’ represents the human need for socialisation and ‘novel experience’ and ‘educational enrichment’ (see Li and Petrick, 2006) the innate drive to develop.

Having been working in the industry for so many years, I have learned that Midi music festival is the best music festival in China, so I really want to learn something from it...Midi is really a good platform for music communication. [29-year-old DJ]

A further, not unexpected, universal motivator relates to the festival content (i.e. ‘the music does matter’) (Bowen & Daniels, 2005).

If the band arrangement is bad, or is not my favourite, I wouldn’t have attended. [21-year-old, MC]

Although several of these relate to motivators found in previous studies (see Table 1 in section 2) the data also seems to suggest several differences. The two complex push factors summarised as ‘spiritual escape’ and ‘spiritual pursuit’ appear to be unique to this study. ‘Spirit’ (精神 jingshen) and ‘spiritual’ are highly reflected in the interviews and in the sense expressed relate to people’s inner mind and feelings, as opposed to their physical bodily sensations and material possessions (Hornby, 2004). ‘Spirit’ or the ‘spiritual’ is not an uncommon concept in Chinese society and is regularly talked about as an essential part of everyday life. Although this research is qualitative, the fact that both of these motivators were freely expressed by nineteen of the twenty-two interviewees suggests their relative importance.

Spiritual escape is analogous to a feeling of personal freedom, an escape from the

mental constraints of everyday life rather than escape from the more physical, such as a heavy workload or material pressure. Spiritual escape describes a form of relaxation through personal intrinsic expression and release rather than the more physical relaxation found in studies such as Backman et al.'s (1995).

Attending Midi rock live means feeling natural and true, it is like nothing binds me, I can be myself...I was very relaxed, thoroughly relaxed there, it was like nobody watched me, no one cared about what I was doing...I can find the true me there...it was like I don't have to worry about anything there...I can do/be whatever I want to do/be. [21-year-old student].

At Midi, there is no spiritual constraint. [23-year-old student]

At Midi, people don't criticise you when you act differently, such as pogo (moshpitting), shout out loud and so on, these acts cannot happen at any time, they only happen in some special environment. [23-year-old construction worker].

There is no shyness any more, I can run around in only my underwear, but at other places, people would say I am mad. [17-year-old student].

We jumped and jumped, nobody criticised us...Nobody and nothing restrained you at Midi, you can jump and bump, it felt free and alive. [24-year-old salesman]

It can be seen that there were things people felt they could do at Midi that they couldn't do elsewhere. Criticism by society on how they act 'differently', and how they are judged if they don't conform to the general social norms of the current Chinese society was highly emphasised by the interviewees. One participant said he and his male friend had kissed at Midi, which they had never done outside of the Festival environment. Such acts are not publicly accepted by the mainland Chinese society, yet,

these people felt that at the Festival there was less, if any, public criticism, an atmosphere of ‘anything goes’.

Some Chinese social-cultural context research has highlighted the predominance of a collectivist perspective, a greater level of social influence and conformity to the social norms (Gilbert & Tsao, 2000; Hsu, 1981, 1985; Lau, 1992; McCullough et al., 1986; Sun et al., 2004). Previous research has also shown that in interdependent cultures, such as China, emphasis is placed on fitting in, behaving in a ‘proper’ way, and living up to others’ expectations (Gao, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore the people interviewed normally feel that they ‘have’ to or are ‘forced’ to conform to society and fit in in terms of both behaviours and values. Although they are strongly influenced by the collectivist nature of the Chinese social-cultural context, they consider this to negatively constrain their thought processes and that this negative affect is noticed more when looking outside from the Festival environment. Their comments suggest a desire to rebel against these social norms and to pursue a more independent, free and self-oriented life, reflecting a more western individualistic perspective (Feather, 1986; Lau, 1988, 1992; Stipek et al., 1989). The collectivist aspect of current Chinese society (e.g. ‘we’ and conformity) is more socially dominant in traditional, older Chinese society whilst the individualist aspect (e.g. self-value, independence and freedom) seems to be growing within the Chinese younger generation. Both kinds of social-cultural aspects seem to coexist in modern Chinese society although not always comfortably. There is undoubtedly a clash between these younger people’s desire to express their individualism and the collectivist wider social environment which constrains them. The transcripts highlight this tension demonstrating a critical view of wider society and the

