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ARTICLE



Sino-Turkish Tourism Cooperation under the Framework of the Belt and Road Initiative

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, China has vigorously promoted the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As a key area of communication among peoples, tourism has become an important aspect for cooperation between China and the countries along the 'Belt and Road'. China established the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2018 to promote the cultural and tourist industries, providing important support for their development. Meanwhile, Turkey has abundant religious and cultural tourism resources, and it is actively tapping the Chinese market, hoping to attract more Chinese tourists. This has laid the foundation for tourism cooperation between the two countries. In 2018 the Year of Turkish Tourism was celebrated in China. Within the year a series of cultural and tourist activities by Turkish organisations were carried out in various Chinese cities for the purpose of enhancing the appeal of Turkish tourism. Despite the outstanding advantages of Turkey's tourist resources, its unstable security situation and political disputes between the two countries have negative impacts on tourism cooperation. Moreover, Turkey's domestic tourist industry is facing a shortage of measures to effectively meet the language needs of Chinese tourists, which also inhibits the willingness of Chinese tourists to travel to Turkey.

KEYWORDS

Belt and Road Initiative; China; tourism; Turkey

Turkey became a tourist destination for Chinese citizens in 2002, after the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) legalising and regulating the tourist activities of Chinese travelers to Turkey. Since then, a large number of Chinese citizens have traveled to Turkey. The cooperation in tourism between China and Turkey has been close. Currently experience of visiting cross-border religious and cultural heritage in the international community has become a popular form of tourism. Rather than believers of religions, most of the Chinese travelers are fascinated with specific religious cultures and histories. Due to its geographical advantage between Europe and Asia, and the blending of Eastern and Western civilisations, Turkey is a

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country of rich tourist resources, which constitutes great attraction to Chinese tourists. Chinese tourists prefer tours immersed in religious and cultural experiences, especially those related to well-known natural or artificial landscapes. Many of Turkey's diverse tourist sites associated with Islamic, Christian and Turkish civilisations are among the first choices for Chinese tourists, and world-famous cities such as Istanbul are destinations that cannot be missed. Tourism exchange is also an important part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China merged the Ministry of Culture and the National Tourism Administration into the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2018. This reflects China's recognition of the intimate connection between culture and tourism. The year of 2018 was the Year of China-Turkey Tourism, which has significantly promoted cooperation in tourism between the two sides. With a seemingly bright future of Chinese-Turkish tourism cooperation, there are nevertheless some risks. The negative factors in the two countries political relations may bear concerns for Chinese tourists. In addition, security and stability in Turkey are critical to the building of a healthy environment for tourism.

1. China's Belt and Road Initiative and Prospects for Tourist Development

In this socialist country under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the constitution of the party and the constitution of the country hold the highest authority within party management and state administration. After the 19th National Congress of the CPC, the promotion of the BRI and the 'Building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind' were added to both the constitutions of the party and the state, a sign of China's giving a practical legal guarantee for administrative policies from the top level of its political system. The BRI will improve tourism cooperation between China and the countries joining the BRI. Within the framework of 'Belt and Road', the establishment of a tourism exchange mechanism and the releasing of the official report concerning national tourism mentality indicate a promising future for China's tourism industry.

1.1. The 'Belt and Road Initiative' Guaranteed by the Constitutions of the Party and the State

The 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and the '21st Century Maritime Silk Road' initiated in 2013 led to the formation of the Belt and Road Initiative under President Xi Jinping. Countries along the 'Belt and Road' such as Turkey have increased their economic cooperation with China. In October 2017, Xi Jinping pointed out in the report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC that, 'China adheres to the fundamental national policy of opening up and pursues development with its doors open wide. China will actively promote international cooperation through the BRI. In doing so, we hope to achieve policy, infrastructure, trade, financial, and 'people-to-people connectivity' and thus build a new platform for international cooperation to create new drivers of shared development.'¹ The BRI has also been included into the party constitution:

¹Xi Jinping, 'Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Delivers at the 19th National Congress of the

'following the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration, and pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative.'² In March 2018, the constitutional amendment of 'Building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind' was adopted during the 13th National People's Congress held in Beijing, stating that China insists on 'developing diplomatic relations and economic and cultural exchanges with other countries and prompting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.'³ In fact, the 'Community with a Shared Future for Mankind' is an important goal of the BRI. One can see powerful and reliable support from the Chinese party and government for the BRI, which has been inscribed into law and most importantly to the constitution. This indicates that the BRI will be a long-term national project. Tourism is a key area of 'people-to-people connectivity', and to achieve this connectivity, the 'going-out' and 'bringing-in' of Chinese and other people will be crucial.

1.2. Tourism Exchange Mechanism under the Framework of the BRI

On 18 May 2017, the National Tourism Administration and the Government of Sichuan Province jointly announced that with the approval of the State Council, the 22nd General Assembly of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) would be held in Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan, from 11th to 16th of September, 2017. During the conference, the National Tourism Administration held a round-table meeting among tourism ministers from states along the 'Belt and Road' within the UNWTO, advocating the establishment of tourism cooperation communities of the BRI countries and regions. At its opening ceremony on 13 September 2017, President Xi Jinping delivered a congratulatory speech to the conference. Xi Jinping pointed out that tourism was an important channel for different countries and different cultures to exchange and learn from each other. It was an effective means of developing the economy and increasing the employment rate, and was also an important industry whose development could help improve people's living standards. Xi Jinping also emphasised that China attaches great importance to the development of tourism, and the comprehensive contribution rate of tourism to China's economy and employment had exceeded 10%. In the next five years, China would witness 700 million passengers travelling abroad. As a country with a long history, splendid culture, magnificent natural landscapes, and diverse customs, the Chinese people warmly welcome tourists from all over the world. The UNWTO plays an active role in promoting global tourism development and strengthening international tourism exchanges and cooperation. It was hoped that all the participating countries would take this meeting as an opportunity to jointly promote greater development of the global tourism industry.⁴

Communist Party of China', (18 October 2017), available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf.

