



PLANNING MALAYSIA:

Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners

VOLUME 23 ISSUE 5 (2025), Page 145 – 158

IMPACTS OF RISK PERCEPTION ON THE BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS OF TOURISTS TRAVELING TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract

Southeast Asia, geographically close to China and rich in tourism resources, is a popular destination for Chinese tourists. However, the rising number of outbound Chinese tourists has been accompanied by increasing safety concerns, posing significant threats to tourists' lives and assets and influencing their future travel intentions (TIs). This study examines the impacts of six dimensions of perceived risk—social (SOCR), financial (FINR), physical (PHYR), facility (FACR), psychological (PSYR), and functional (FUNR)—on the behavioural intentions (BIs) of Chinese tourists to Southeast Asia. Using a questionnaire survey and structural equation modelling, we analysed the responses of potential tourists. The findings reveal a high overall level of risk perception (RP) among tourists, with SOCR, PHYR, and FINR significantly and adversely affecting their BIs. This research highlights why it is important for tourism enterprises and destination governments to enhance destination risk management and reduce tourists' RPs to improve their TIs.

Keywords: Behavioural Intention, Risk Perception, SEM, Southeast Asia, Tourism

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INTRODUCTION

The safety of tourists is a critical global concern that significantly affects both tourists and destinations (Zou & Meng, 2020). Decisions regarding tourist destinations are closely linked to perceived travel risks, with safety and security being key factors in choosing a destination (Henderson, 2007; Hall, Timothy, & Duval, 2012). Southeast Asia, given its proximity to China and rich tourism resources, is particularly attractive to Chinese tourists (Liu, Yu, & Wang, 2019). As the largest source of outbound tourists globally (Huang et al., 2021), China accounted for 169 million outbound trips in 2019, representing over 12% of global tourism (Bao, 2020). However, the rising number of Chinese tourists in Southeast Asia has coincided with an increase in safety incidents. For example, telecommunication security issues in northern Myanmar had disrupted normal travel (Guangming Net, 2023). In May 2023, a Chinese couple tragically died while on vacation in Bali (Global Times, 2024a), and a shooting at Siam Paragon in Bangkok in October 2023 resulted in the death of a Chinese tourist (BBC, 2023). These frequent and alarming safety incidents have heightened public concern about travel safety in Southeast Asia, significantly affecting tourists' willingness to visit the region (Liu, Yu, & Wang, 2019). In early 2024, countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand (Global Times, 2024b; China Daily, 2024) announced visa-free policies for Chinese tourists. Consequently, the issue of outbound travel safety is again in the spotlight. Therefore, it is essential to examine the risk perceptions (RPs) of Chinese tourists travelling to Southeast Asia and how these perceptions influence their travel intentions (TIs).

Recently, many scholars have focused on how RP factors influence tourists' decision-making behaviours (Matiza, 2020; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). Most studies have explored the concept, influencing factors, and evaluation of tourism RP (Huynh, 2020; Cui et al., 2016; Garg, 2015), treating it as a holistic variable (Seong & Hong, 2021). However, there is a lack of research concerning the impact of distinct RP dimensions on behavioural intentions (BIs). Moreover, empirical studies have not yet explored how these various dimensions affect Chinese tourists' TIs to Southeast Asia. To fill this gap, this study targets potential Chinese tourists to Southeast Asia using a questionnaire survey to analyse the impact of six risk dimensions—social (SOCR), financial (FINR), physical (PHYR), facility (FACR), psychological (PSYR), and functional (FUNR)—on tourists' BIs. This research aims to help tourism practitioners develop more effective marketing strategies and provide insights for policymakers to enhance tourists' security and satisfaction, thereby attracting more Chinese tourists to Southeast Asia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism Risk Perceptions (RPs)

This study employs the Perceived Risk Theory as the underlying framework, which posits that individuals' RPs significantly influence their decision-making processes (Bauer & Hancock, 1960; Moutinho et al., 2011). In 1960, Bauer first introduced the concept of PSYR in marketing, highlighting the importance of studying consumers' RPs (Bauer & Hancock, 1960). Subsequently, Mowen and Minor (1995) later defined "risk perception" as the likelihood of the occurrence of negative outcomes. Building on this, Lepp and Gibson (2003) considered RP as a subjective variable, representing the probability of actual risks during the travel process. Moutinho et al. (2011) further elucidated that tourism RP is a function of uncertainty and outcomes, primarily stemming from the product, purchase channels and locations, social, psychology, economics, and tourist experiences. As a theoretical concept in cognitive psychology, RP has been applied across various disciplines, such as sociology, management, and tourism, to gain deeper insights into people's psychological and behavioural responses (Dang, 2022).

