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Qualitative study of green resort attributes– A case of the crosswaters resort in China

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Abstract: Socio-cultural ecosystem resources and services have impacted eco-tourism. Although many companies spare no effort to act upon sustainable and responsible initiatives, concerns in the literature have grown in light of inconsistent findings with regard to tourist reactions. By examining China’s first ecotourism resort, the Crosswaters Ecolodge & SPA, this study attempts to address and assess how green attributes are projected by management and perceived by customers. A multi-method qualitative study was adopted, and the findings identify four green attributes: aesthetic values, functional values, experiential appeal, and psychological appeal. Interrelationships are also identified among these attributes, and gaps exist in terms of management projections and customer perceptions. Theoretical and managerial implications are accordingly provided to assist in the creation of pro-environmental marketing strategies.

Subjects: Hospitality; Tourism; Business, Management and Accounting

Keywords: ecotourism; resort; green attributes; customer perception

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Against the background of rising urbanization and desolation of the natural landscape in China, the hospitality industry has carried out and engaged in environmentally friendly practices to establish a green image and also educate consumers on environmental protection. To shed light on how green initiatives are practiced and perceived in the Chinese tourism industry, China’s first eco-tourism resort, the Crosswaters Ecolodge & SPA, was selected for this study. Our findings of four major green attributes at the resort are aesthetic values, functional values, experiential appeals, and psychological appeals. Consumer perceptions of these attributes vary from person to person, influenced by their prior expectations, personal differences, and degree of involvement. The researchers also identify an interactive system among these components.
1. Introduction
Along with the emerging demand for nature-based tourism, ecotourism operators are faced with
the challenges of meeting diverse expectations for green products and services (Balaji et al., 2019).
In the context of the meetings and conventions industry, green efforts made by convention
planners are evaluated with different levels of importance from the perspective of attendees,
although the attributes assessed as important might escape the attendees' attention (Lee et al.,
2013). A similar phenomenon of managers' and customers' preferences is also observed in the
hospitality field (Žunić et al., 2019). It is inferred that the ways in which approaches to "going
green" are anticipated, implemented and perceived are inconsistent between customers and
operators (Balaji et al., 2019; Chou & Chen, 2014).

The development of the ecolodge industry has significant implications for countries with high
potential for ecologically sustainable tourism, and there is a need to accommodate increasing
numbers of customers. Rising urbanization in China is a consequence of economic development,
and the rise from poverty of half a billion people between 1981 to 2012 resulted in a drastically
changing landscape of an increasingly highly mobile tourist market. Against the backdrop of
expanding amusement parks and ever more technologically advanced hotels and resorts,
China's first ecotourism resort, the Crosswaters Ecolodge & SPA, opened in southeast China.

Situated in Huizhou, 80 miles from the capital city of Guangzhou of Guangdong Province, the
Crosswaters is constructed as part of Nankun Mountain Nature Reserve, which is home to remarkably
diverse plants and birds and sustainably managed bamboo forests. The Crosswaters focuses on the
development of the reserve as an ecotourism destination. With over 5,000 local Hakka people, who
were the source of significant community participation in its development, the ecolodge has won
many awards domestically and internationally because of its environmental, social, economic, and
spiritual design (including the ancient Chinese Fengshui principles of heaven/astronomy and earth/geography).
It is believed that the ecolodge could adequately address many of the concerns that
have arisen over the decades due to urbanization and the destruction of the natural landscape.

The era has witnessed an industrial trend of hoteliers incorporating environmentally friendly
practices on hotel booking websites and through promotional messages (Chou & Chen, 2014;
J. Wang et al., 2018). The implementation of community social responsibility also contributes to the
internal and external performance of tourism enterprises (Calveras & Ganuza, 2018; C. Wang et al.,
2018). While green initiatives are helpful in establishing the image of green hotels, they also play an
important role in educating consumers on environmental protection by providing green products and
services (Hsiao et al., 2014). The success of such initiatives depends on customers' willingness and
preferences to accept green-related changes, which eventually achieve sustainable competitive
advantages for hoteliers (Abraham & Sibi, 2017). Environmentally conscious tourists expect improve-
ments in service, pricing structure and product differentiation (Cheung & Jim, 2014).

To elucidate how green initiatives are practised and perceived in the Chinese tourism industry,
a Chinese ecolodge, the Crosswaters, was selected for this survey. Understanding social responsi-
bility in a developing country requires taking into consideration societal expectations and cultural
traditions (Melissen et al., 2018). The aim of this study is to investigate the eco-friendly attributes
of the resort, especially the elements imbued with significance from the perspective of Chinese
tourists. Specifically, the three primary research objectives for this study are as follows:

(1) to identify green attributes with respect to ecolodge operations,
(2) to explore perceptions of the green factors from the perspective of ecolodge guests, and
(3) to assess the deviation between management projections and guest perceptions.

Based on these objectives, this study expects to contribute to the extant literature in the
following ways. First, the study will consolidate the current knowledge of green attributes and
their application in a different context. Second, this research seeks to reconceptualize green attributes from a Chinese perspective, thereby obtaining a more holistic picture. Last, due to the paucity of attribute relevance, it aims to clarify the interactive relationships among these attributes, encouraging scholars to investigate these issues using a quantitative approach. In addition, this study also seeks to provide insights for ecolodge practitioners to understand the dimensions and characteristics of green attributes, which are affected by a variety of factors.

