

# Tourists' experiences and behaviors related to norms: Finding from a survey using the Mafengwo travelogue

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## Abstract

In this paper, we present a descriptive account of survey conducted on descriptions related to “norms” as found in Mafengwo, a Chinese-language travelogue platform. As the number of international tourists to Japan surged in the 2010s, the impressions of tourists who failed to show respect for local manners became more widespread. However, while we recognize that the consideration of how tourists perceive their own experiences and actions is insufficient, this research specifically investigates the narratives of Chinese tourists’ “norms.”

## Keywords

Norms  
Chinese Tourists  
Mafengwo  
Japan Inbound Tourism

## Introduction

In the 2010s, the number of international tourists to Japan surged, and journalists and academics were quick to notice this trend alongside the ensuing implications. There were two points of focus: the first on economic activities such as shopping by tourists and the second on negative social and cultural impacts such as tourists’ bad manners and associated frictions with local communities. These discussions highlighted the kind of images people have had of “tourists,” and strengthened these images. However, the consideration of how tourists perceive their own experiences and actions remains insufficient. If we accept the general idea that tourism contributes to cross-cultural understanding, it is necessary to not only demand that tourists understand the local community, but also to avoid the stereotyping of tourists and endeavor to understand their rationalisations.

Specifically, we set out to understand the behavior and experiences of tourists based on their own narratives. Stereotypes of tourists have proliferated such as “not displaying manners” and “causing friction with the local community.” Accordingly, we focused on the collection and analysis of narratives of “norms” and investigating the thoughts of tourists and actions related to local culture and manners.

Several studies have been made on the relationship between tourists and host societies (Smith, 1989). Yet, focus has been on the impact of tourists on host societies and little attention has been given to the impact of host societies on tourists. In addition, although some research has been conducted on tourism from a performance perspective, the focus has been on describing a dynamism of the creation of tourism spaces through actions of various actors (Edensor, 1998). The ways in which events in tourism spaces affect tourists have not been sufficiently discussed. This paper concisely describes examples of the influence of the host societies on tourists. It will be helpful to examine what growing international tourism brings to individual subjects and societies by depicting the chain of interactions between the various subjects involved.

## Research Methods

Tourist narratives which relate to “norms” were queried by researching travelogues in Mafengwo - a widely used Chinese-language travelogue platform known for a lot of descriptions of tourist’s experiences and information of places they visited on each article.

According to Miyajima (1984), “norms” refer to certain standards and ideals that each member is required to conform to in social situations. Norms are either explicit/institutional, such as legal systems, or implicit/non-institutional, such as group rules. Sanctions given for breaking norms include explicit consequences like penalties and implicit ones such as blame and isolation, and sometimes no sanctions are given.

This raises the question: How do tourists refer to norms in their travelogues? In all, 44 travelogues about Japan were chosen in order of popularity. In total, we found 48 cases of descriptions of norms in 28 blogs.

## Findings

In sum, four categories of norms are established.

### *(1) Description of the norms that may manifest on local streets and facilities*

23 of the 48 descriptions are the norms clearly marked on streets and facilities. For example, there were signs on the roads for drivers, the order of worship at temples and shrines, signs about restrictions of photography, manners at hot springs, and rules at guest houses.

Tourists check streets, facilities, travelogues, and refer to pamphlets to learn these rules. Among them, is a case that is a copy of the contents of AKIMAHEN, a booklet issued by Kyoto City and distributed to international tourists from 2015, which states; “You cannot enter shrines and temples with hats or sunglasses on. Do not open the door yourself in a taxi. Please do not bring your own drinks into a restaurant” (case 2) (Kyoto City, 2015).

In addition, there are several cases that refer to the signs of the prohibition of photography placed on Hanamikoji, Kyoto

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**Table 1.** Extracts of cases of descriptions of norms in Mafengwo travelogues (Source: Authors)