collectivist social norm as it constrains thoughts and ideas and the 'spiritual'. They wished to escape from these real or perceived spiritual restrictions and feel free to 'relax their minds', be independent and different. The feeling of 'spiritual escape' therefore is likely to be more of an 'escape of mind' from the rigours of society rather than the escape from the every-day, the humdrum felt by festival goers from independent, individualist societies.

Furthermore, Tafarodi et al. (2004) suggest that Chinese students express their 'inner selves' more easily when they are alone or with close friends only. The escapism expressed by the interviewees here corresponds with this. There is an emphasis on the self and individualism and perhaps, therefore, an 'anti-cultural' element to this motivator in that it embraces cultural traits not seen as desirable within the mainland Chinese society.

Other responses expressed the contrast between their experience at Midi and their everyday normal lives.

In contrast with Midi, the working environment in China is very depressing, and it restrains people's personal emotion...Compared with the normal restrained, depressed and brainwashed life, I felt free with no constraint at Midi. [25-year-old marketing specialist].

The things we see and experience at Midi cannot be seen and experienced in other places and in our daily life. [21-year-old student]

This dissatisfaction with the working environment in mainland China expresses a feeling that less importance is placed on 'I' or inner-self and personal emotions. Under the collectivist predominance of 'We', respondents indicate that their inner-selves, self-



value and personal emotions are felt to be not well respected and taken care of in their working environment and normal lives. This inability to release their emotions and fulfill their self-value in their work and normal lives results in a suppression of individual identity and in some cases a 'depression of spirit'. It is this contrast that makes festival goers more eager to be released and to feel spiritually free.

At Midi, attendees do not need to hide their inner selves and restrain their emotions anymore, and this creates the sought after feeling of release. Therefore, according to the push and pull model, spiritual escape can be seen as a push factor that motivates people to attend Midi. Since '*Midi is a platform for spiritual relaxation*' [17-year-old student], the strength of feeling in the responses suggests that this push factor (the need for spiritual relaxation) is a more important motivator than pull factors, such as the atmosphere or the bands at Midi, although it is also clear that both types of motivator need to be in place.

This type of motivating factor may also be important for some festival goers in the West but from previous studies this appears to be a lesser motivator than others such as excitement and socialisation. Uysal et al. (1993) listed 'escape' as a motivator for festival attendance but in later studies this factor was not found to be of importance (e.g. Bowen & Daniels, 2005; McMorland & Mactaggart, 2007). Gelder and Robinson's (2009) research at Glastonbury and V Festival in the UK did show that 'escape from everyday life' was one of the six motivators but they concluded that 'socialisation' was the most important factor although also recognising that all respondents had multiple motives for attending. Therefore, we conclude that although there are similarities with the motivators identified in other studies, it is both the strength of this motive ('spiritual

escape') and its focus on intellectual and emotional escape which appears to be specific to the Chinese context.

The second motivator which appears to be more important in the Chinese context is 'spiritual pursuit'. This is defined as the intrinsic need for hopes and dreams exemplified in the ideas of a youth culture, a belief in a utopia, and ideas around faith. This is a less passive, more goal based motivation than spiritual escape as it moves beyond escapism and freedom to political, collectivist action or at least intent.

Not only me but, many people have a mutual dream, which is having our own collective youth culture. At Midi, we have...This youth culture, it's a culture we choose, not a culture we are forced to accept...Ideologically speaking, people at Midi don't want to be controlled, they wish to decide how they live...In a word, we go to Midi to find a place where we can share our spirit, and we can find those who have the same spirit with us. [23-year-old construction worker].