This paper is structured as follows: A literature review is first presented that pertains to academic concerns with regard to corporate and tourist social responsibility in terms of ecotourism and green hotel attributes. The third section explains the methods of collecting and analysing the data. The fourth section provides the results and discussion followed by conclusions and managerial implications. The last section addresses limitations and future research directions for this study. With green attributes newly identified in this top-level ecolodge in China and the discrepancy between management and guest experience, it is expected that the study will make a theoretical contribution but also have managerial implications for marketing strategies in future practices.

2. Literature review
Social responsibility in ecotourism and green attributes in hospitality in the Chinese context are the core concerns of this study. The first section explores an in-depth understanding of ecotourism and the relationship between marketing strategies and social responsibility. The second section presents an overview of the eco-components and overall measurement scales of hotel services. The last section addresses the existing academic achievements in China.

2.1. Social responsibilities in ecotourism
Ecotourism refers to activities that qualify as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (Bowden, 2014). Ecotourism requires the continuous and inclusive involvement of all stakeholders, including operators, communities, governments and visitors (Luo et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2015; Rivera & Gutierrez, 2019; Vinodan & Manalel, 2019). Ecotourism emphasizes minimal adverse impacts, maximal respect for local culture, and maximal economic benefits; thus, it is attractive to nature-oriented and socially and culturally conscious tourists (Lee & Jan, 2018). Despite a broad range of ecotourist activities, harnessing the natural environment is core and fundamental to mainstream ecotourism participants (Suciu et al., 2016). Governments at all levels are able to exploit their destinations as long as they are aware of the characteristics and needs of ecotourism destinations (Merce et al., 2017).

Tourist intention, behaviour and satisfaction are of interest in ecotourism as they are included in other tourist activity categories. Specific to the ecolodge sector, ecotourists will perceive how and to what extent a service is ecofriendly by evaluating staff behaviour, eco-programmes, and ecotourism knowledge (Ban & Ramsaran, 2017). The last aspect will only positively influence customer satisfaction when customers appraise a hotel favourably (Oviedo-Garcia et al., 2017). This view is supplemented by additional attitudinal, social and behavioural determinants of ecotourist behavioural intentions, which are mediated by satisfaction (Perera & Vlosky, 2017). It is therefore recommended that managers market their values on the basis of ecotourist satisfaction with the ecolodge (Sumanapala et al., 2017; Wang, Wang, et al., 2018).

The awareness of marketing strategies in the industry is also relevant to academic concerns. Chan (2013) helps hoteliers to avoid the “greenwashing” designation by studying green marketing strategies. Tourists motivated by “seeking” and “escaping” to stay in an ecolodge are not always reassured by such strategies. From the viewpoint of suppliers, product promotion and corporate image were found to be more significant concerns than environmental sustainability in addressing the concept of ecotourism in Kenya’s hot spots and therefore primarily serve the interests of other stakeholders (Atieno & Njoroge, 2018). The dominance of stakeholder interests that condition the implementation of a social responsibility orientation is shaped by the interdependent, multi-faceted
nature of the industry (Farmaki, 2019). There is also a discrepancy of projected-perceived geopark image in terms of accessibility to urban areas (Chan & Zhang, 2018). In their study of Philippine ecotourism, a framework has been proposed for value chain participants to incorporate the quadruple bottom-line strategy (Rivera & Gutierrez, 2019). Ecotourism with social responsibility should be widely recognized as a current need (Žunić et al., 2019).

2.2. Green attributes in hospitality

The literature on purchase intention, customer behaviour, and customer satisfaction is well-developed in terms of managerial areas of academic interest. The theory of planned behaviour has been universally adopted to explain individual behaviours with regard to environmental concerns, such as energy saving and green purchasing (Kim & Han, 2010; Luo & Fan, 2019; Wang, Wang, et al., 2018). Additionally, such behaviours can be accompanied by both positive and negative attitudes. For example, in the selection of a hotel, green attributes are assigned low relative importance compared with priorities of price attributes and other traditional choice factors (Njite & Schaffer, 2017). Schuitema and De Groot (2015) share a similar idea, claiming that green intentions cannot always be transformed into actual behaviour because green product attributes have a greater influence on purchasing decisions when egoistic product attributes are fulfilled. In regard to customer satisfaction, the overall outcome is significantly influenced by a hotel’s basic and advanced green practices that contribute to either positive or negative experiences (Yu et al., 2017).

A number of authors have attempted to explain tourist differences in preferences and perceptions of individual green attributes in accommodation. With support of attribute centrality theories, Gershoff and Frels (2015) argue that consumer judgement of the greenness of products depends on a central versus a peripheral attribute that is attached to its environmental benefits and consumers who value food- and administration-focused attributes, who are female and who raise children would like to pay more for green attributes (Kwok et al., 2016). These findings echo a previous study that finds that apart from age and nationality, gender and economic status should also be considered in understanding decision-making behaviours (Berezan et al., 2013; Chou & Chen, 2014). However, in the case of business and leisure travellers, similar results are found in their ratings of the importance of specific green attributes (Millar et al., 2012). To understand the eco-components of hotel service qualities, it is deemed necessary to identify three eco-attributes specific to Australian ecolodges: eco-friendly practices, activities, and learning (Ban & Ramsaran, 2017).