²The Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2017).

³(Release under the authorization of the NPC and CPPCC) Amendments to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China', (11 March 2018), available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/11/c_1_122521235.htm.

⁴Xi Jinping's congratulatory message to the 22nd General Assembly of the United Nations World Tourism Organization', available at: http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0913/c6409_4-29533058.html (accessed 13 September 2017).

1.3. The Release of the National Report on Tourism Mentality and Big Data of Travel for the BRI

On 29 September 2017, the China Tourism Academy released the ‘National Report on Tourism Mentality and Big Data of Travel for the Belt and Road Initiative.’ This report pointed out that with the continuous deepening and development of the BRI, advancing tourism in the framework of the BRI has become popular.⁵ The Secretary-General of the UNWTO, Taleb Rifai, said that the ancient Silk Road was an important channel to enhance exchanges and cooperation between people and had an irreplaceable role.⁶ Nowadays, under the BRI, tourism will be boosted and cultural exchanges will be closer. Tourism will usher in an opportunity for development. The data shows that three years after the introduction of the BRI, the tourism industry has greatly benefited. Tourism has gradually become an important part of the BRI, and the BRI has become key for the tourism industry. The two are deeply interrelated and mutually reinforcing. According to the report, due to factors such as the BRI policy and the signing of more in-depth cooperation agreements between China and relevant countries, the attention of potential tourists to BRI tourism information shows steady growth. Civil connections such as tourism exchanges of citizens provides a broader platform for enhancing cultural understanding among countries. Countries participating in the BRI are abundant in tourist resources and cultural heritage, therefore the promotion of the BRI has brought citizens more attention to tourism.

Up to now, more than 100 countries and international organisations have participated in building the BRI, and more than 40 countries and international organisations have signed cooperation agreements with China, forming an international consensus for cooperation. The Ministry of Transport of China revealed in May 2017 that since the BRI was proposed, China and related countries have already opened 356 routes for international passenger and cargo transportation. Maritime transportation services have covered the range of participating countries of the BRI. 43 participating countries have brought in direct flights to and from China, with about 4,200 flights per week.⁷

2. Development of Sino-Turkish Relations and Tourism Cooperation between China and the Middle East

While envisioning the future of cooperation between China and Turkey, looking back at what the two ancient nations have gone through would be helpful in understanding the opportunities and risks for China-Turkey bilateral relations. Meanwhile, the tourism cooperation between China and Turkey lies within the bigger framework of tourism cooperation between China and the Middle Eastern countries, most of whom are participators in the BRI. Therefore, cultural and tourist exchanges in the Middle East as a region will also be taken in discussion to present background and contexts.

⁵China Tourism Academy, ‘National Report on Tourism Mentality and Big Data of Travel for ‘Belt and Road’’, available at: <http://www.ctaweb.org/html/2017-9/2017-9-29-16-55-06755.html> (accessed 29 September 2017).

⁶The 22nd United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Plenary Meeting was successfully convened, available at: http://www.sohu.com/a/193971165_99985863 (accessed 23 September 2017).

⁷Ibid.

2.1. The Evolving Political and Economic Relations

Sino-Turkish relations were in the past mainly troubled by political disagreements such as ideological differences during the Cold War, as well as the Uyghur issue and the East Turkestan Independence Movement which China designates a separatist movement. Changes in bilateral relations of the two countries continue to emerge in the post-Cold War era, especially after 2000, due to many reasons. As Turkey is gradually modifying its foreign policy with more focus on Asia and with the resurgence of China as an important player in world economics and politics, there is a warming-up of the once strained relations. Though having experienced ups and downs, the relationship between China and Turkey in the 21st century is generally smooth.

The Cold War set two countries in opposite camps with different paths. While China was aligned with the Soviet Union due to ideological reasons, Turkey sided with the Western Bloc for both its own anti-communist stance and its appreciation of the western modernisation progress. The historical fact that Turkey sent military personnel to the Korean Peninsula to join the UN forces led by the US was considered by China as a reminder of past hostility and confrontation between the two states. In the early years of New China under the leadership of Mao Zedong, Turkey was regarded as a lackey of American Imperialism.⁸ Turkey also recognised Taiwan and maintained exchanges in many areas before it established diplomatic relation with China in 1971, as in parallel with the US policy. What was also a concern for Turkey was that China in the 1960s publicly supported its domestic left-wing activities, antagonising the then anti-communist Turkish government.

Scholars from both sides concede that after the normalisation of foreign relations in 1971, bilateral relations between China and Turkey remained most of the time in a state of cold peace or even became strained.⁹ One of the reasons for this embarrassing state was the Uyghur issue. While the East Turkestan Independence Movement is often the term used by Chinese scholars and officials referring to the separatist movement in Xinjiang, Turkey prefers calling it 'the Uyghur issue'. The East Turkestan separatist movement has long remained a thorn in the bilateral relations of the two countries, an obstacle that hinders the development of political relations. As economic relations were soaring between China and Turkey and the need for closer cooperation turned clear, the Chinese government required explicit reassurance from Turkey on the Xinjiang issue that Ankara would not support any separatist movement within China's territory. Facing the dilemma of its need to improve relations with China and its sympathy for the Muslim population in Xinjiang, Turkey chose to be pragmatic. After 1997, Turkey ceased to support a number of Uyghur diaspora associations operating in Turkey, and later issued a decree imposing significant restrictions on the activities of Uyghur diaspora organisation within Turkey. In 2003, during his visit to China, Erdogan, then Turkish prime minister, pointed out that Turkey supported the One China policy, respecting China's territorial integrity. Yet Turkey still approached the Xinjiang issue by defending the economic and cultural rights of Uyghurs as citizens of

⁸X. Xiao and W. Wang, 'The evolution of Sino-Turkish relations', *Foreign Affairs Review* 95, (April 2007), p. 35.