	No.	Excerpt	Corrponding Number (URL below)
Norms that appear to be clearly stated on local streets and facilities	1	...Eating and drinking in the bedroom is prohibited, but it is okay to drink bottled drinks and eat bread in bags...	17934136
	2	...You cannot enter shrines and temples with hats or sunglasses on. Do not open the door yourself in a taxi...	13831311
	3	...About hand washing at the temple, first pour water into your left hand while holding the ladle in your right hand, then take turns washing your right hand...	13831311
	4	...There is a bathtub in the bathroom. Japanese bathtubs are for bathing only. After cleaning your body outside the bathtub, enter the bathtub...	13831311
	5	...In Kyoto, bicycles must be parked in a dedicated parking lot. Otherwise, you may be forced to move with a tow truck...	13831311
	6	...You must be naked in the hot springs. Before entering the pool, you need to sit on a chair and clean yourself. Do not stand and wash...	13831311
	7	...Before entering the hot springs, I studied the manners of the hot springs...Of course, you can't take pictures in the toilet...	13584865
	8	...I accidentally stepped on the carpet while trying on clothes... (You have to take off your shoes before entering the fitting room in Japan)...	3505848
	9	...Before worshipping Buddha, you must first wash your hands. Wash your left hand first, then your right hand, then your left hand...	17823739
	10	...reserved seats are not free...it is possible for an adult to hold a child in the same seat or sit next to an empty child's seat...	11175150
	11	...We are not even allowed to take pictures. I secretly took two pictures. I am very sorry...	10894006
	12	...At Tokyo Disney, the use of cell phones is basically prohibited on all rides, and everyone respects the rules of the game...	11835830
	13	...Please do not rush to board. Everyone please follow the rules. Don't be the destroyer of fairy tales!...	11835830
	14	...Be careful about taking pictures here. There is a sign on the door that prohibits taking pictures...	19158673
	15	...There were a lot of signs saying "Photography is prohibited," so let's follow the rules...	18079054
	16	...The road has signs to keep quiet...	8407614
	17	...There are many maid cafes in Akihabara, and you can choose the one that interests you, but photography is prohibited inside...	8407614
	18	...There are few pictures of the hot springs because you can't take pictures in the baths...	10860698
	19	...Photography is prohibited in the garden of Kodaiji Temple, so the young lady has no choice but to lean on the railing and make a sad face...	8674866
	20	...After bath time, I always made an exception for Ichiro-san and let him use it...	17934136
	21	...If you take a picture on a private road adjacent to a main road, you will be fined 10,000 yen...	13831311
	22	...There is a screen showing a snapshot at the place to disembark. Photography is prohibited but I secretly took it, sorry...	10894006
Norms likely to be unstated	23	...A group of tourists in the back were chasing her (geisha) and taking pictures of her. It was really bad...	10923374
	24	...The mobile phone in my pocket suddenly rang. At first I thought, "I accidentally dropped my headphones and let the music play" so...	17934136
	25	...I try to keep my voice low so as not to disturb other people watching the maple trees...	21132880
	26	I can understand why Japanese people put their hands together and say "Itadakimasu"... Emptying the bowl is the greatest way to show gratitude to the chef...	11328250
	27	...The common point is that the station is clean. Locals do not speak loudly at the station and basically stand in line quietly or sit on chairs in the waiting area...	12788110
	28	...If you go shopping with your child, bring your own garbage bag, otherwise you have to eat at the same place and then go home...	11835830
	29	...If you are traveling and need to change your baby's diaper, you can just put it in a plastic bag and throw it in the trash if you have one...	12894554
	30	...In front of many houses in Kyoto, there are icons that prohibit photography...	12894554
	31	...Try not to disturb others. Parents with children should also educate their children to behave well in public spaces.	10604902
	32	...I also felt it was rude to point the camera at someone I didn't know...I hid far away and filmed the scene...	9279377
	33	...There are no trash cans in Nara Park. Please bring your own trash to the area where the trash cans are located before throwing them away...	10947538
	34	...I wanted to take a picture with a geisha, but I was told it was rude. So I secretly took a picture...	10860698
	35	...For fear of disturbing the silence here, everyone who enters the garden voluntarily lowers their voices and slows down their walking.	10860698
	36	...For example, in an elevator, stand on the left side, open the right side, and let passers-by go by...	10299954
	37	...I found a large field next to the guest house. With the owner's consent, we were taking selfies using a tripod...	9014613
	38	...Volunteers prepared garbage bags at the exit of the fireworks display venue. Everyone was taking garbage home...	10535654
	39	...Just be careful not to make a lot of noise, just communicate in a whisper and you'll be fine...	18079054
	40	...Stand on the right side in Osaka. This is an important point, please be careful...	18079054
	41	...So quiet that people dare not say a word, with only a few tourists passing by...	18079054
	42	...Because of the super-quiet driving environment, Shito (my companion) and I are wondering whether to eat the lunch we just bought on the platform...	18079054
	43	...The old lady was strict with me. W (companion's name) was frustrated, 'I was not paying attention'...	13584865
	44	...When I tried to take her out...I ran around the tatami mats in the living room with her shoes on. Well, she learned her lesson...	12894554
	45	...The number of people breaking the rules increased and the monastery became unbearable, ...signs were put up saying no photography was allowed...	9279377
	46	...Just when I was able to pose, the staff came out of the back door...lying there in the snow was the pinnacle of embarrassment...	8674866
	47	...Wearing a kimono in the ancient capital is especially okay, but riding the subway or going shopping in a kimono looks totally like cosplay...	8674866
	48	...A drunken man in Kabukicho also extends his hand to keep a safe distance from passers-by...	18079054