2.3. Green attributes in China

In general, there is a lack of Chinese studies on green attributes with a particular focus on ecolodges, despite some attempts to conceptualize green attributes and green management in various fields. For instance, the present studies agree on the importance of the relationship between green consumption and corporate social responsibility via green management (Liang, 2017; Wang, 2018). In a study of electronics designs in Taiwan, seven component materials (battery, shell, monitor, filters, modelling, flash, and sensor) are found to be perceived as green and satisfying to customer needs (Chuang & Liao, 2018). Wan and Shen (2015) interpret green attributes in terms of urban green space in a high-density city of Hong Kong as its features, naturalness, accessibility, and variety of facilities. According to a survey in Beijing and Shanghai by W. Luo et al. (2017), the attributes of green building are regarded as nondurable and multi-dimensional (environmental, social and economic).

With regard to the hospitality industry, a large body of current studies focuses on architectural and design practices. Additionally, the outcomes of the extant research are applicable to hotels at large; nevertheless, the research is still lacking in terms of identifying an overall measurement scale for Chinese resorts and ecolodges. Interior scenery, such as indoor plants, as well as other scenery factors, such as mountains and water elements, are commonly documented due to their visual and mental satisfaction to bio-hotel guests (Wang & Wang, 2007). In the Taiwanese market,
green hotel attributes are constructed based on the six measures of room quality, personal toiletries, service quality, environmental operating behaviour, green measures and price level (Chou & Chen, 2014). Taking a consumer point of view, Zhang et al. (2016) investigate the young generation's attitudes towards green measures in hotels. In their study, ecological practices are measured by a reduction of material consumption, waste reduction, ecological products, ecological services, and hotel propaganda. Additionally, six scales are proposed to measure green services in an ecolodge, which include reliability, empathy, environmental communication, green energy saving, assurance, and tangible attributes (Lee & Cheng, 2018).

Given that customer expectations and attitudes vary in accordance with the position and pricing of hotels (Abraham & Sibi, 2017), the eco-attributes of a top-level resort are supposed to display their competitive advantages over those of budget or business hotels. Although some existing studies in the Chinese context have shed light on green components in hotels, the hospitality industry has been investigated as a whole, and particular efforts have not been made to date that focus on an ecolodge. Furthermore, academic concerns about the discrepancies in managerial projection and customer perceptions are inadequate in relation to Chinese hospitality development. Finally, despite the extensive literature, the uniqueness of cultural, social and economic impacts on Chinese ecolodge visitors seems to be absent from the international academic research.

3. Methods
By investigating company materials and guest experiences at the Crosswaters Ecolodge & SPA, this study aims to fill the above-noted research gaps and contribute to the literature by supplementing the work on green attributes within the Chinese context. As the current studies are relatively sparse, this study is explorative and qualitative in nature. Through a process of initial inquiries and development of preliminary theories, the qualitative approach is advantageous in the early stages, especially phenomenological research (Belotto, 2018). We employed simple statistical procedures in the research but focused on content analysis based on the grounded theory approach. Additionally, a case-study method was employed to empirically examine the gap between managerial green projections and tourists' perceptions in an ecolodge.

3.1. Data collection
The data for the study were collected from triangulated sources of the organization’s publicity materials, online comments and observation from an on-site visit, which laid a foundation for broader coverage of data and accuracy in its research procedure (See Figure 1) (Luo et al., 2016).
The data for this study were collected in three steps: first, to obtain the latest official information projected and updated by the resort, an internet search of the organization’s websites and their social media account on WeChat was conducted. WeChat is similar to Facebook and Instagram, and it is one of the most popular instant messaging apps available in China. Forty-two texts from these sources under similar titles of “Discovering the Crosswaters” “About us” and “Introduction” were listed in a WORD file retaining the original language (either Chinese or English). Since all of the researchers of the current study are bilingual, no translation process was involved until the data analysis was conducted to avoid information loss and inaccuracy in the coding process. Second, given the significance of user-generated contents (UGC) in social media studies (Aggarwal et al., 2012), Qunar (https://www.qunar.com/), one of the first and largest travel engines in China, was selected as a source of customer comments. According to a report released by iResearch in 2016, most users of Qunar are those with a bachelor’s degree or higher, middle-to-high income, from developed regions and married and/or have children. This demographic represents the potential customers targeted by the resort (“iResearch “). Under the navigation bar of HOTELS in Qunar, only one hotel was titled as Longmen Crosswaters Resort and SPA. Ranging from the dates of 29 March 2009, to 16 May 2018, a total of 466 posts (all in Chinese) were publicly available on the platform and retrieved in another WORD file. While the internet search exposed substantial details of green practices at the resort, four researchers, all experts in international tourism management, visited the resort on the third weekend in April 2018. It was neither a peak season nor a slack period for tourism, which meant that observations could be undertaken smoothly in a normal business state. Prior to the visit, the green elements discussed by Hsiao et al. (2014) had been established as a guideline to assist observation. During the 10-hour stay in the resort, a total of 849 photographs at ten sites were taken and later used as reminders and evidence for each researcher to record the findings from his or her perspective without interference from the others. These ten sites included the areas en route to the resort, the public areas, the reception areas, accommodation rooms, the spring pool area, the Chinese and Western restaurants, the scenery viewing area, the recreational centre, and the river-trekking route. Two brochures obtained from the reception desk were also collected to be used as the organization’s publicity materials.

