

When Will the Iceberg Melt? Narrating the Arctic Among Chinese and Danish Tourists Aboard a Cruise Ship in Greenland

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The exponential growth in Chinese outbound tourism and the increased sophistication and diversification of Chinese tourist preferences have meant that Chinese tourists have become an interesting resource for destinations around the globe including of course Arctic destinations. The pristine Arctic nature is likewise seen as a valuable resource by the experienced Chinese tourists. This growth has led to an ever-increasing interest in the Chinese market from actors in the tourism industry, policy-makers and the media around the world. Even though the number of studies on Chinese tourism is growing, there is still a lack of in-depth, qualitative research on Chinese tourism especially in destinations like the Arctic. This paper will provide a cultural analysis of a nine-day cruise in Greenland aboard a Scandinavian cruise ship with a mixed passenger group consisting of primarily Danish and Chinese tourists. The focus will be on the co-construction of Greenland as an Arctic destination through different narratives by both the travel agency, the tourists and the tour guides. The narratives will be explored in order to provide a nuanced understanding of the Arctic experiences of these Danish and Chinese tourists, thereby adding a perspective on the Arctic that will give insight into the unexplored potential of the Arctic as a resource to Chinese tourists and Chinese tourists as a resource to Arctic communities.

Introduction: Welcome to Greenland

Late one evening in August 2017, we¹ landed in Kangerlussuaq Airport accompanied by 200 Chinese and Danish tourists. We were headed for a cruise ship waiting for our group just off the coast about ten kilometers from the airport. On leaving the terminal, we were met by guides from our Scandinavia-based travel agency² guiding us towards the waiting coaches. Most of the group had been on a whirlwind tour of Iceland earlier the same day; everyone was tired and looked forward to reaching the cruise ship. However, several ordeals awaited us – some planned, some unplanned – all of them adding to the construction of Greenland as a remote, exotic and challenging destination. All the busses were rather old, looking nothing like the regular tourist coaches you would meet at other destinations. We chose one, trying to find one of the less dilapidated looking, and after every seat was filled, the slow ride on bumpy roads towards the fjord

started. The Danish guide boarded the bus with us and began telling us of the mandatory safety briefings on Arctic cruising we had to go through. The first briefing would be on the jetty before boarding the zodiacs taking us to the cruise ship. The second would take place aboard the cruise ship, before we would finally be allowed to eat a late dinner and go to bed. It would be past midnight by then, but still relatively light due to the high latitude. A few kilometers out of the airport, the bus had to climb a steep hill – and stalled. The driver could not get the bus started again. After a few futile attempts, the guide again took the microphone and said: ‘Welcome to Greenland’!

This narrative of Greenland as an exotic, challenging place and consequently of us, the cruise passengers, as intrepid explorers rather than common tourists, was one of the many narratives of Greenland and the Arctic emerging from the interplay between the guides, the tourists, and the local communities on this 9-day trip along the west coast of Greenland. This article will explore such narratives in order to understand the construction of Greenland as an Arctic destination. The linkage between tourist imaginaries and itinerary was of special interest on this cruise as the passengers mainly consisted of two distinct groups: Danish and Chinese tourists. This meant that the pre-trip imaginaries and the knowledge of Greenland was widely different in the two groups, which complicated the process of constructing our shared Arctic experience in the ‘short-lived society’ (Foster, 1998) aboard the cruise ship. However, understanding this experience is extremely valuable in interpreting Arctic tourism from a resource perspective, as the narratives emerging aboard the cruise ship materializes in the intersection between tourist expectations, industry preferences and finally the actual destination: Greenland. Identifying and analyzing these narratives therefore allows us to understand how the Arctic is perceived as a resource for the Chinese and Danish tourists and how challenging it can be to tap into the potential new and expanding resource for the Arctic tourism industry: The boom in Chinese tourism. Chinese outbound tourism doubled between 2011 and 2016, with more than 128 million travelling abroad for private purposes in 2016 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). While Greenland as yet receives a very minor share of this growth and the yearly number of Chinese tourists is counted in hundreds, not thousands³, Iceland has seen a growth of 660 percent in visitors from China between 2011 and 2016, receiving almost 67 thousand Chinese visitors in 2016 (China Daily, 2016).