⁹See T. Zan, 'Sino-Turkish relations and Turkey's perception of China', *Arab World Studies* 4, (July 2010), pp. 59–66, and C. Ergenc, 'Can two ends of Asia meet? an overview of contemporary Turkey-China relations', *East Asia* 32, (2015), pp. 289–308.

China, at the same time condemning violence and maintaining friendly relations with Beijing.¹⁰

Nowadays economic relations are the first and foremost realm in Turkey-China bilateral relations. Improving political relations serves as a beneficial means to help create a favourable environment for economic cooperation. Entering the millennial era, economic relations became the major aspect of mutual interests. In 2012 Turkey became a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, in search of more cooperation with China in economic and other aspects. Yet the economic development between China and Turkey has long been marked by the wide gap between import and export volume, with Turkey facing serious trade deficits. So great has been the trade gap that Turkish scholars and officials lament that Turkey's trade with China has been defined by an ever-widening trade deficit for Turkey after 2000.¹¹ Yet meanwhile, the level of economic cooperation has steadfastly increased. China and Turkey signed a number of MOUs with regard to economic cooperation in the first decade of the 2000s. Since then the two countries have seen steady development in sectors such as transportation infrastructure, energy, mining and even space technology. Military cooperation plays another important role in the betterment of Sino-Turkish relations. In 1996, an agreement was reached between Turkey and China on the purchasing of medium-range missiles to be jointly produced in Turkey.

In terms of tourism, China and Turkey signed a MOU on Chinese citizens travelling to Turkey, which signaled the beginning of Turkey becoming one of the overseas tourist destinations for Chinese visitors. Turkey places great emphasis on Chinese tourists and their purchasing power in Turkey.¹² As tourism becomes the significant aspect in promoting the communication of peoples highlighted in the BRI, Turkey welcomes China's strategy of 'going out' which also benefits Turkey economy.

2.2. Tourism Cooperation between China and Middle Eastern Countries

Tourism becoming an important aspect in enhancing international political, economic and social exchanges is a rather new phenomenon. Tourism used to be viewed as a kind of individual spontaneous leisure activity worthy of little organisational attention from governmental level. Yet civic and social exchanges that proceed official encounters have often proven useful and conducive for countries to stay in touch, at least in an informal way, if official association is yet to mature.

In the broader context of the Middle East, the major manner in which China and the region engaged in social contacts before the BRI brought forth tourism as a significant aspect, was public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. China constantly encourages high-level scholarly exchanges and official visits in the hope of improving cultural communication between Chinese people and the various countries in the Middle East. Among many channels of social connection religious interchanges have long been given emphasis in the history of the public diplomacy of China. In recent

¹⁰A. Ath, 'A view from Ankara: Turkey's relations with China in a changing Middle East', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 26(1), (March 2015), p. 120.

¹¹*Ibid*, p124.

¹²T. Zan, 'Sino-Turkish relations and Turkey's perception of China', p. 62.

years academic exchanges, especially in language and cultural studies, are also gaining popularity and importance. According to the Declaration of Action on China-Arab States Cooperation under the BRI there have been more than 20,000 students from Arab countries studying in China and over 1000 Chinese students studying in Arab states by 2017.¹³

Influenced by past political affinity between China and the Arab world based on common anti-imperialist claims during the Cold War and strategically China's dependence on Arab oil, it is undeniable that Arab countries remain the major targets for China in the region. It nevertheless should be pointed out that in the new period of China's foreign policy, China values the strategic relations with Muslim countries in the Middle East.¹⁴

The Middle East is now one of the regions experiencing the most rapid growth in the tourist industry. The outstanding rate of growth is nonetheless shadowed by the region's disproportionately small share of the world tourism market, which to a large extent has resulted from the constant political turmoil and lack of stability in the past decades. During the 1980s, when the Iran-Iraq War occupied much of the world attention, the Middle East as one of the six tourist regions divided by the World Tourism Organization only accounted for 2.4% of the world share.¹⁵ Yet even in 2010 before the devastating Syrian Civil War, the Middle East as a whole only received 6.5% of the total world tourist arrivals¹⁶, a slight increase over three decades. As a scholar on Middle East tourism has pointed out, the region has such a wealth of tourist resources that it should be an ideal region for tourism development. But the political conflicts there often create negative factors that render tourism highly vulnerable.¹⁷

Since the 1990s, Middle Eastern countries have gradually come to realise the vulnerability of their economic structures relying solely on oil and gas resources as globalisation slowly takes root. Tourism emerged to be an important alternative for economic development as a result of the diversification of industrial structure.¹⁸ Not only in traditional Mediterranean tourist countries such as Turkey and Egypt, but also Gulf states like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has there been great investment in infrastructure, services and the development of tourist resources to boost the tourist economy. While Middle Eastern countries were upgrading their tourist industries, China took advantage of this trend and signed MOUs regarding Chinese citizens traveling to the region, making a number of Middle Eastern countries tourist destinations for Chinese tourists, including Egypt in 2002, Syria and Oman in 2007 and the UAE in 2009. After the signing of MOUs that allow Chinese citizens to visit the Middle

¹³China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, 'Declaration of Action on China-Arab States Cooperation under the 'Belt and Road' initiative', available at: http://www.chinaarabcf.org/chn/zagx/gjyd_yl/t1577010.htm (accessed 10 July 2018).

¹⁴W. Zhu, 'The strategic relations between China and the Middle East Islamic countries', *World Economics and Politics* 9, (2010), pp. 4–18.

¹⁵Data quoted from M. Wei, 'Development of tourism in the Middle East countries', *West Asia and Africa* 12, (2010), pp. 56–62. For original date please see in World Tourism Organization website, <http://statistics.unwto.org/>.