3.2. Data analysis
After the data collection, the data analysis was conducted in three stages. The qualitative approach was adopted on the basis of grounded theory. The content analysis was first conducted using Nvivo 11 to gain insight into textual data from the organization’s publicity materials. Qualitative content analysis particularly enables an in-depth understanding of emergent themes using texts (Shah & Jha, 2018). All texts were examined to identify eco-friendly practices, and each text was tagged with a code through an open coding process. For example, a text from the website stating that “(it) is composed of a sub-tropical forest, waterfalls and the convergence of two torrential streams”, was regarded as one topic and tagged with a code of “Environmental harmony”. The first-order categories were established by combining similar codes, deleting existing codes, or creating new ones when a different topic emerged. They were further organized into second-order themes. For example, the theme of aesthetic values in the study consists of two first-order categories as subthemes: architectural design and environmental harmony. A team of three coders first worked independently in the coding and then collaboratively by holding rounds of discussion until consensus was achieved to enhance inter-coder reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). Meanwhile, times each subtheme was mentioned were also calculated as text units because the number/percentage of text units would indicate the importance of different factors (Luo et al., 2015). For instance, a statement from the website that the resort has been granted many awards was counted as one text unit under the subtheme of “Reputation and fame”. However, when the same text appeared again in the brochure, such repetition was not counted as a new text unit.
With triangulated sources, rigor is also significant to ensure consistency in the study methods (Belotto, 2018). For the second stage, similar methods and procedures were followed as those in the initial stage to analyse textual data from online posts. The purpose of this analysis was to obtain perceptions of green attributes from the customers’ perspective in which disparity might exist from that of a managerial perspective. For example, a guest post regarding health-related sanitary concerns was not mentioned by any official publicity material and therefore contributed to a new code of “sanitation and cleanliness”. At stage 3, aiming at justifying the validity of second-hand data and providing a wider perspective on green practices at the resort, the researchers paid a visit to the resort on 21 April 2018, and organized their findings into a visit diary that was collaboratively developed through group discussion and agreed upon by all group members. Since they experienced the environment, service, and products within a real-life context, their observations helped enhance our understanding of the operator (Luo et al., 2016). The text in the visit dairy was also processed by methods similar to those used in the previous stages.

4. Findings and discussion
Two categories emerged from the content analysis: tangible attributes and intangible attributes. The dominant green qualities are labelled tangible attributes because they are readily observable or available to all visitors. These qualities succeed in arresting visitors’ attention when management places either aesthetic values or functional values that are in concordance with the public’s environmental consciousness. Given that tangible attributes are the basic components in the Crosswaters’ regular daily operations, they take the leading role in its ecological management. However, it is also worth noting that intangible attributes are gaining equal significance in winning guests who experience additional activities/services and/or in appealing to guests’ psychological satisfaction. Therefore, aesthetic values, functional values, experiential appeal, and psychological appeal emerged as four major themes.

Ten subthemes were also identified. Figure 2 presents a framework of how these green attributes are related to each other. These subthemes to green operations and practices are illustrated in a circle around “green attributes”, and the dashed arrows indicate the influence among these attributes. For example, “Reputation and fame” is an attribute that directly influences the

![Figure 2. A Framework of Green Attributes in the Crosswaters.](image-url)
Crosswaters’ green operation, which is also affected by other attributes such as architectural design, environmental harmony, energy and waste management and staff service, and it has an effect on spirituality.

The quantitative relationships of these subthemes are presented in Table 1, with text units indicating the times they were mentioned in our three sources.

By measuring the eco-components of hotel service, Bastič and Gojčič (2012) identify the four attributes of equipment, hotel staff, use of energy and water and food. According to observations of the Indian hospitality sector, green components are summarized as water conservation, energy conservation, waste management, procedure, noise/air quality and local community development (Abraham & Sibi, 2017). Noting that some green practices are invisible to guests, Trang et al. (2019) recently propose five customer-facing dimensions: Customer benefit, Energy efficiency, Water efficiency, Recycling policy and Green characteristic. While most of these dimensions are consistent with our findings, architectural design, environmental harmony and spirituality were explored for the first time in the current study.

In Stage 1, 112 text units from the Crosswaters’ publicity materials are organized into four themes and eight attributes (See Tables 2 and 3). The most prominent theme is experiential appeal, which accounts for 40.18% of total text units. The dominant two subthemes are recreational alternatives and environment harmony, which account for 40.18% and 20.55% respectively.

In contrast, the subtheme of “staff services with friendliness and professionalism in addressing incidents” is mentioned once only (See Figure 3).