This paper therefore explores the following research questions: Which narratives of the Arctic can be identified among Danish and Chinese cruise tourists to Greenland? What are the underlying structures of these narratives? And how can they contribute to new insights and understandings of the Arctic in the minds of these particular tourists? The article will begin by a short introduction to our research setting and methods followed by a discussion of cruise tourism and Arctic tourism as a backdrop to the narrative analysis. This analysis will be organized around two nodes: *Natural places and spaces* and *Cultural spaces and places*. We do, however, emphasize that especially in the case of Arctic tourism, nature and culture are impossible to separate, and that the narratives are therefore often intertwined. In order to speak of a narrative, it also needs to be emphasized that in this paper we work with what one might call grand narratives or master narratives (Lyotard, 1984), which is also a metanarrative that directs attention to the story behind or about a story - the narrative (Stephens & McCallum, 1998). In this context, this means that the knowledge and experience of the Arctic that the tourists onboard this cruise ship already carries with them is the foundation that we, the researchers, are aiming to reveal and understand. The aim is then to understand how this pre-knowledge and pre-experience play into new experiences and

understandings, and how these shape and re-shape the varying constructions of the Arctic in the minds of the tourists. Addressing the research questions above allows the researchers to explore narratives that points towards pre-understandings as well as the modifications the narratives undergo during the cruise, thereby providing new insights into the co-construction of narratives and the context in which they are created.

Method – On Conversations and Seasickness

The Setting

The cruise was arranged by a Scandinavia-based travel agency specializing in guided group tours, often in relatively exotic destinations, for the mid to upscale market segments. This was not stated as such in sales materials, but based on price-level, conversations with the travel agent, tour guides and passengers themselves, it is safe to say that this was the target audience which also constituted the majority of the passengers. The cruise ship was relatively small. It was a converted freight ship, equipped to deal with ice and harsh Arctic weather conditions. The maximum number of passengers was just above 200. While the expedition leader and the tour guides (nine in total) were all Danes, except for one Greenlandic and one Chinese tour leader, the rest of the staff was international. The Captain was Finnish; the chef was French, the hotel manager German, the service staff a mixture of Filipino and eastern European, while the majority of the crew was Filipino. The staff would sometimes switch tasks, the crew doubling as waiters, the Latin American doctor operating the reception, the tour guides staffing the small onboard store and the captain piloting one of the zodiacs.

While the staff was international, the cruise guests were quite homogenous. The passengers consisted of around 150 Danish and 50 Chinese guests. On the basis of our conversations with passengers, confirmation from tour guides and expedition leaders, as well as general observation on-board, the majority of the Danish tourists belonged to the so-called ‘grey gold’ segment, and were well into their sixties and seventies. The Chinese group was significantly younger, as most of them were in their forties and fifties, and several of them brought kids. The youngest Chinese boy celebrated his ninth birthday on the ship, while there were no Danish children at all. We had been informed by the travel agency before the trip that the Chinese tourists all had a common connection to a Chinese travel writer, who had collected the group and was supposed to act as their tour leader. Some of them had travelled together before and were connected to a hiking club at one of the major universities in Beijing while others were friends or acquaintances of the Chinese travel writer. They all belonged to the upper middle class⁴ segment and were professionals: academics, dentists, lawyers and the like. They had even brought a ‘teacher’ to activate the children on board the ship, which had no facilities for children and where the Wi-Fi-connection was expensive and unreliable. The Danes were also middle class, but spanned from lower to upper middle class, including nurses, farmers, elementary school teachers, tradespersons, business people, and a surprisingly large number of doctors, which became clear during our conversations and interviews.