Tourism RP has been identified as a construct with multiple dimensions (Cui et al., 2016). For example, Moutinho (1987) researched PHYR, PSYR, and FINR aspects of tourism, suggesting that understanding consumer behaviour requires examining complex interactions among various influencing factors. Lepp and Gibson (2003) identified seven risk factors: health, political instability, terrorism, unfamiliar food, cultural barriers, political and religious dogma, and crime, which were further summarised into three dimensions: PHYR, SOCR, and FUNR. Quintal et al. (2010) categorised tourism RP into five dimensions: PHYR, PSYR, FUNR, SOCR, and FINR. Xu et al. (2013) and Yao and Hou (2019) added FACR, highlighting the impact of destination infrastructure and service facilities on travel safety and experiences. After studying the impact of RP on BIs during the Covid-19 pandemic, Matiza. T (2020) pointed out that, although tourism risk is divided into multiple dimensions, health, PSYR, and SOCR are most likely to influence tourists' future travel possibilities. Bae and Chang suggested that tourists' RP can be divided into two dimensions: cognitive risk and affective risk. The cognitive risk dimension refers to individuals' perception of the vulnerability and intensity of risk, while the affective risk dimension refers to the anxiety or concern individuals face when encountering risks (Bae & Chang, 2021). Based on the above research, the six dimensions of risk—SOCR, FINR, PHYR, FACR, PSYR, and FUNR—were selected due to their relevance to the tourism context and their documented impact on travel behaviour in previous research (Quintal et al., 2010; Xu et al., 2013; Yao & Hou, 2019). This study empirically analyses the impact of these six dimensions of risk on BIs. By incorporating these multiple dimensions of risk into the context of international tourism, we aim to gain a

nuanced understanding of their individual and collective influence on travel behaviour.

Tourists' Behavioural Intentions (BIs)

Behavioural intention (BI) is defined as the subjective probability that an individual will perform a specific behaviour (Mahardika et al., 2020), and it is considered the best predictor of individual behaviour (Prasetyo et al., 2020). According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, BI manifests as the willingness of individuals to exert effort and plan to execute specific behaviours (Ajzen, 1991). Generally, the stronger the willingness to engage in a certain behaviour, the more likely it is to be implemented (Prasetyo et al., 2020). In the context of consumer behaviour, BI can also be reflected in the willingness to recommend products or services to others (Sun & Sun, 2022). Thus, the more evident the BI, the stronger the inclination to recommend it to others.

Correlation between Tourists' Risk Perceptions (RPs) and Behavioural Intentions (BIs)

Risk perception (RP) is a crucial factor influencing tourist decision-making behaviour (Dang, 2022). However, there is no consensus in the academic community regarding the impact of RP on tourists' BIs. Some scholars argue that RP does not significantly affect tourists' BIs (Susanto et al., 2021) because potential tourists may exhibit adaptive behaviour, reducing RPs to levels they find acceptable (Lee et al., 2012). Nevertheless, most scholars agree that tourists' RP does influence their BIs (Zorlu et al., 2023; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021; Zhu & Deng, 2020; Bae & Chang, 2021). They argue that tourists generally tend to avoid risks (Susanto et al., 2021), and RPs are more or less consistent with reality (Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021). When individuals have high RPs, they are more inclined to avoid those risks, resulting in lower BIs (Zhu & Deng, 2020). Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: SOCR negatively impacts tourists' BIs to travel to Southeast Asia.
- H2: FINR negatively impacts tourists' BIs to travel to Southeast Asia.
- H3: PHYR negatively impacts tourists' BIs to travel to Southeast Asia.
- H4: FACR negatively impacts tourists' BIs to travel to Southeast Asia.
- H5: PSYR negatively impacts tourists' BIs to travel to Southeast Asia.
- H6: FUNR negatively impacts tourists' BIs to travel to Southeast Asia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire Design and Distribution

Based on our theoretical framework, a self-administered questionnaire was developed for this study to evaluate the impact of six RP dimensions on Chinese tourists' TIs to Southeast Asia. The questionnaire was divided into three sections.

The first section gathered respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, education level, monthly income, and frequency of international travel. The second section contained the RP scale, which addressed six dimensions: SOCR, FINR, PHYR, FACR, PSYR, and FUNR, each with at least four items. Social risk (SOCR) items were derived from Bai (2019); FINR items from Yao and Hou (2019), Maulana et al. (2022), and Zhu and Deng (2020); PHYR items from Yao and Hou (2019) and She et al. (2019); FACR items from Yao and Hou (2019), Xu et al. (2013), and Zhu and Deng (2020); PSYR items from Yao and Hou (2019); and FUNR items from Xu et al. (2013) and Zhu and Deng (2020). The third section comprised the BI scale, incorporating four items sourced from Irfan et al. (2021) and Yeh et al. (2021).