¹⁶Data quoted from Y. Morakabati, 'Tourism in the Middle East: conflicts, crises and economic diversification, some critical issues', *International Journal of Tourism Research* 15, (2013), p. 376, for original data please see in World Tourism Organization website <http://statistics.unwto.org/>.

¹⁷See Y. Morakabati, 'Tourism in the Middle East: conflicts, crises and economic diversification, some critical issues', *International Journal of Tourism Research* 15, (2013), pp. 375–387.

¹⁸M. Wei, 'Development of tourism in the Middle East countries', *West Asia and Africa* 12, (2010), pp. 56–62.

East, the region has increasingly been the focus of interest for Chinese tourists. The ongoing and potential economic contribution by Chinese tourists to local economies provides incentives for both private and public sectors of Middle Eastern countries to attract more Chinese visitors and customers. At the same time China has come to realise that tourism could play an important role in bringing closer two peoples still not so familiar with each other, which would be smoothing the way for economic and political cooperation on the governmental level. It is against this backdrop of mutual interest that in recent years an increasing number of Middle Eastern countries have participated in the annually held China International Travel Mart, hoping to exploit the Chinese tourist market and facilitate the steady growth of Chinese visitors. As evidence of this trend of Chinese travelers increasingly favoring Middle Eastern countries as tourist destinations, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) issued a report titled 'Chinese Outbound Travel to the Middle East and North Africa' in 2014. This is a study analysing Chinese preferences and perception of the region, and also providing recommendations for Middle Eastern countries on marketing to Chinese tourists.¹⁹

3. The Prospect of China-Turkey Tourism Cooperation

With 40 years of 'reform and opening up', China's economic level has greatly improved. Overseas tourist activities of Chinese citizens are increasingly diversified, such as leisure tours, family visits, and special tourism. As far as special tourism is concerned, this includes many fields such as visiting industry and agriculture, study tours, ecology, exhibitions, etc. Religious and cultural tourist experience is an important aspect. Compared with European and American tourists who are keen on relaxing leisure activities such as enjoying beaches, Chinese tourists are more interested in cultural and historical buildings loaded with humanistic implications ((SOURCE?? EVIDENCE??). Turkey's unique advantages of various historical sites and natural scenery are very attractive to Chinese tourists. The ancient civilisations and diverse religions that once existed or still exist have different appeals to Chinese tourists as containing a rich exoticism. Chinese tourists come to encounter and understand the cultural histories of Turkey and realise exchanges between two people through tourism. It is helpful to enhance mutual understanding between the Chinese and Turkish peoples and improve the 'people-to-people connectivity'.

3.1. The Increasing Number of Chinese Tourists Visiting Turkey

In 2014, the number of Chinese tourists visiting Turkey reached 200,000, an increase of 43% year-on-year. This is due to the Turkish government's policy of simplifying entry visa procedures for Chinese tourists to vigorously attract Chinese tourists.²⁰ Starting in 2015, Chinese tourists holding a visa of OECD member countries or Schengen countries can apply for a Turkish e-visa online. The e-visa issuing policy has been further

¹⁹World Tourism Organization, 'Chinese Outbound Travel to the Middle East and North Africa', available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/publication/chinese-outbound-travel-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

²⁰J. Xia, 'Chinese tourists can apply for Turkish e-visa online', Xinhua, available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2015-03/26/c_127621677.htm (accessed 26 March 2015).



Figure 1. Source: Ministry of culture and tourism of Turkey.

simplified thereafter. Any citizen holding a Chinese passport can submit a visa application online and successfully receive a Turkish e-visa within a few minutes. Moreover, some of China's reality shows such as the 'Flowers on Trip', 'Divas Hit the Road' and 'The Amazing Race China' were shot in Turkey. The magnificent scenery of Turkey displayed in these shows has attracted much attention of the Chinese people. Since then, Turkey has become one of the most popular overseas destinations for Chinese tourists.

In August 2016, the then Turkish Ambassador to China Ali Murat Ersoy pointed out that in 2015 Turkey had more than 300,000 Chinese tourists, for most of whom Istanbul has become the preferred destination (Figure 1). Ersoy said, 'The Chinese tourism market is very important to us and is also important to any other country in the world. We are working hard to adapt the Turkish tourism industry to the tastes and habits of Chinese tourists and to meet the needs of Chinese tourists to the greatest extent possible.'²¹ In 2017, the number of visitors from China to Turkey was 247,000, an increase of 27.57% compared to 2016. Turkey's goal was to attract 1 million Chinese tourists to Turkey in 2018.²² Yet according to statistics from Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Turkey managed to welcome up to 390,000 Chinese tourists in 2018, still a 60% increase compared to the previous year.²³

At present, Turkish Airlines has direct flights from Istanbul to five Chinese cities, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Taipei. They are prepared to increase the number of round trips and increase the number of new direct flights in other cities.

According to statistics from the official website of the Turkish National Tourist Office, Turkey has excellent tourist reception capacity as a popular overseas tourist destination (Figure 2). There are 48 airports in Turkey with an annual capacity of 50 million passengers, 16 of which are international airports. A large number of domestic

²¹Y. Ao, 'Turkish Ambassador to China on tourism exchanges and cooperation: China and Turkey waiting for tourists to find', People's Daily Overseas Edition, (accessed 18 August 2016).

²²W. Shen, 'The Year of Turkey Tourism in 2018 was held in Shanghai', available at: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0420/c1002-29940584.html> (accessed 20 April 2018).

²³Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, 'Number of arriving-departing visitors, foreigners and citizens', available at: <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN-153018/number-of-arriving-departing-visitors-foreigners-and-ci-.html>.