According to the content analysis of the online comments, 350 text units are organized and shown in Tables 4 and 5. The subthemes that receive the most attention from guests are “infrastructures such as transport and communication that function properly and efficiently” and “staff services with friendliness and professionalism in addressing incidents”, which account for 25.71%
### Table 2. Green Attributes from the organization’s publicity materials

| Categories        | Themes          | Subthemes                                                                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tangible attributes | Aesthetic values | Architectural design with green materials and simple décor                |
|                   |                 | Environmental harmony with nature and people                              |
|                   | Functional values | Infrastructure such as transport, communication, that function properly and efficiently |
|                   |                 | Products & food with organic labels and local features                   |
| Intangible attributes | Experiential appeal | Recreational alternatives that offer additional contact with green attractions |
|                   |                 | Staff services with friendliness and professionalism in addressing incidents |
|                   | Psychological appeal | Spirituality allowing for religious or spiritual pursuits in a relaxing ambience |
|                   |                 | Reputation and fame gained through word of mouth, awards and certificates |

### Table 3. Subtheme-related Citations from the organization’s publicity materials

| Subthemes          | Citations from the organization’s publicity materials                                                                 |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Architecture with  | Stilt houses are built to protect to the original rugged landscapes; equipped                                        |
| Environmental      | Almost entirely with indigenous materials such as silk, cotton, bamboo or                                            |
| Harmony            | Wooden furniture, clay and stone decorations, all rooms perfectly embody                                               |
|                    | Both elegance from western culture and implicitness from traditional                                                 |
|                    | Chinese culture. (from the official website)                                                                          |
| Access to equipment| The room is provided with spring bathtub ... the ecolodge is well equipped                                             |
|                    | With all facilities in conference rooms for 40–400 people. (from official website)                                   |
| Diversified leisure| Lie in the tranquil bamboo forest and relax yourself from breathing.                                                 |
| Options            | Body and mind begin to revive through our professional spa’s comprehensive therapeutic approach. (from a brochure)   |
| Industrial fame    | (We were) granted the Best Landscape Design Award for Boutique Hotels                                                 |
|                    | In China in three consecutive years from 2009 to 2011. (from WeChat)                                                  |
and 18.57% of the total, respectively. The most neglected attributes are “energy and waste management of minimal consumption and treatment cost”, “reputation and fame gained through word of mouth, awards and certificates”, and “sanitation and cleanliness beneficial to physical health”, with 3, 4 and 11 text units, accounting for 0.86%, 1.14% and 3.15%, respectively.

By comparing the findings from the organizational publicity materials and those from customer comments, important deviations are revealed between management projection and customer perceptions. First and foremost, two subthemes labelled as “energy and waste management of minimal consumption and treatment costs” and “sanitation and cleanliness beneficial to physical health” are newly added to the theme of functional values, which shows that two attributes are neglected by management but are perceived by customers as being important, which account for 0.86% and 3.15%, respectively. Second, what is prominently highlighted for one party might be insignificant as far as another party is concerned. For instance, recreational alternatives (40.18%) and reputation and fame (12.5%) receive greater attention from management than they do from customers (only 14.86% and 1.14%). Similarly, infrastructure (25.71%) and staff services (18.57%) are obviously more important for customers than for management (only 4.46% and 0.89%).

Tables 6 and 7 illustrate the themes and subthemes generated from 73 text units of site observation. Of these ten subthemes, “architectural design with green materials and simple décor” and “energy and waste management of minimal consumption and treatment costs” are the most notable attributes as both account for higher than a 15% value. The attribute of “reputation and fame gained through word of mouth, awards, and certificates” is of least concern with 5% of total text units.

4.1. Theme 1: aesthetic values
Rooted deeply in oriental culture is the idea of the unity of human and nature, which is also transplanted in Chinese people’s appreciation of beauty in architectural design and the natural environment. The Crosswaters’ website introduction, on-site observations and guest comments all evidence that what is highly praised is the adoption of ecological materials and natural elements in décor to reduce unnecessary consumption.

Bamboo is an important building material at the Crosswaters, which comes from the dense bamboo grove in Nankum Mountain. Like wood, this organic material is derived from nature and is
renewable. In addition, bamboo has a shorter growth life cycle than that of wood. At the same time, bamboo can reduce a large amount of CO\(_2\) emissions in construction, with a positive environmental protection effect. Moreover, constructing Hakka Mentang houses is the accumulation and crystallization of the Hakka people’s long-term pursuit of wisdom to coexist in harmony with nature. The thick rammed mud walls of their folk houses play a role in heat prevention, and the well in their yards can adjust humidity and have strong natural adaptability.

Ecological balance and the harmonious relationship between the local people who inhabit the forest and their surroundings were key elements in the construction of the resort. Comments from visitors attach importance not only to the creation of natural beauty but also its maintenance. Additionally, the on-site visit provided insights into the hotel’s environmentally friendly elements.