The Research

We had been allowed aboard this cruise by the Scandinavian travel agency, broadly speaking to explore cultural encounters between the two different groups of passengers as well as between the

cruise passengers and the local communities. Our trip was funded by our home university. Whereas the Chinese group leader had been asked for permission to let us join her group, the Danish tourists did not know beforehand that we would be on board the ship. For the first few days we simply introduced ourselves to the people we talked to, and described the purpose of our research, but after a couple of days, we introduced our research project and ourselves formally during one of the many information meetings.

Besides information meetings, there were also several lectures on topics related to Greenland and the Arctic. These lectures were given by the tour leaders, who all had years of experience in Greenland. Identical lectures were often given to both Danish and Chinese tourists, with a Chinese translation of the Danish lecture. This meant that the Chinese tourists had to sit in on long expositions on the presence of the Norsemen in Greenland a thousand years ago, designed to interest the Danish tourists as this spoke to Denmark's historical relationship with Greenland. However, the lectures never included an introduction to the current relationship between Denmark and Greenland, since this is already understood by the Danish tourists and was never addressed explicitly to the Chinese audience. We participated in as many lectures as possible, trying to catch both the Chinese and the Danish version of each individual lecture.

Meals were also partly separate. Breakfast and lunch was served in the main restaurant, and was shared by all passengers, while dinner was served in two locations so that the Chinese guests had the option of dining in a separate dining room. About half of them preferred to dine in the main restaurant with the rest of the passengers. During daytime activities, we alternately followed the Danish or the Chinese groups, sometimes together and sometimes splitting up. We had all our meals with the Danish guests to allow the Chinese group some privacy.

We were conscious of the delicate balance between our role as researchers and the consequent need to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics aboard the ship and the concurrent need to avoid making the rest of the guests feel uncomfortable through constant scrutiny. Our method can therefore best be described as 'conversational fieldwork' combined with participant observation. We took copious handwritten notes during briefings and during the semiformal interviews that we did with the guides, the expedition leader and a few of the tourists who themselves expressed a wish to participate in formal interviews. We did not use a recording device, and we did not take notes during the many informal conversations that form the main body of our 'data'. Our written records of these conversations were created in the evening or in stolen breaks during the day. Being two researchers helped in this very informal and un-structured setting, since we could compare impressions and interpretations of what went on during the day. Our cautious and qualitative approach also means that we have few verbatim quotes from the tourists, as our notes would always be written down based on our recollection in the breaks between activities and not transcribed from recordings. This also leads to an ideographic approach, focusing on unique cases rather than attempting to quantify our data or analyze the frequency with which certain concepts and ideas occur in the material.

Apart from these notes from conversations and written records of observations, our material consists of the written material collected before and during the trip and huge numbers of photographs. Many of them of icebergs and of stretches of the ocean where a whale had just disappeared, but most of them of tourists engaging in touristic pursuits: sightseeing, hiking, photographing, dining, and being briefed during information meetings. We were after all tourists

ourselves, so we experienced much of what they did, being just as fascinated by the Arctic scenery as our co-passengers aboard the ship, feeling seasick after a rough sail during the night and listening to the call for the ship's doctor over the speaker system when other passengers were also trying to recover in the morning and at the same time realizing that neither of us were up to interviewing anybody that day. In addition, we took photos of the daily program written on a whiteboard in the central lobby of the ship, which served as a fix-point for all the tourists.

Cruise Tourism – Shared Liminal Spaces

Both cruise tourism and Chinese tourism are growing industries. Cruise tourism has long been popular as the ultimate self-indulgence, the place where you can leave your humdrum everyday life behind and re-invent a holiday version of yourself. Wang (2000a) argues that this re-invention is the major reason for the popularity of tourism spaces; what tourists seek is not just enjoyment and new experiences but a contrast to everyday life. Foster (1988) points out that the difference does not have to be immediately apparent as over-indulgence, but can also simply consist of leaving behind status markers and daily responsibilities. Thus, going on a cruise becomes a liminal experience, leaving normalcy behind and expanding the boundaries of your existence, not only in terms of onboard behavior which may be radically different from everyday life, and includes a large degree of self-indulgence, but also in terms of expanding your physical horizon, especially in the case of cruising in the Arctic, where the open and dramatic Arctic seascapes are radically different from the physical reality of the home countries of most cruise passengers. The cruise ship in itself becomes an important shared space where a small-scale short-lived society emerges among the cruisers under the competent and deliberate guidance of the cruise staff (Yarnal & Kersetter, 2005; Foster, 1988). While cruising has been a popular holiday form in the West for many years, cruise lines are now trying to enter the potentially lucrative Chinese market by adapting the ships and itineraries to Chinese preferences. This entails targeting cruises to families not retirees, providing shorter cruises matching the very limited vacation time in China, and stressing shopping and shows over spas and fitness onboard the ships (Mondou & Taunay, 2012).