At Midi, there is no interest conflict, from this point of view, I agree that Midi is themed as a utopia...Utopia means a communist society, it means a purely spiritual world without material demand, so at Midi, people are away from materialism. [25-year-old marketing specialist].

As shown in the last quote several attendees complained about the commercialisation in modern-day society. Although politically mainland China is not deemed as a capitalist economy the rapidly developing profit-making and commercialised activities are an extensive part of the Chinese way of life as the country transitions to more market-based economic systems. This makes China a more complex and contradictory society. As in the transition from 'we eat what we earn' to 'I eat what I earn', the current more commercialised and materialistic Chinese society is perceived to consist of a greater level of conflicts and competition, and less peace between people.

Influenced by the negative impacts of commercialisation and materialism, people perceive a gap between the current commercialised society and what has been propagandised previously, as a communist society, or utopia. Therefore, this group of festival-goers hope for a more peaceful and utopian world. Their choice of festival was affected by this perception of and attitude to commercialisation. Their pursuit of an idealised world is implied and linked directly to a perceived lack of commercialisation of this Festival compared with others:

Midi is not that commercialised, I prefer this. [20-year-old student].

Midi is a pure rock music festival in China, and also my only favourite, the other music festivals are too commercialised. [23-year-old student].

As well as the anti-commercialisation, anti-capitalism views expressed others explained this 'spiritual pursuit' as something intertwined with ideas of faith and belief:

When our memory of faith is in yesterday...when talking about dreams becomes odd...when we found our lives were turning numb and meaningless...when we found we had lost a lot on the way we had been through... when we worshiped money, our dreams were lost, but at Midi, we see true faith. [17-year-old student]

Young people should have passion, be free, and should not be controlled; these are the essentials of the faith at Midi. [25-year-old marketing specialist]

Mainland China becoming more market-driven seems to amplify the importance of money and material possessions and, in their views, diminish the importance of thoughts and feelings, their 'spiritual life', and the meaning of their life. A focus on the pursuit of

only money seems very problematic to these festival-goers and therefore attending this type of festival allows them the space and time to reflect on the 'spiritual pursuit' of their dreams and to rethink the meaning of their lives.

This political motivation is stronger within the younger demographic attracted to the Festival and is inherently related to a sense of belonging:

Attending Midi is to embrace a young culture. [23-year-old construction worker]

At Midi you know what it is to be forever young. [21-year-old student]

This expression of youthful spirit is not necessarily about biological age but a feeling of youth. Again this can be seen as a reaction to the restraints of Chinese society and a disaffection with increasing materialism. In everyday life people are less motivated to confront and change the system but in the 'safe' environment of the Festival a youthful spirit emerges which breaks the social restraints, and creates a feeling of 'vigour, courage and passion', and a belief in dreams. This feeling was a very strong motivation to attend amongst the interviewees. .

Due to its relatively long history and features that resonate with Chinese youth such as Utopian ideals, freedom, dreams, and faith, Midi has come to symbolise much more than a music festival to several attendees:

Midi stands for 'utopia', which has a free attitude at life and a faith on freedom. [20-year-old student]

Midi stands for peace, freedom and a beautiful soul. [21-year-old student]

Midi is like a symbol, it is like if I don't go to Midi then I am not a cool person...Attending Midi is fulfilling one

of my dream. [23-year-old construction worker]

In summary, the 'spiritual' aspect of attending is clearly important as demonstrated in the comments below:

You can feel forever young at Midi...Midi is a pure rock and roll music festival, it rejects commercialisation...I think people attend Midi because of something inside their heart, a spirit, a faith, a love...Midi is the main support to our spirit. [21-year-old student]

Midi isn't only a show; it's a get-together chance for people who have dreams and passion in life...to me, Midi means dreams, freedom and forever young...they are pursuing the freedom, physical and spiritual freedom!... Midi is a utopia! Utopia is a spirit garden in our dreams, a place we can live without anything but our dreams, a place where we put spiritual pursuit at the highest and material needs at the lowest. [28-year-old advertisement specialist]

The ideas expressed above are intangible and related in some way to spiritual behaviour they have therefore been themed together as 'spiritual pursuit'. Although elements of this have been found in other western studies such as McMorland and Mactaggart's (2007) 'self-fulfillment' motivator, or spiritual motivations to visit a cathedral (Gutic, Caie, & Clegg, 2010), it appears to be unique to this setting and is clearly culturally influenced.