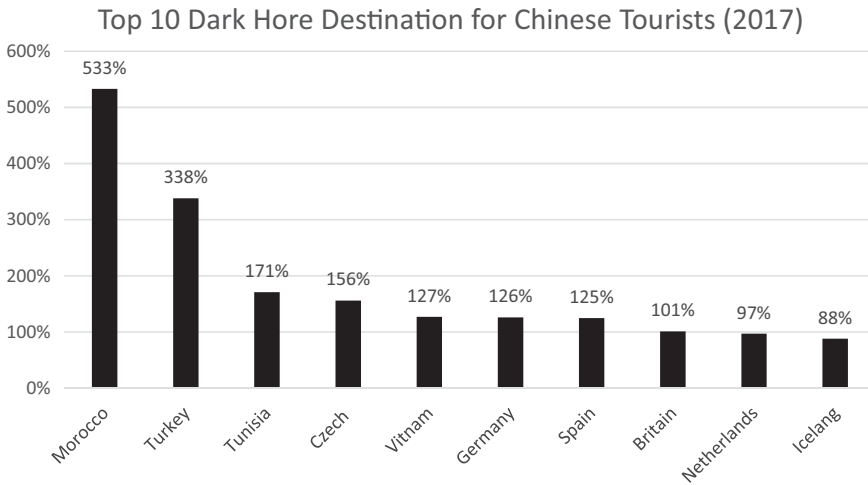


Figure 2. Source: 2017 China outbound tourism travel report by China travel news.

flight routes in Turkey provide convenience for tourists to travel within the country. In addition, Turkey, where tourism has long been thriving, is capable of providing 1 million beds per year to foreign tourists,²⁴ varying from affordable to luxurious, with all types of hotel accommodations available.

The world-famous Turkish baths is a fresh experience for Chinese tourists. There are 34 hot spring tourist centres in Turkey in 17 provinces. There are more than 1000 natural springs with excellent quality and unique features. It is ranked the 7th largest hot spring country in the world. Many of the hot springs in Turkey are ancient baths existing from the period of the Ottoman Empire. In order to promote tourism, Turkey has drawn up a 6-year development plan since 2004. It is expected to invest \$25 billion to improve the quality of tourism in Turkey and increase the number of tourists from 13 million to 30 million per year.²⁵

In tourism marketing, hot spring sightseeing is also the focus of Turkey's promotion to the Asian market. For Chinese tourists, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey assisted Chinese travel operators in designing some hot spring trips, so that more Chinese tourists can come to Turkey to enjoy hot springs. The natural mineral springs of Turkey's Pamukkale is famous both at home and abroad. The ancient Greek city of Hierapolis was already a famous spa in ancient Rome. The local hot spring swimming pool has many ancient Roman stone pillars, stone piers and stone statues. Taking a hot spring there, one can also enjoy those beautiful sceneries.

3.2. The 2018 'Year of Turkey Tourism in China'

In September 2017, the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, Numan Kurtulmuş, pointed out that the BRI was not only a transportation plan, but would also bring

²⁴Official Tourism Portal of Turkey, 'Official Statistics', available at: http://www.goturkey.com.cn/info/Statistical_data.html (accessed 13 September 2017).

²⁵Ibid.

Turkey and all Asian countries closer and more united. In 2018, Turkey in turn hosted the China Year of Tourism to enhance mutual understanding between the peoples of both sides. In addition to strengthening cultural links between Turkey and China through a year of tourism, Turkey plans to establish a China-Turkey University to strengthen its relationship with China from all aspects of academics and industry.²⁶ Tourism is not just about sightseeing, vacation, or leisure, but more about cultural exchanges. When the Turkish President Erdoğan visited China in 2015, he and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed the issue of building a China-Turkey university. Tourism was recommended as one of its majors, which will make a great contribution to the future development of China-Turkey tourism.²⁷

On 18 April 2018, the opening ceremony of the 'Year of Turkey Tourism in 2018' hosted by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism was held in Beijing. Afterwards, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism organised and held exhibitions, performances and concerts as well as a series of events such as a Food Week and cultural seminars in various cities in China in 2018. After Beijing, on 20 April, the opening ceremony of the 'Year of China-Turkey Tourism' was held again in Shanghai, and the Turkish epic dance show 'Troy' was staged. Earlier, the Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism Numan Kurtulmuş sent a warm invitation to Chinese tourists in Beijing on 17 April, saying that it was in the common interest of both countries to enhance the relationship between Turkey and China. Kurtulmuş was very optimistic about the fast-growing Chinese tourism market, predicting that China would have 300 million new middle-class citizens, and the purchasing power of these middle classes would be quite amazing. In general, entering the Chinese tourism market will bring benefits to Turkey. Kurtulmuş also stressed that leaders of the two countries supported the further strengthening of bilateral relations. With the active promotion of specific cooperation projects related to the construction of the BRI, the two countries would be able to continuously promote the interconnection of infrastructure, and there would be more and more common aspects in national interests. It is in China's interest to increase contacts with Turkey; it is also in Turkey's interest to enhance relations with China.²⁸

With the arrival of the 'Year of Turkey Tourism', in order to better introduce Turkey to Chinese tourists, in 2018 the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and a number of official Turkish organisations organised tourism promotion activities in various cities in China. On April 4, 2018, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism organised a Turkish tourism and food promotion meeting in Guangzhou in cooperation with Turkish Airlines. The Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB) led nearly 20 Turkish travel agencies to participate in the exhibition, in order to promote deeper cooperation with major travel agencies in Guangdong.²⁹ On 16-18 April 2018, the 14th

²⁶The China-Turkey Tourism Year in 2018, Turkey targets two million Chinese tourists', available at: http://www.sohu.com/a/191738601_594364 (accessed 13 September 2017).

²⁷B. Li, 'Turkey Tourism targets the 'Belt and Road' opportunity', *International Business Daily*, (accessed 13 September 2016).