Small cruise ships provide a very different setting from the mega ships carrying several thousand passengers and limit-less offerings in terms of entertainment and food. Smaller cruises tend to be branded as 'adventure cruising' or 'expeditions' or in the case of our concrete cruise as a 'luxury cruise' thereby indicating that the very smallness of the ship in fact signals exclusivity and quality thus distinguishing this cruise from 'normal' cruises. In a study of typical American cruise passengers' motivations for joining a cruise, R. V. Jones found that mental and physical relaxation was the primary motivation for cruising, whereas experiencing new places and encountering new cultures was not a priority (Jones, 2011). His study describes the typical cruise, where the ship itself and the onboard activities turn into the main attraction. In our case, where the destination was very remote and therefore rather expensive, the situation was quite different. For the cruise passengers on this particular cruise, the primary motive was indeed experiencing the Arctic destination rather than cruising as an end in itself.

Arctic Tourism – Co-Constructed Places

The Arctic has become the object of increasing attention for tourism within the last couple of decades, which has increased academic as well as industry interests in the Arctic. This means that different perceptions of the Arctic are coming into play, both in terms of the perceptions being

brought into the Arctic, e.g. when tourists are visiting, but also when bringing perceptions 'out' of the Arctic to live and breathe in the rest of the world. It has therefore become a focal point for this article to understand how narratives within Arctic tourism are constructed and brought to life. It will be useful to address existing knowledge of Arctic tourism and tourists to the Arctic as a platform for understanding existing narratives and in order to expand scholarly knowledge of fluctuating narratives that directly affect visiting tourists and the destinations they visit, and may indirectly inform larger debates about for instance China's engagement in the Arctic or the consequences of climate change.

The Arctic as a tourist destination represents quite a distinct understanding in existing studies. Not surprisingly, the Arctic is primarily defined by its natural landscape, which is often narrated as untamed, remote and isolated wilderness (Hall & Johnston, 1995; Hall & Saarinen, 2010; Lemelin et al., 2012; Maher et al., 2011; Müller et al., 2013; Olwig & Lowenthal, 2006; Snyder & Stonehouse, 2007). It is also well-established that tourists come to Arctic destinations to experience this unique natural landscape, often conceptualized as a last frontier (Müller & Jansson, 2007), because the Arctic is one of the last places on earth where you can hope to experience what appears and has been narrated as untouched and unreachable nature (Lee et al., 2017; Saarinen, 2005).

This draws lines back to Arctic explorers and the idea of Arctic tourism as an expedition-like experience that has become possible for contemporary tourists (Lee et al., 2017). It seems that today's Arctic travelers may be looking for contrasts to balance out the hectic, modern lives at home, and they are expecting Arctic destinations to provide such simplicity. Tourists seek contrasts to their everyday lives and try to establish an understanding of their authentic selves through the other (e.g., MacCannell, 1976; Wang, 2000), places as well as people. Hence, the Arctic is perceived as a chance to obtain such motivational goals, particularly because many popular destinations suffer from over-tourism and wealthier and more adventurous tourists therefore look for new places to visit.