### 4.2. Theme 2: functional values

The Crosswaters brought together a team of experts from both academic and professional fields from home and abroad to solicit input into energy management, infrastructure, hygienic management, and tourism management, making the hotel an example of sharing and learning from various fields, such as ecology, horticulture, ornithology, astronomy, spirituality, and tourism.
As Horng, Liu, Chou, Tsai, and Chung noted, hotels create such a significant environmental impact that they must take a more proactive approach (Horng et al., 2017). First, energy and waste management are fundamental approaches in any hotel’s green initiatives, taking into consideration government policies, advances in technology and even local conditions (Hsiao et al., 2014). At present, the building power of the Crosswaters is derived from a large municipal power grid and the South Kunshan substation. Its sewage treatment station is located in the lower reaches where the kitchen sewage and the general wastewater entering the sedimentation tank are concentrated. The Crosswaters made efforts to adopt an energy policy that fulfils both economic and environmental requirements by focusing on continuous improvements in electricity and water consumption, which accounts for a large proportion of overall costs. Few clues were found with regard to this aspect from the official documentation; most visitors also lost sight of it. However, no detail was too small to escape some conscientious guests.

Second, infrastructure such as transport, power supply, and communication facilities, which enable a hotel to function properly, are expected to reach higher environmental standards in a green resort. These items are viewed as common parts of standards and specifications in the green sector (Lee & Cheng, 2018). Although little differences have been noticed from other hotels, some guests felt an acceptable level of conformance with regard to its conventional facilities while others expressed disappointment.

When a guest complained about the long waiting time for the water to warm up, he or she was also revealing an inappropriate operation: water was being wasted. Obviously, the hotel failed to reach ecological requirements in this respect. The fact that some individuals attribute importance to the comfort of regulating lighting and temperature on their own while others regard...
a centralized control as being more environmentally friendly could be explained by different conceptions of environmental friendliness.

Third, consumers of the resort are presented with other opportunities to maintain contact with natural elements such as through the restaurant. The production and treatment of food and even the commodities not produced in the hotel but sold to guests are supposed to be friendly to the environment and beneficial for a healthy life. Both are recommended by the official materials. The online comments show strong support for these practices. The guests expect the deprivation arising from a lack of access to healthy and affordable food could be addressed (Skinner et al., 2016).

It is apparent from some criticism that on the one hand, the resort spares no effort to promote a healthy diet for their guests that is largely cultivated and treated in the traditional folk fashion; on the other hand, close attention must be paid to its quality control to avoid the presence of non-green products. Moreover, Millar and Baloglu’s investigation discovered that although customers are supportive of sustainable practices, they are largely price sensitive (Millar & Baloglu, 2011). By expressing their dissatisfaction with the poor service in some of the comments, what mainly concerns the guests is obtaining the best value for the price.

| Categories | Description | Themes | Subthemes | Text units | % |
|------------|-------------|--------|-----------|------------|---|
| Tangible   | Dominant qualities that can be seen or noticed by visitors in regular operations | Aesthetic | Architectural design with green materials and simple décor | 13 | 17.81 |
| Attributes | Values | Environmental harmony with the nature and the people | 7 | 9.59 |
| Functional | Energy & waste management of minimal consumption and treatment costs | 11 | 15.07 |
|          | Infrastructure such as transport, communication that function properly and efficiently | 5 | 6.85 |
|          | Products & food with organic labels and local features | 9 | 12.33 |
|          | Sanitation and cleanliness beneficial to physical health | 5 | 6.85 |
| Intangible | Latent qualities with added values in accordance with subjective preferences | Experiential | Recreational alternatives that offer additional contact with green attractions | 6 | 8.22 |
| Attributes | Appeal | Staff services with friendliness and professionalism in addressing incidents | 5 | 6.85 |
|          | Psychological | Spirituality allowing for religious or spiritual pursuits in a relaxing ambience | 8 | 10.96 |
|          | Appeal | Reputation and fame gained through word of mouth, awards and certificates | 4 | 5.47 |
| Total     | | | | 73 | 100.00 |
Fourth, given its location in remote mountains, worries about sanitation and cleanliness are justifiable. Indeed, concern about hygiene and health issues are expressed in the online comments but have obviously been ignored by the management. As travel has expanded, tourists have well realized that improper contact with unhygienic surfaces in hotels is likely to result in the transmission of infectious diseases. Although the observational standards for cleanliness in hotels must, by their nature, be harsh, they have been far from adequate to date (Almanza et al., 2015). However, experts agree that avoiding the use of toxic chemicals is important due to serious pollution problems, even if it is at the cost of customer comfort (Hsiao et al., 2014).

4.3. Theme 3: experiential appeal
Different from hotels in cities that have access to diverse leisure attractions, guests in an ecotourism destination spend most of their time in the resort. As a result, the variety and quality of recreational activities are considered to be a vital means of drawing public attention in the tourism market. A large variety of activities are available in the Crosswaters to widen customer experiences ranging from wellness programmes such as fishing and cycling to educative activities such as star viewing and wine tasting. Although diverse wild plants and birds are involved as resources for economic gain, a decommodified experience will eventually contribute to the environment (Belicia & Islam, 2018).

