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## Emerging Scholar Profile

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My name is Xuerui (Sherry) Liu and this is my reflection on my academic journey and research interests. Currently, I work at the Department of Tourism, School of Humanity, Southeast University, China. I obtained my Master in Tourism Management, with Distinction, from the University of Surrey, UK. During my Master's degree studies, I met many renowned and outstanding scholars in the tourism field. Their expertise aroused my interest in tourism research and inspired me to further develop my academic career. I believe that interest is the best teacher. For my Master's thesis, I examined the influence of a television drama on tourist motivation and behavior at a heritage attraction, Highclere Castle in the UK, the setting of the television series, *Downton Abbey* which is my favorite television drama (Liu & Pratt, 2019). My Master's studies opened a door into a new world that I was excited and passionate to explore more. After graduation, I had a one-year work experience as a Market Analyst in a leading theme park in China. This period allowed me to reflect on my personal goals and aspirations, which strengthened my resolve to pursue a higher level of education.

To embark on a Ph.D. journey was one of the most important and courageous decisions I have made in my life. I wish to express sincere gratitude to my teachers who have encouraged me to pursue a Ph.D. degree and supported my Ph.D. application without reservation. With their assistance and support, I joined the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM), The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 2016. While the University of Surrey has offered me fundamental skills and a rigorous attitude that have anchored my research career, SHTM trained me into becoming a professional researcher.

My Ph.D. thesis focused on tourism decision-making, and particularly looked at it in the context of the mobile Internet era. Some results of the project have been presented at the APTA 2018 conference. At the very beginning, I was not familiar with the multidisciplinary theories, frameworks, and methods in Psychology, Geography, Tourism Studies, Marketing,

and Information Technology. The more I learned, the more I realized how much I did not know. Self-doubt, anxiety, feelings of worry, and even depression were things I struggled with during my Ph.D. journey, from debating whether I complete my Ph.D. studies to believing I could succeed as a researcher. My special appreciation and gratitude go to my families, mentors, colleagues, and friends who were the light in my journey.

I was fortunate to join a six-month attachment program funded by SHTM at the Fox School of Business, Temple University, in the US, which offered me the experience of meeting great minds and working with enthusiastic, outstanding scholars. Together with the brilliant team at the U.S. - Asia Center for Tourism and Hospitality Management, I had the opportunity to participate in a WTTC project focusing on mobile payments in travel and tourism. Apart from the training to improve my research skills, these projects also afforded me plenty of time for reflection on my research passion. I was awarded my Ph.D. in Tourism Management in September 2020. Although it is the end of my Ph.D. journey, it is not the end of my academic journey.

I will continue to focus on three key areas of research interest: mobile technology, social media, and tourism in China. As a 'Post-90s' who has witnessed the rapid development of information technology, I am extremely passionate about understanding the influence and changes brought by the proliferation of mobile technology into tourists' behaviors such as their travel plans, decision-making, and on-site activities. I have been working on several papers on this topic in collaboration with Dr. Dan Wang and Professor Ulrike Gretzel. Some research findings have been published in a paper on *Tourism Management* (Liu, Wang & Gretzel, 2022). We hope to share more valuable research output in 2022. The second area of my research looks at social media. I have published a paper co-authored with my colleagues at SHTM regarding how social media affect tourists' choices of different travel components (destination, transportation, accommodation, food, and dining activities, attractions, as well as shopping and leisure activities) (Liu, Mehraliyev, Liu & Schuckert, 2020). As an exploratory study, the article provides a holistic picture of the different roles played by social media in tourists' decision-making. I expect to conduct follow-up studies with a particular focus on new forms of social media and user-generated content in China. Around 904 million people in China had access to the internet as of the first quarter of 2020 (Statista, 2020), and there is an extremely high proportion of Internet users who are active in social media. Furthermore, social media platforms in China are very different from those in other parts of

the world. Thus, I wish to examine this underexplored and promising market. My third research area explores tourism in China. China is an important source market as well as a tourism destination in the world. I worked with a research team on the publication of a book, namely *Annual Development Report on China's Cultural Tourism 2019-2020*. I was responsible for the second chapter of this book which is related to theme park development in China (Liu, 2020). I expect to conduct studies in this area by focusing on the impact of new media on Chinese tourists' behavior and destination marketing.

Besides research, I earned the designation of a Certified Hospitality Educator (CHE) in 2018. I have been teaching courses on *Information Technology in Hotel and Tourism, Management, Tourism Strategy*, and *Tourism Market Planning* at the undergraduate level. For me, teaching is an extremely inspiring and rewarding experience because I can share my knowledge in tourism research and my work experience in the tourism industry.

Having found my passion in both research and teaching, I started my job as a lecturer at Southeast University in June 2020. I am working on the publication of my research while preparing for new research projects. Meanwhile, I am supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students and trying to help them like those who had helped me. As an emerging scholar, I am striving for impactful research that could provide 'real' contributions to the body of knowledge and the industry. In retrospect, I cannot be more grateful to everyone who has helped and accompanied me in my pursuit of an academic career, and for all the opportunities, frustrations, and failures I have had. I would like to take this opportunity to tell those who are about to embark on an academic journey: Do not be afraid of making mistakes or rush for quick 'success'. Keep going, work hard, seek good mentors and companions, network and collaborate, and your efforts will be rewarded in the long run.

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