While the primary motivation and attraction for tourism to the Arctic may appear to be nature, it entails a clear linkage to perceptions of a lifestyle very different to hectic, modern city life. This also means that a preunderstanding of what Arctic communities are becomes part of the narrative that is constructed and constantly negotiated by tourists while visiting the Arctic, but also upon return to their everyday lives. This understanding of the Arctic is constructed through the eyes of tourists relying largely on their preunderstandings and operators trying to facilitate the best possible experience for their visitors, which entails matching the actual experience to preexisting notions of what the Arctic has to offer. These narratives of the Arctic might originate in Arctic tourism, but can generate ideas that may supersede a tourism context. Subsequently, this could have wider consequences for development in Arctic communities. These narratives may foster ideas of a community in need of development and modernization based on the strong, popular narratives of the Arctic rather than understandings of independent, modern, global communities in their own right.

Narrating the Arctic

The opening narrative welcoming cruise passengers to Greenland carries undertones of the places and spaces that these tourists are about to experience. This narrative was one out of several identified during the cruise, which were shared and constructed onboard and ashore.

Conversations with different actors and observations gave insights into Greenland as a physical and narrated space and place. Greenland is thus situated, mediated and constructed not only as a tourist destination for a growing influx of tourists to the Arctic, but also at a general level as a place of interest and political attention in an increasingly global discussion of resources in the Arctic.

We have chosen two core themes to represent the prevalent narratives emerging from our data: 1) Natural places and spaces 2) Cultural spaces and places. These themes reflect the spectrum of ways in which Greenland was narrated in the context of this study. We understand *space* as a physical reality explored and understood through the tourists' own interaction with the destination, while *place* is understood as "physical spaces that people naturalize through patterns, behaviour and communications" (Campbell, 2018: 23). Accordingly, space and place are closely intertwined and are therefore treated as correlated terms in this analysis. Similarly, the close relationship between culture and nature is acknowledged. For analytical purposes, culture is understood in the broadest possible sense as a perceived contrast to nature, i.e. encompassing history, society and everyday life, which plays a role in the narratives at hand. In the following, the identification of these two core themes will be explained and each narrative theme will be elaborated and exemplified. The two themes are considered supportive strategies for constructing Greenland as place and space, not as narrow or limiting categories that are opposed or contradictory. They each zoom in on a particular thematic perspective on Greenland.

Natural Places and Spaces

Literature on Arctic tourism confirms that nature is the predominant factor in tourists' understanding of the Arctic and their primary motivation to go there (Hall & Johnston, 1995; Hall & Saarinen, 2010; Lemelin et al., 2012; Maher et al. 2011; Müller et al. 2013; Snyder & Stonehouse, 2007). It is important to emphasize that although 'nature' is often treated as a particular category in a tourism context, it is here viewed as a narrative category covering a vast variety of connotations and narrated in many different ways. For example, nature is a collective term relating to other subcategories such as landscape, geography, isolation or physicality. Therefore, nature has to be understood in conjunction with place, linking physical nature to the mediated and narrated space that tourists are immersed in, because of their desire to visit Arctic or Greenlandic nature.

'Nature' is present in many shapes and forms in the narratives surrounding Greenland, and more widely, the Arctic. The Greenlandic nature that the cruise tourists experience is of course in itself a narrated version of Arctic nature pre-selected by the travel agency in constructing the itinerary. The ship stopped at different sights every day, and the tourists were then taken on guided tours – again a preselected narration of the spaces and places visited. Most tours focused on the cultural sights. We would typically visit a church, a community center or a school, and sometimes museums or a local producer of qiviut, the luxurious wool from the musk ox. Nature would be ever present in the scenery, the weather (which was unexpectedly rainy and cold), and the many questions from the tourists related to the basic challenge of survival in remote areas, but the tours were constructed around such traditional tourist attractions.