Most guests feel pleased with these activities and enjoy unique pleasures that cannot be easily obtained from hotels in urban jungles. However, as some of these leisure activities are organized outdoors, they are subject to change or even cancellation due to factors such as weather, construction or maintenance. Moreover, some guests hope to strike a balance between rural tranquillity and urban colourfulness. The conflicts among individual interests, environmental concerns and collective interests present a social dilemma (Schuitema & De Groot, 2015).

Furthermore, guests' green evaluation is not based only on environment and activities but it is also influenced by service quality and staff attitudes. From the hotel guests' perspective, the core of providing green services is the efficiency in addressing unexpected incidents and the ability to adapt to various demands in a well-trained and pleasant manner. As implied in the comments,

### Table 7. Subtheme-related Citations from site observation

| Subthemes                          | Citations from online comments                                               |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Harmony with                      | The colors on staff uniforms are echoed with that of the overall environment. |
| Environment and                   | With green for leaves and brown for trunks, enhancing mind identity.         |
| Human                             | Behavior identity and visual identity.                                       |
| Efficient energy                  | Mini water heaters are employed in public toilets to bring comfort and        |
| Management                        | Convenience, and also reduce carbon emissions from heaters of regular sizes. |
|                                   | To reduce auto emission, private cars are prohibited and replaced by battery  |
|                                   | Cars and minibuses to carry guests to and from the reception and their rooms. |
| Availability of local and         | Part of the outdoor areas is a demo garden for organic vegetables and the     |
| Organic products                  | Signs inform that meals are mainly made from locally and organically produced |
|                                   | Produced components. Besides, the restaurant sells ecological products that    |
|                                   | Are labeled with local producers' names.                                      |
| Neglect of healthy Concerns       | There is no obvious sign of a smoke-free area, and some guests smoke around   |
| Spiritual fulfillment             | Lotus on the pond, spacious hall, yellowish light, back with bamboo forest    |
|                                   | Enveloped in wet mist—what a perfect place for a Buddhist meditation sitting.  |
| Industrial recognition            | Certificates and awards are displayed in visible positions in the lobby.      |
thoughtful and professional responses from service staff benefit problem solving and contribute to the cultivation of productive relationships.

In a comment where exclamation marks were used to end every sentence, negative emotions were strengthened. Worse than being disappointed by limited electricity, the guest attributed the fault to the management. It is apparent that failing to offer services as expected has destructive consequences such as the expression of negative emotions or misunderstanding, which require extra time and effort to repair.

4.4. Theme 4: psychological appeal
When practical values are satisfied, some guests emphasize the psychological benefits. There are visitors who are purely attracted to spiritual benefits. Green consumers are typically better educated and have an above-average socioeconomic status (Cheung & Jim, 2014). More importantly, by situating themselves in the physical surroundings, some are sensitive enough to attain mental relaxation in a relaxing ambiance. Therefore, the Crosswaters is expected to provide these people with an opportunity to depart from material reality for the time being. Some comments reveal that these guests regard staying in the resort as a kind of temporary religious pursuit or spiritual escape that is admired and blessed by God in Chinese folk tale culture.

For Chinese tourists, the word-of-mouth reputation and fame obtained through national and international awards and certificates also adds to the Crosswaters' appeal. One of the reasons for such appeal is that the resort's popularity demonstrates that it is well-known among the visitors' networks of friends and family who usually share many similarities in their values and tastes. Therefore, experiencing the same place to some extent reduces the psychological tension of making uncertain decisions; moreover, it enhances a sense of belonging to a group and collective identity, which can be formulated out of social values and functions (Garcia, 2018). This explains why some visitors decided to go there despite many predictable inconveniences.

Another reason for such appeal in China may be due to respect for authoritative opinions, which indicates a desire for regulation and standards. Claims from third parties are believed to face minimal scepticism compared with firm advertising (Gershoff & Frels, 2015; Millar & Baloglu, 2011). For example, the RCI Certificate announces that “it not only provides our high-end customers the ease and freedom to travel globally but also showcases the beauty of Crosswaters and Nankunshan to the rest of the world” (“RIC,”). When guests realize they are treated as the target customers of an organization that aims at the high-end tourism market, their self-esteem and honour naturally rise. The results of Schuitema and Groot's experiment point out that for some people, the influence of egoistic motives can be stronger than other green product attributes (Schuitema & De Groot, 2015).

The Crosswaters is successful in taking advantage of industrial recognition of its uniqueness and values. As far as the guests are concerned, a visit there could be entertaining as well as informative as there are gardens with a rich Chinese history and abundant native species, which provides access to and, as a result, offers a sense of achievement.

5. Conclusions
Based on the triangulation of official publicity materials, online comments and a site visit, this study proposes a framework of green attributes in the operations of a typical Chinese ecolodge. Our conclusions are as follows: first, catering to a desire for eco-leisure products, the Crosswaters offers visitors an experience that features four green attributes: aesthetic values, functional values, experiential appeals, and psychological appeals. The first two are tangible as they are observable to visitors in general, and the other two intangible attributes appeal to certain guests who seek opportunities for additional experiences. Second, consumer perceptions of green attributes are influenced by many factors including prior expectations, personal differences, and degree of involvement. High expectations lead to alternative participatory enjoyment or disillusionment if such expectations are not
properly handled. Visitors who engage in additional experiences and have been in contact with staff tend to identify and appreciate these environmental-friendly efforts in a more concrete and sophisticated manner. Additionally, understanding of ecological practices varies from person to person.