Respondents were selected on the criteria that they were at least 18 years old and had prior international travel experience. These criteria ensured that participants had relevant experiences and insights regarding RPs and TIs. The questionnaire was distributed via the Questionnaire Star online survey platform on social media platforms such as WeChat, Moments, QQ, and TikTok from 6-19 May 2024. Of 531 distributed questionnaires, 418 valid responses were obtained after removing duplicates and responses from individuals without international travel experience to ensure data integrity.

Data Analysis Methods

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to analyse the data, using IBM® Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS®) 25.0 for descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and exploratory factor analysis, and IBM® SPSS® Amos 24.0 for confirmatory factor analysis and structural model testing. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a robust statistical technique that examines complex relationships among variables while accounting for measurement errors (Dang, 2022). The SEM results are presented and discussed in detail in the following sections.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

The sample included 418 respondents with a relatively balanced gender ratio (48% female, 52% male). The majority were aged between 26-35 (36.4%), followed by 18-25 (22.2%), 36-45 (26.1%), 46-60 (12%), and >60 (3.3%). Monthly income varied, with 158 respondents earning >RMB8000, 154 earning RMB4001-8000, 101 earning RMB1001-4000, and five earning <RMB1000. Most respondents had an undergraduate degree (n=162), followed by junior college education (n=125), postgraduate education and above (n=79), and high school education or below (n=52). International travel frequency ranged from once (n=79) to ≥ 5 (n=88) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Sample characteristics (n=418)	Number	Percentage (%)	Sample Characteristics (n=418)	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender			Education level		
Male	199	47.6	High school or below	52	12.4
Female	219	52.4	Junior college	125	29.9
Age			Undergraduate	162	38.8
18-25	93	22.2	Postgraduate and above	79	18.9
26-35	152	36.4	Times of Overseas Travel		
36-45	109	26.1	1	79	18.9
46-60	50	12.0	2	81	19.4
Above 60	14	3.3	3	87	20.8
Monthly Income			4	83	19.9
Below 1000RMB	5	1.2	5 and above	88	21.1
1001-4000RMB	101	24.2			
4001-8000RMB	154	36.8			
Above 8001RMB	158	37.8			

The average RP scores were medium-high for all dimensions, with PHYR having the highest (3.648), followed by SOCR (3.605) and FINR (3.518). Key concerns included safety (PHY5=3.88), violent events (PHY3=3.83), and social security differences (SOC3=3.75). The BI score averaged 2.345, indicating a medium-low willingness to travel to Southeast Asia.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to assess data adequacy for exploratory factor analysis. The KMO score was 0.956, significantly exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.6. Bartlett's test produced a chi-square value of 9478.573 (df=528, $p<0.001$), confirming the data's suitability for factor analysis. Using principal component analysis and varimax rotation in IBM® SPSS® 25.0, seven factors were extracted with eigenvalues >1 , explaining 71.625% of the total variance. These factors aligned well with the hypothesised model, indicating strong structural validity.

Reliability and Validity Testing

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α). The overall scale reliability was excellent (0.931). The Cronbach's α values for SOCR, FINR, PHYR, FACR, PSYR, FUNR, and BI were all >0.85 , demonstrating strong internal consistency and stability across all dimensions.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to verify the measurement model's validity. Model fit indices were assessed to determine the alignment between the theoretical model and actual data. The results indicate a satisfactory model fit, with $X^2/df=1.903$ ($X^2=901.799$, $df=474$, $p=0.000$), $RMSEA=0.047$, $CFI=0.954$, $GFI=0.881$, $AGFI=0.860$, $TLI=0.948$, and $NFI=0.908$ (Table 2). These findings affirm the strong structural validity of the measurement model (Irfan et al., 2021).

Convergent and discriminant validity

The composite reliability (CR) was 0.854-0.908, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The average variance extracted (AVE) estimates were >0.5 , indicating strong convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was confirmed using the square root of AVE for each factor exceeding the correlations between factors, demonstrating robust differentiation among constructs.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

After confirming the measurement model's effectiveness, the hypotheses were examined using the structural model. The R^2 was 0.466-0.756, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.35, indicating good explanatory power (Cohen, 2013). Path analysis revealed significant negative impacts of SOCR ($B=-0.265$, $p=0.001$), FINR ($B=-0.135$, $p=0.042$), and PHYR ($B=-0.203$, $p=0.038$) on BI. However, the effects of FACR ($B=-0.128$, $p=0.131$), PSYR ($B=0.062$, $p=0.443$), and FUNR ($B=-0.024$, $p=0.689$) on BI were insignificant. Therefore, Hypotheses (H) 1, 2, and 3 were accepted, while H4, 5, and 6 were rejected. Table 3 summarises the results of hypothesis testing.