The **weather** was a major topic of conversation, as is of course common in unfamiliar, culturally sensitive settings where you need neutral conversation openers. The first two days were blessed by blue skies and sunshine. However, when the weather changed a couple of days later, the mood changed as well. The Danes would sigh, saying "*if only the weather was better*", especially when the

promised barbecue in front of the Equip Glacier was cancelled due to rain and fog. Contrarily, the mood turned nearly triumphant when the sun finally came out on the very evening when we reached the Ilulissat Ice Fjord, one of the promised highlights of the trip. The weather was addressed daily in nautical terms by the expedition leader in his morning greeting, giving wind speeds, atmospheric pressure, wave height and temperatures. A few days into the trip, the staff began posting printed weather forecasts in the reception. Not just any weather forecast: the Danish guests had requested that they post the forecast produced by DMI (the Danish Meteorological Institute). The Chinese guests were much more stoic and had come equipped for the Arctic weather. When we raised the drizzle as a potential conversation opener, the reaction was that, well, this is the Arctic: Of course, it is cold! [北极, 天气当然会很冷]. This plays into the narrative of the Arctic as a remote and challenging place – both through the pre-understandings of the tourists and the technical details given in the daily briefing. While the weather was thus a constant presence, **climate change** was not really a topic of much conversation. Although Greenland has hosted political meetings and events on climate change, this was not a central part of our data. The title of this article carries connotations of climate change, but is really a reference to a question asked by a Chinese tourist glancing at a big iceberg that had run aground just outside a settlement. The context of this question was a desire to understand practical, tangible issues about life in a Greenlandic settlement rather than a political curiosity about climate change, and there were no other signs of this particular topic being at the forefront. This may have been partly due to the expedition leader, who stated explicitly that he ‘did not believe in climate change’ during a lecture and later elaborated on this during an interview, saying that the climate was constantly changing and that as we were headed towards a new ice age, a little global warming might actually be a good thing!

Whereas trips ashore were largely organized around human settlements and cultural themes, nature was a constant presence aboard the ship – represented especially by **whales and icebergs** – two iconic representations of the Arctic. For the first few days of the trip, the captain would announce any sighting of whales over the ship’s loudspeaker system, and tourists and staff alike would flock to the windows trying to get a glimpse of the animals. We had been told during one of the first meetings that we would almost certainly get to see whales, but that they could of course guarantee nothing. A few days into the trip, it was clear that we would see whales to our hearts content. All expectations were fulfilled, even to the extent that we overheard a group of tourists cancelling a whale safari they had booked in Iceland on the trip back from Greenland. They had seen enough whales! However, the initial cautious half-promise of whale sightings had the double effect of creating an added appreciation of the whales we saw and of strengthening the narrative of the exclusivity and elusiveness of Arctic nature.

Another example of ‘nature’ being used narratively in quite a literal way is found in the way that icebergs were often the object of conversation, whether used to reinforce a positive experience of something very unique to this part of the world, or as a less fulfilling part of the promised experience. For example, a Danish tourist explained in a conversation over coffee that she had imagined the icebergs to be much more impressive, and she was disappointed that they were not as big as imagined. Nonetheless, the space created here is one in which nature is a frame of reference that is shared in the initiated group of people having encountered icebergs. The disappointed tourist had been warned by her daughter before coming on the trip, that the icebergs might not be as enormous as she expected, as the daughter had actually seen icebergs before and

been unimpressed. However, a few days after expressing her disappointment in the icebergs, we had a chance to talk to her again after our visit to the Ice Fjord in Ilulissat. She was now entirely satisfied with the icebergs, which had completely matched her expectations, and she was looking forward to going back home and sharing this with her daughter!

Experiencing nature was often done through the lens of a camera. When the captain announced whale sightings during the first few days; when he sailed daringly close to an Iceberg (creating slightly alarming associations with Titanic); when we were anchored just off the Equip glacier, people would flock on deck in silence with their cameras, vying for the best spots. There was a clear hierarchy in the size of the cameras for both the Danish and Chinese tourists. The husbands would normally sport huge cameras with potent lenses, wives more often resorting to mobile phones. Some of the Philippine sailors would join the tourists on deck with small digital cameras, trying to get a picture of the elusive mammals as well. The cruise staff also included a professional photographer. He would take pictures of the sights every day, creating a presentation that would be shown on a small screen in the reception every evening. His pictures were mainly of sights and landscapes, with tourists present primarily as incidental by-standers. These pictures were available for sale on the last day of the cruise, complemented by small videos from a drone he carried and footage from the previous week when the weather had been better. In this way, his narration of an authentic Arctic experience became a combination of the actual experience of the concrete cruise we were on, and then a better, sunnier and more picture-perfect version from the previous cruise.