Source: URL: <http://www.mafengwo.cn/i/> [corresponding number].html

(cases 11, 21, 23, 30). Efforts to raise awareness of acceptable etiquette conducted by Kyoto City Government and the local communities (Nakai, 2019) have caught the eye of travelers and have been disseminated through online travelogues.

### (2) Norms likely to have been unstated

25 of the 48 cases were the norms not clearly stated at the location. For example, avoiding loud noises in restaurants and taking photos as quickly as possible in places where photography is allowed. The standing position on the escalator (“to stand in a row” and “stand at left side in Tokyo and Kyoto, right side in Osaka”) is often mentioned (cases 36, 40, 48).

Tourists strive to find out what kind of norms the place they visit has by referring to guidebooks and online articles and by reading between the lines. They sometimes inadvertently misbehave based on their misunderstandings of local norms. For examples, one tourist tried to reduce the volume of their voice at a famous spot for autumn leaves (case 25) or had a lunch box in a Shinkansen train as quietly as possible (case 42). Tourists are conscious of protecting norms, and by acting according to their own interpretation, they are actors toward the creation of new norms.

### (3) Breaking norms

7 cases were descriptions of norm violations: 2 of which were violations by others, and 5 of were by themselves or their companions. They mostly depicted the photography ban.

Regarding the tourists’ own violation of norms, they also wrote words of apology such as “I took two pictures in silence. I am very sorry” (case 11) and “There is a screen showing a snapshot at the place to disembark. Photography is prohibited but I secretly took it, sorry” (case 22). Regarding the violation by their companion, the blogger also wrote that he reprimanded the companion (case 44) and expressed condemnation about the violation by others, such as “A group of tourists in the back were chasing her (geisha) and taking pictures of her, which is really bad” (case 23). The norm-breaking behavior reminds tourists of the norms and provides an opportunity to disseminate information about them through travelogues.

### (4) Evaluation against norms

Tourists are not passive beings who are aware of and comply with norms, but are also actors who strengthen existing norms and create new norms through their observance and dissemination. Evaluating norms is one of the ways tourists’ actions related to norms (cases 21, 43, 48). For example, a writer complained about a sign prohibiting photography in Kyoto (“If you take a picture of a private road adjacent to a main road without permission, you will be fined 10,000 yen. As expected, Kyoto people are hated by other Japanese people” (case 21)) or another one complained about being severely reprimanded for a minor violation (“The old lady was strict with me. W (companion’s name) was frustrated, ‘I was not paying attention.’ (case 43). Tourists are also actors who evaluate the adequacy of norms of the local community.

## Conclusion

In this study, we explored Chinese tourists’ travelogues about Japan and found that they imparted descriptions of explicit or implicit regional norms in 28 out of 44 blogs. Some (5 of the 48 cases) described their own violations of the norms, but these were paired with expressions of apology and feelings of guilt. Viewing tourists as “rule-breakers” not only emphasizes a small number of cases but also greatly limits understanding of the complex relationship between tourists and norms.

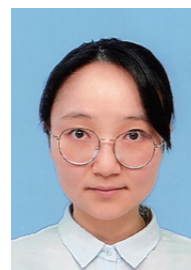
Research implications suggest that it is necessary to conduct a more rigorous theoretical examination of the descriptions of tourists’ “norms.” To do so, it will be necessary to deepen discussions from communication theories and media theories. Tourists may exaggerate their own knowledge of and adherence to local manners. The most frequently mentioned norm was that related to the banning of photography possibly because Mafengwo is a photo sharing site. It will be useful for future research to explore the relationship between the characteristics of the media platform and their descriptions.

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