²⁸W. Zhang, W. Liu and M. An, 'The Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism warmly welcomes Chinese tourists, who says that promoting the relationship between the two countries is in the interest of both countries', *CRI Online*, available at: <http://news.cri.cn/20180418/A2871794-e208-b066-c561-79bd14bd28fa.html> (accessed 18 April 2018).

²⁹Civil Aviation Resource Net of China, 'Turkey airlines introduces Turkish culture and authentic cuisine to Guangzhou citizens', available at: <http://news.carnoc.com/list/441/441855.html> (accessed 4 April 2018).

China Outbound Travel & Tourism Market (COTTM) was held in Beijing³⁰; a number of Middle Eastern countries including Turkey, who hoped to attract more Chinese tourists, attended. Representatives from Turkey said that in response to the call for cooperation in the China-Turkey tourism cooperation, the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (CCTS) launched 'The Modern Silk Road' joint tourism package in August 2018. This connected the famous Silk Road ruins and natural beauty of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to meet the tastes and needs of Chinese tourists.³¹

3.3. Establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China

In order to adapt to the goal of promoting the 'people-to-people connectivity' to achieve the BRI interconnection, China has adjusted the central government structures accordingly, in order to better utilize tourism to promote the international cooperation within the BRI. In March 2018, through the institutional reform of the State Council of China, former Ministry of Culture and National Tourism Administration were merged into the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which is responsible for unifying planning for cultural and tourist development, adapting to the new thinking that culture and tourism are integrated and mutually supportive. After the reform, the culture and tourism industry would achieve unified management and overall development, which helps promote the prosperity and development of great culture and the transformation and the grading of tourism industry. This reform not only places tourism at the same level as culture, but also shows that China has a clear understanding of the close relationship between culture and tourism. The integration of the culture and tourism sectors is expected to direct the government, industry and citizens to view cultural and tourist projects with a more open-minded perspective, further promoting Chinese culture to the world.³²

Since the '13th Five-Year Plan', China has successively introduced a series of policies to promote the development of the cultural tourism industry, further facilitating the integration of the culture and tourism industry. Under this background, the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism will certainly boost the tourism cooperation between China and Turkey. State Councilor Wang Yong said that the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was to 'enhance and demonstrate cultural self-confidence, coordinate cultural undertakings, cultural industry development and tourism resource development, improve the cultural soft power of the country and the influence of Chinese culture, and promote the integrated development of cultural undertakings, cultural industries and Tourism.'³³ The establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China can push tourism and cultural

³⁰S. Zeng, 'The Middle East Countries actively expand China's overseas tourism market', available at: <http://World.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0418/c1002-29934505.html> (accessed 18 April 2018).

³¹'Turkic-speaking countries launch Silk Road tourism package', EFE, available at: <https://www.efc.com/efe/english/patrocina/turkic-speaking-countries-launch-silk-road-tourism-package/50000268-3713830> (accessed 7 August 2018).

³²'The National Tourism Administration and the Ministry of Culture are combined to achieve 1 + 1 > 2 effects', Beijing Business Daily (accessed 15 March 2018).

³³Wang Yong: 'The establishment of Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Culture and the National Tourism Administration will no longer retain', Xinhua, available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018h/2018-03/13/c_137035413.htm (accessed 13 March 2018).

cooperation between China and Turkey to a higher level. The direct contact between the Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism and its Turkish counterpart will encourage the two countries to jointly coordinate tourism and cultural cooperation policies and encourage greater cultural exchanges and mutual visits between two peoples, and to enhance mutual understanding and strategic mutual trust between the two countries.

4. The Challenges Facing China-Turkey Tourism Cooperation

Despite the strong willingness of China and Turkey to cooperate in tourism, there are many external factors that hinder the development of tourism cooperation and the promotion of strategic mutual trust between the two countries. The challenges faced by China-Turkey tourism cooperation, in addition to the security factors in tourist attraction sites, mainly come from domestic security factors, negative political factors and supporting environmental factors of tourism in Turkey.

First, Turkey's domestic security situation in recent years has been worsening. The civil war in neighboring Syria has entered its ninth year, and the war spillover effect is obvious. Although the 'Islamic State' terrorist organisation's base camps in Syria and Iraq have gradually been dismantled, its subsequent security risks imposed on the region cannot be ignored. The 'Islamic State' terrorist attacks present serious threats to the domestic security of Turkey in recent years. On the other hand, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has long been considered by Turkey as one of the biggest problems threatening its domestic security. The social instability caused by security problems will diminish the willingness of Chinese tourists to travel to Turkey.

In 2015-2016, terrorism in Turkey was rampant. A number of terrorist attacks against civilians occurred in numerous cities. The two international airports in Istanbul were targeted for bomb explosions, and a large number of Turkish locals and foreign tourists were killed or injured in those terrorist attacks. The terrorist attacks have severely damaged the tourism industry in Turkey. According to the statistics of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the number of tourists in Turkey had shrunk significantly in 2016, and the number of foreign tourists dropped from 36.2 million in 2015 to 25 million in 2016.³⁴ With regards to the frequent occurrence of terrorist attacks in Turkey, the media and scholars have pointed out that frequent terrorist attacks have highlighted the fragile security, severe social division and acute political turmoil in Turkey.³⁵ The rapid deterioration of the domestic security situation in Turkey is a hindrance for the development of tourism and Turkey's status as an important aviation transit port worldwide. Turkey's anti-terrorist mission is significant. The challenges faced by the Turkish government come from different non-state organisations or entities that create terrorist attacks. The complex and difficult situation of counter-terrorism requires the Turkish government's dedicated attention and efforts. In a nutshell, Turkey's domestic security situation is challenged mainly by the 'Islamic State'.

³⁴Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 'Number of Arriving-Departing Visitors, Foreigners and Citizens, Border Statistics 2016', available at: <http://www.turizm.gov.tr/Eklenti/53125,border-statistics-2016xlsx.xlsx?0> (accessed July 2017).