Table 2: The Results of the Assessment of the Measurement Model

Dimension	CR	AVE	FUNR	PSYR	FACR	PHYR	FINR	SOCR	BI
FUNR	0.891	0.672	0.820						
PSYR	0.854	0.594	0.688	0.771					
FACR	0.908	0.622	0.708	0.596	0.788				
PHYR	0.894	0.586	0.697	0.716	0.728	0.766			
FINR	0.903	0.651	0.637	0.725	0.594	0.725	0.807		
SOCR	0.855	0.596	0.647	0.638	0.7	0.651	0.535	0.772	
BI	0.897	0.686	-0.491	-0.46	-0.538	-0.556	-0.497	-0.549	0.828

Notes: Goodness-of-fit statistics for the measurement model: $\chi^2=901.799$, $df=474$, $p<0.001$, $\chi^2/df=1.903$, $RMSEA=0.047$, $CFI=0.954$, $GFI=0.881$, $AGFI=0.860$, $TLI=0.948$, and $NFI=0.908$. Diagonal values represent the root square of AVEs. CR=composite reliability, AVE=average variance extracted.

Table 3: The Results of the Hypothesis Testing

Path	Unstd.	S.E.	t-value	P	Std.	Result
SOCR → BI	-0.265	0.082	-3.249	0.001***	-0.264	Accepted
FINR → BI	-0.135	0.066	-2.036	0.042*	-0.166	Accepted
PHYR → BI	-0.203	0.098	-2.077	0.038*	-0.197	Accepted
FACR → BI	-0.128	0.085	-1.512	0.131	-0.13	Rejected
PSYR → BI	0.062	0.081	0.767	0.443	0.07	Rejected
FUNR → BI	-0.024	0.059	-0.4	0.689	-0.033	Rejected

Notes: Unstd. = unstandardised coefficient, Std. = standardised coefficient. *** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$

A standardised path coefficient diagram was obtained after coefficient standardisation. Of the three latent variables of SOCR, FINR, and PHYR, SOCR had the greatest impact on BI (β SOCR→BI=-0.265, $p=0.001$), followed by PHYR (β PHYR→BI=-0.203, $p<0.05$), and, lastly, FINR (β FINR→BI=-0.135, $p<0.05$) (Figure 1). Therefore, SOCR factors are indicated as the primary obstacles hindering potential Chinese tourists from travelling to Southeast Asia.

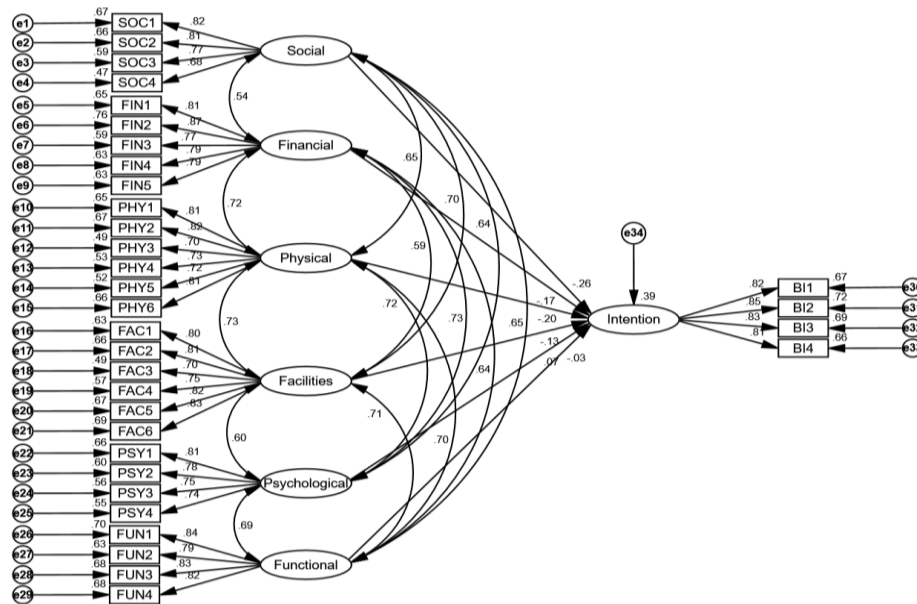


Figure 1: The Result of the Standardised Path Coefficient

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

This study examined the correlation between the RPs and TIs of Chinese tourists to Southeast Asia. By analysing the influence of six distinct types of RPs—SOCR, FINR, PHYR, FACR, PSYR, and FUNR—on TIs, valuable insights have been gleaned regarding travel behaviours. The findings from EFA, CFA, and SEM reveal key insights.