The two motivational themes, emerged as different from other studies, spiritual escape and spiritual pursuit, suggest the need for further research into leisure motivation within China. It may be that these motivators only hold true for the case study Festival. Midi is unique in mainland China and appears to represent more than just a music

festival to the people who attend. It could be, however, that these culturally bound motivators are found in other leisure activity choices within China, or within other countries with similar political and cultural characteristics.

## Conclusion

This research has focused on intrinsic needs as it has been argued that leisure choice is largely motivated by intrinsic factors related to interest, enjoyment and engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The two spiritual motivators identified and analysed here show strong similarities with the escape-seek dichotomy which highlights two intrinsic motivation domains (Iso-Ahola, 1982; Snepenger et al., 2006), both of which can be seen in these two unique, or culturally bound, motivational themes. Spiritual escape can be viewed as 'escape' from the constraints of society as well as seeking a freer environment. Spiritual pursuit can be seen as the seeking of a 'better' way of being. These two motivations are inextricably interlinked with the other, more universal factors and also are clearly influenced by a variety of externalities.

Compared with studies undertaken in the West, the seven motivations identified here reveal several differences. In the Western context, motivations for festival attendance are mainly socialisation, family togetherness, novelty, excitement and thrills, general relaxation, entertainment, learning, and music (e.g. Chang, 2005; McMorland & Mactaggart, 2007). In this Chinese context, spiritual escape and pursuit are found to enrich this range of motivations. These unique manifestations of the need to 'escape' appear linked to perceived current aspects of mainland China society, which are felt to be restraining life-style, behaviour and to some extent thought processes.

Other studies in leisure have concluded that ‘cross cultural differences in leisure motivation may be relatively unimportant’ (Walker & Wang, 2008, p.192) and that ethnic and cultural similarities have been underemphasised (ibid). This study has found both similarities and differences, both of which are of interest. The similarities suggest a universality which could be useful in the export or geographic expansion of music festival formats or other leisure activities in an increasingly globalised world. The differences require further exploration but could initially suggest that the current Chinese social-cultural context has influenced people’s leisure motivation in some way, and music festivals should address these culturally bound motivations by providing a ‘free’ and ‘open’ atmosphere for the festival-goers in order to meet their ‘spiritual’ needs.

Although the findings appear to show the importance of both culturally bound and universally present motivators, further research is clearly needed to examine its validity and wider applicability. Quantitative data from a wider set of festivals is now needed to test the validity of the two 'new' motivators. Further qualitative research could also be employed to investigate the underlying social, political, and cultural reasons for these differences.

Finally, apart from enriching leisure motivation studies, this study reveals the effects of some of the changes taking place in mainland Chinese society. To some extent it provides a lens through which the complexity and contradictions of this society and its influence on the lives, character and feelings of the younger generation can be viewed. The changing political, social and cultural context has strongly influenced some Chinese people’s need for leisure time, and the type of leisure they pursue. Midi music festival is

indeed unique in China, due to its intangible attributes such as 'youth culture' and the 'utopian' image people perceived. Its uniqueness also reflects a growing demand for 'escapist' activities in a socially restrained and rapidly changing environment. To its attendees, Midi is a refuge, a safe haven or even a paradise. It will be interesting to see how this type of leisure activity develops further within China to meet this growing demand and whether such large-scale demonstrations of anti-conformism will in turn begin to challenge some of the existing social norms.

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