³⁵J. Wang, 'Three questions for New Year's Day attack in Istanbul: who did it? why? how is it Turkey?', available at: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1591806 (accessed 2 January 2017).

At the end of 2017, the base of 'Islamic State' in Raqqa in northern Syria was regained; the region is gradually entering the post-'Islamic State' era³⁶, but many countries in the Middle East still face the threat of the remnants of the 'Islamic State'. Turkey, once used by extremists to enter Syria and Iraq, is also facing potential threats from its retired veterans of the 'Islamic State'.³⁷ Turkey has been accused by Western countries of providing weapons, money and other aid to the 'Islamic State'. The lax management of the Turkish-Syrian border has led to the crossing of thousands of 'Jihad' extremists into Syria and Iraq. As a member of NATO, Turkey once refused to open its air base to the United States as a frontier to combat the 'Islamic State'.³⁸

However, the unpredictable rapid expansion of the 'Islamic State' has caused Turkey great sufferings resulting from its own irresponsibility. In June 2014, the 'Islamic State' took control of Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq. The Turkish consulate was occupied. 46 consuls including the Consul General were kidnapped; an attempt by the 'Islamic State' to protest against the Turkish government's secular policies, which according to IS beliefs had violated the teachings of Islam.³⁹ Four months later, Turkey announced its fight against the 'Islamic State', which quickly made itself become the target of terrorist attacks. From the bombing of a border town in June 2015 to the nightclub attack in Istanbul in January 2017, the 'Islamic State' was responsible for at least six terrorist attacks in Turkey, each one causing huge casualties. The 'Islamic State' tended to produce large-scale attacks against civilians, and local Turkish citizens and foreign tourists became innocent victims. Turkey's domestic outcry over the poor protection on civilians and tourists was huge. NATO allies also accused Turkey of supporting the 'Islamic State' by allowing its militants to enter Syria. Turkey was under tremendous pressure at home and abroad. Beginning in 2016, the 'Islamic State' constantly suffered military failure on the Syrian-Israeli battlefield, which have stimulated extremists to divert attention by creating horrific terrorist incidents.

The Kurdish issue in Turkey is another source of Turkey's domestic security problems. There are currently around 1.8 million Kurds living in Turkey. In 1978 The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was founded with the initial goal to establish an independent Kurdish state, later turning to the demand for Kurdish autonomy. Their demands have been consistently declined, and since 1984 PKK has been involved in a series of armed conflicts with the Turkish state. PKK employed radical means such as suicide bombings at Turkish governmental facilities, assassination of Turkish diplomats and kidnapping foreign tourists to express their political demands, as well as discontent with the Turkish state about the discriminating treatment of the Kurdish population in Turkey. Their violent activities and conflicts with the state have led to serious social instability and security crisis, and resulted in the Turkish government declaring it as a terrorist organisation.

The outbreak of the civil war in Syria has worsened Turkey's geo-security environment. On the one hand, Turkey and Syria have a 910-kilometer border, which has

³⁶Z. Wang, 'The global anti-terrorism situation in the post-Islamic State', *West Asia and Africa* 39(1), 2018, p. 4.

³⁷W. Su, 'Research on China-Turkey security risk prevention under the 'Belt and Road Initiative'', *World Religious Cultures* 39(1), 2018, p. 24.

³⁸M. Li, 'Turkey's true attitude towards the Islamic State', *South Reviews* 31 (12), 2015.

³⁹L. Liu, 'Turkey is frequently attacked by terrorists, in fact that it was targeted by many extremist organizations', available at: <http://news.sohu.com/20160629/n456862531.shtml> (accessed 29 June 2016).

become a channel for extremists from all over the world to participate in the 'Islamic State', becoming a nightmare for Turkey. On the other hand, the Kurdish groups in northern Syria have risen in the fight against the Islamic State. The Turkish government is very concerned that Kurds in Turkey would be incited to make more political claims. The Syrian war produced a large number of war refugees. Turkey is the country with the largest accommodating number of Syrian refugees and has accepted more than 2.9 million refugees. However, the refugee status is an excellent disguise for terrorists. The identity of some refugees cannot be fully confirmed. Some terrorists use the cover of refugee to penetrate Turkish society and establish networks in the local area. The province of Kilis in southern Turkey has witnessed the population of Syrians become bigger than the local Turkish population due to the large number of Syrian refugees. At the same time, the 'Islamic State' has established an important branch based in the province of Kilis. In view of this, the domestic security situation in Turkey is getting increasingly serious.⁴⁰ These circumstances will inevitably have a negative impact on the willingness of tourists from all over the world to travel to Turkey.

Second, there are different voices in Turkey against China. Chinese tourists have high degrees of patriotic enthusiasm and spontaneously resist tourist activities in countries or regions that are not friendly to China or threaten China's sovereignty and integrity. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Turkey on August 4, 1971, the two countries have maintained good relations. Since the 1980s, China and Turkey have had frequent high-level visits, but the so-called 'East Turkestan' issue has long been a negative factor concerning China-Turkey bilateral relations. Although at the official level, Turkey has repeatedly expressed its disapproval of anti-China and separatist activities, Turkey's pan-Islamism and pan-Turkish ideologies, however, have rendered Turkey's attitude toward the 'East Turkestan' issue unclear. In 2015, there were many anti-China demonstrations in Turkey. During this period, some Chinese tourists in the country were harassed, and some local Chinese shops were also violently damaged, which had a negative impact on the relationship between the two countries, and certainly discouraged Chinese tourists traveling to Turkey. Tourism cooperation is an important carrier of the non-governmental exchanges between China and Turkey. The voices supporting 'East Turkestan' or other separatist organisations based in Turkey will curb the willingness of patriotic Chinese tourists to visit Turkey. In order to attract Chinese tourists, Turkey must deal with its domestic anti-China activities and their ambiguous attitude toward the 'East Turkestan Movement'.