Firstly, tourists demonstrate high RPs coupled with low BI. Respondents generally had moderately high RPs, with PHYR being the most pronounced, particularly concerning destination safety and potential violence during travel. It underscores significant apprehension about safety and security in Southeast Asia. Social risks (SOCR) and FINR followed closely. The heightened RPs among Chinese tourists can be attributed to frequent reports of negative incidents involving Chinese tourists and recent political turmoil and social instability in certain Southeast Asian countries (Global Times, 2024a; BBC, 2023; Anna Plunkett, 2023). Additionally, global events such as contagious diseases (Škare et al., 2021), natural disasters (Liao & Fan, 2017), and cultural differences (Hou, 2020) contribute to elevated RPs. Consequently, the high RP translates into low BIs, particularly regarding tourists' willingness to recommend Southeast Asia to others.

Secondly, SOCR, FINR, and PHYR significantly and negatively impact Chinese tourists' TIs to Southeast Asia. Among these, SOCR has the most substantial negative impact, followed by PHYR and FINR. Social risks (SOCR) include public safety and religious beliefs that pose potential risks to tourists (Cui et al., 2016). Due to the unique social environment in Southeast Asia, tourists perceive SOCR more acutely, thereby diminishing their TIs. Financial risk (FINR) involves perceptions of potential financial losses and the belief that the price of travel products or services may not align with their values. A heightened perception of FINR negatively influences BIs. Physical risk (PHYR) pertains to potential health threats due to weather, security, and hygiene. Individual differences, such as physical fitness, make tourists more sensitive to PHYR (Yao & Hou, 2019), thereby negatively impacting their TIs.

Thirdly, the impact of FACR, PSYR, and FUNR on Chinese tourists' TIs was insignificant. This may be because, compared to SOCR, FINR, and PHYR, these risks are perceived as more controllable or less likely to result in severely negative outcomes. For instance, Southeast Asia, as a relatively mature and cost-effective travel destination, has well-developed tourism infrastructure and policy framework, minimising the impact of FUNR. The facility risks (FACR) aspect, involving potential failures of facilities, transportation, or equipment, is relatively low due to careful planning and the short-term nature of tourism. Psychological risk (PSYR), related to mental well-being and emotional discomfort, poses a weaker influence on TIs. Moreover, FACR or FUNR can often be mitigated through careful planning and the selection of reputable service providers.

CONCLUSIONS

This study expanded the Perceived Risk Theory by incorporating multiple risk dimensions into the context of international tourism, providing a nuanced understanding of how these risks individually and collectively influence travel behaviours. It demonstrates that not all RPs carry the same weight, enriching the framework of BIs and underscoring the complexity of the travel decision-making process. These findings highlight the importance of addressing these risks to improve TIs. To attract Chinese tourists, Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) in Southeast Asia should prioritise mitigating SOCR and personal risks by enhancing security measures, clearly communicating safety protocols, and improving the overall sense of safety. Marketing campaigns should specifically address the concerns of Chinese tourists, emphasising measures taken to ensure safety and security and promoting positive travel experiences. Furthermore, governments of Southeast Asian nations should collaborate with tourism stakeholders to implement policies that bolster visitor safety, including stricter crime regulations, improved emergency response systems, and partnerships with Chinese travel agencies. Continuous improvements in facilities, psychological,

and functional areas can enhance the overall visitor experience, providing high-quality facilities and services to foster positive word-of-mouth. By addressing these key concerns, Southeast Asian destinations can position themselves as safe and attractive options for Chinese tourists, ultimately boosting the region's tourism industry.

LIMITATIONS

The sample in this study is limited to Chinese tourists, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings. Future research should include diverse tourist groups to validate and extend these results. Additionally, RPs are dynamic and influenced by factors like political stability, pandemics, and economic conditions. Longitudinal studies are recommended to capture these fluctuations and their impacts on travel behaviour over time. Lastly, future research should explore additional risk factors, such as environmental risks and geopolitical tensions, for a more comprehensive understanding of influences on TIs.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

All participants voluntarily participated in this study after being informed of its purpose and procedures. Informed consent was obtained, and participants' anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. The data collected were used solely for academic research purposes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by grants from the Shangrao Normal University Optional Research Project (SRSK202304).

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Received: 4th February 2025. Accepted: 19th May 2025