Third, given the diversity of guest needs, there is a deviation between management projections and guest perceptions, primarily in terms of infrastructure, products and food, sanitation and health and service quality. Our investigation reveals a preference of current high-end tourists in China for health and spiritual satisfaction; however, the resort fails to update its relevant facilities and services to some extent. Some socioeconomic and cultural factors might explain these projection-perception gaps. As an old resort with more than ten years of operation in a remote and mountainous location, to reconstruct and innovate its infrastructure and facilities is deemed to require such a massive investment that high financial returns usually cannot be expected in the short term, especially in the face of a highly competitive green hotel market in China (Wang, Wang, et al., 2018). Furthermore, a lack of educational opportunities that can be compared with ongoing green awareness and advancement in value systems might result in a misconceptualization of ecotourism. Last, exposed to a culture that traditionally values collectivism, even the customers may be influenced by conflicting personal norms and social norms (Balaji et al., 2019). In the same vein, green hoteliers confront various objectives and values through community support (Vinodan & Manalel, 2019).

The study filled in the gaps in the hospitality and ecotourism research literature by considering the complex system of green attributes and focusing on cultural constructs. The findings of ten subthemes facilitate an in-depth understanding of hotel green attributes. These findings reveal to academia the variations from managerial and customer perspectives with regard to energy and waste management, sanitation and cleanliness, recreational alternatives, reputation and fame, infrastructure and staff services. They also highlight the significance of economy-specific and culture-specific impacts on consumer decision-making and travel experiences. Whereas functional value and experiential appeals are satisfied at varying levels as a result of customer economic concerns, the cultural background is rooted in interpreting aesthetic values and psychological appeals. Finally, the framework proposed in Figure 3 reveals for the first time the interrelationships among green components that should therefore be considered to be both independent elements and an interactive system. For instance, environmental harmony is identified as the strongest influential factor on other attributes in the system while reputation and fame are the most vulnerable to falling under the influence.

More importantly, the study provides insightful information regarding marketing strategies to enhance the Crosswaters’ green image. The first implication is the modification of its marketing strategy to effectively showcase its originality and distinctiveness. Since the resort devoted itself to solving the paradox of people-oriented and ecological priorities, the balance among tourism, environment, and architecture is of significance. The emphasis of its early-stage marketing was attributed to the design of the experience of the architectural, landscape and environmental uniqueness, which will later be shifted to the psychological experience and spirituality. For example, the Hakka diet culture and healthy ecological activities are important ways to explore the area. To involve more participants in developing well-rounded and competitive strategies, these attractions should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders for collaboration, helping them to adapt to the guests’ environmental needs and expectations.

Second, efforts in communication and awareness-raising with regard to the green certificates that the ecolodge has been received are required in the ecolodge’s marketing. Not being fully aware of the standards and connotations of these environmental concepts, the current/potential guests probably fail to engage in its eco-services and design. What is worse, a potential hazard to its image is being labelled as greenwashing, which is widely criticized as a superficial or deceptive practice for the sole purpose of promotion.

Additionally, it is equally strategic to motivate tourism employees and tourists to participate in sustainable practices through training and incentives for energy reduction. For example, environmental education, Chinese medicine physiotherapy, healthy diet, art exhibitions, and other
functions should be given more consideration to further guide tourists’ ecological awareness and behaviour. Traditional Chinese martial arts also include utilitarian functions to improve health quality and personal development (DelCastillo-Andrés et al., 2018; Jennings, 2014).

Last but not least, in line with tourism development and environmental demands, service quality and product design could be improved, achieving a balance in usefulness, economy, safety, and amenities. As the resort has been operated for nearly 10 years, some facilities need replacing. Traditional and innovative technologies can be integrated as much as possible to reduce damage and interference in the ecological environment. With regard to the architectural image and landscape control, efforts should be made to build a harmonious picture avoiding visual pollution in the natural landscape.

6. Limitations and future research

The limitations of the study should be noted for future research. First, given the explorative nature of the study, green resort attributes were investigated using only a qualitative approach. The findings with quantitative values are important avenues for future comprehensive analysis. For example, interrelations of resort attributes and consumer attitudes can be further discussed with correlation coefficients and p-values. Second, the investigation of stakeholders was not sufficiently exhaustive. Due to resource and cost constraints, we failed to make contact with the local government authority and community, resulting in an absence of first-hand data from some important stakeholders. As a wider range of stakeholders reflects various interests and standards, improvements may include other parties (e.g., hotel employees, the local community, governmental institutes, experts and the media) to balance the needs of communal preservation, revival and economic interests (Wesley & Ainsworth, 2018). Third, the study exclusively explored one Chinese website to determine customer evaluations of the hotel’s “greenness”. A holistic result may be achieved by extending the investigation to overseas reviews from international travel-related websites and interactive forums. Last, the reasons for the deviations between management projections and guest perceptions remain unexplored. Although some simple reasons are provided in the online comments, they are believed to be just the tip of the iceberg, with cultural, ideological, and/or social implications remaining below.

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