Third, the English and Chinese language services at tourist attractions in Turkey need to be improved. In Europe, the Americas, Southeast Asia and other places where Chinese tourists are often seen, multilingual services including Chinese can be found easily in tourist attractions, which greatly facilitates the travel of Chinese tourists and makes it easier to understand the cultural backgrounds of tourist destinations.

⁴⁰Z. Chen, 'Is there any deep meaning behind the Turkish terrorist attack?', available at: <http://finance.sina.com.cn/zl/international/2016-06-30/zl-ifxtsatn7787570.shtml> (accessed 30 June 2016).

To promote the 'people-to-people connectivity' and tourism cooperation between China and Turkey, apart from studying the preferences of Chinese tourists on soft needs such as tourist routes and contents, Turkey should also try to provide convenience for Chinese tourists in terms of hard needs such as facilities and infrastructure. Attractions and guide services should provide Chinese or at least English services. Former Turkish Ambassador to China Ali Murat Ersoy said in an interview in 2016 that the Turkish tourism industry was upgrading and would strengthen the training of Chinese-speaking tour guides for Chinese tourists, as well as analysing tourist habits of Chinese tourists, including food and accommodation, to satisfy the needs of Chinese tourists to maximum level.⁴¹

At present, a group tour is still the preferred format of Chinese tourists, and good tour guide services are crucial to the travel experience. In the face of Turkey's goal of welcoming one million Chinese tourists, there is a huge shortage of Chinese speaking Turkish tour guides. In December 2017, the Turkish Chinese-speaking Tour Guides Association organised a meeting in Istanbul to discuss how to solve this problem. The Professional Chinese Tour Guides Association (ÇİRED) was established in 2006. Its president, Kadir Tanridağlı, said at the December 2017 meeting that there were currently five travel agencies and 134 Chinese-language tour guides in Turkey that could provide services to Chinese tourists.⁴² However, with the celebration of the 'Year of Turkish Tourism in China' in 2018, facing the arrival of a large number of Chinese tourists, Turkey's reception capacity is obviously insufficient.

The Turkish-Chinese Cultural Association and the Turkish Tourist Guides Union (TUREB) began cooperation in November 2017 to offer Chinese language classes in Cappadocia, another tourist attraction that is popular among tourists from China, training more Chinese-speaking guides. The Turkish-Chinese Cultural Association also planned to open more Chinese classes in Antalya Province in southeastern Turkey, the western coastal city of Izmir and the capital Ankara.⁴³ In addition to professional tour guide training, there are currently 12 universities in Turkey including Ankara University and Boğaziçi University, which have established departments for Chinese Language and Literature. There are also four Confucius Institutes and two Confucius Classrooms in Turkey conducting Chinese language teaching⁴⁴ Despite this, the increase of trained Chinese-speaking tour guides in Turkey is still far behind the growth of Chinese tourists.

In addition to the lack of Chinese language services, there are fewer English tips for public services such as in tourist attraction sites, catering, accommodation, transportation, etc. Even though there are a larger number of English-speaking guides than Chinese-speaking guides in Turkey, English signs and instructions are more effective than the guide service for individual tourists. Many tourists often encounter problems of unreliable information due to language barriers during their travels and have to

⁴¹B. Li, 'Turkey tourism targets the 'Belt and Road' opportunity', *International Business Daily* (14 September 2016).

⁴²A. Yi, 'The Turkish tourism industry explores the solution to the shortage of Chinese tour guides', *Xinhua*, available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/2017-12/20/c_1122140720.htm (accessed 20 December 2017).

⁴³A. Yi, 'Turkey strengthens Chinese learning of guides to meet the demand from the Year of Tourism', *Xinhua*, available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2017-12/15/c_1122116969.htm (accessed 15 December 2017).

⁴⁴National Office of Chinese Language Council International, 'About Confucius Institutes/Classrooms', available at: http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node_10961.htm.

rely on inefficient communication methods such as body language and mobile phone translation. Therefore, upgrading multiple language service levels is a favorable and necessary measure for Turkey to welcome Chinese tourists, no matter if group tours or personal tours.

5. Conclusion

In recent years, Turkey has become a popular destination for Chinese tourists. Many Chinese tourists have praised the tourist experience in Turkey after returning home, which has laid the foundation for the overall tourism cooperation between China and Turkey. In 2015, the China National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce jointly issued the 'Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road', stating that 'They should promote policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds as their five major goals.'⁴⁵ The BRI has been included in China's Constitution. China-Turkey tourism cooperation under the BRI has been supported by China's policy at the highest level. The Chinese government has also conducted reforms regarding administrative institutions. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China has helped people both in China and from countries along the BRI better 'going out and 'bringing in', enhancing mutual understanding and strengthening strategic mutual trust between Chinese and other peoples.

China-Turkey tourism cooperation also faces a series of constraints. The first is Turkey's domestic security issue. Turkey is bordered by Syria. The spillover effect of the Syrian war should be paid attention to. A large number of Syrian refugees seek refuge in Turkey. In addition, the long land border makes Turkey incapable of keeping out terrorists returning from Syria and Iraq. Although the 'Islamic State' is gradually dying, the terrorist attacks in Turkey in the past two years are still vividly in sight. At this stage, the infiltration of the residual 'Jihad' extremists should be paid close attention to by Turkey. Turkey needs to properly address domestic security issues to create a favorable environment for the stable development of tourism. At the same time, the 'East Turkestan' issue between China and Turkey, and the insufficiency of tourism support services for Turkey when welcoming Chinese tourists are both negative factors that damage the enthusiasm of Chinese tourists to Turkey.

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Disclosure Statement

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⁴⁵Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road', available at: http://www.en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_66936_7.html (accessed 28 March 2015).