Arctic nature was thus a major presence on the cruise, as a challenge necessitating flexible schedules and security precautions, but also as the main event of the show. Nature caused awed silences and deep appreciation as well as disappointments over small icebergs, elusive fin whales who would not perform for us like the humpbacks and the rain and drizzle, which made hiking unpleasant, and photography challenging. However, the interpretation and appreciation of nature was very much guided by the tourists' pre-trip imaginaries and reference frameworks. The cold weather was not a problem for the Chinese tourists, who were touring the Arctic, while the Danes who were touring Greenland, a familiar, unfamiliar place found it annoying and disappointing. These different references were also very apparent in the spontaneous reaction of one the Chinese tourists in catching her first glimpse of the amazing Ilulissat Ice Fjord. Walking on the wooden pathway leading from the town of Ilulissat towards the fjord, deep in conversation about something entirely unrelated, she suddenly looked up and saw the icebergs in the distance and said 'Oh' followed by a long silence and then asked: '*Have you ever been to Xinjiang?*' [你去过新疆吗?]. She then showed me pictures from a previous trip to Xinjiang on her phone; to show me how similar the beautiful snow-clad mountains in Xinjiang were to the icebergs in Ilulissat. Xinjiang is a remote Chinese province, which was familiar to this tourist and therefore becomes a point of reference in making sense of the Ilulissat ice fjord in a way that reminiscence familiarity and some level of normalcy, i.e. a reference to home away from home (Wang, 2007). This demonstrates how each tourist has his/her own sense-making schemes, which affect the way the narratives of Greenland and/or the Arctic is constructed and subsequently retold.

Cultural Spaces and Places

As we have shown above, the narration of Arctic nature was guided by the tourists' preconceptions. This was doubly so in the case of another grand narrative identified, *cultural spaces and places*. We

use culture in a broad sense as a narratively constructed contrast to nature, where culture encompasses history, society and everyday life in Greenland. Many of the ideas revealed through the conversational fieldwork relates directly to Greenland's colonial past, which was very present among the Danish group of tourists, and became a topic of differentiation to the Chinese group of tourists, whose frames of reference were very different. For the Danes, Greenland was a familiar, unfamiliar space and place. Most of the tourists we talked to, either had been to Greenland before or knew somebody who had lived and worked in Greenland, where Danish teachers, nurses and doctors have historically been a large part of the workforce. They therefore had second hand stories about what life is like in Greenland, as well as Danish media discussions of potential Greenlandic independence, and social problems in Greenland as their frame of reference. The expedition leader, who had worked in Greenland for many years, would always use the old, colonial, Danish names when referring to locations in Greenland. For the elderly Danes aboard the ship, this made perfect sense, as these would have been the names they were familiar with from schoolbooks, but for the younger Danish and Greenlandic tour guides, this was a constant source of annoyance and somewhat of an embarrassment. It sometimes created amusing misunderstandings, as when the Chinese tour leader compared the written program (using the Greenlandic names) with the expedition leader's presentation (using the colonial names) and announced that we would apparently be visiting two towns today: Both Ilulissat and Jacob's Harbor (the old Danish name for Ilulissat)!

This misunderstanding illustrates the wide gap between Chinese and Danish references for making sense of Greenland in the light of **history** and varying levels of knowledge and understanding. The Chinese tourists knew relatively little about Greenland before the cruise and therefore used other frameworks to interpret Greenland's colonial past. For instance, when discussing the current relationship between Denmark and Greenland and the separatist movement in Greenland with us, the researchers, the Chinese guests would sometimes refer to the current relationship between China and Tibet, and the perceived ingratitude of Tibetans, who did not appreciate the development and civilization that China brings to Tibet! On another occasion, while discussing Greenland's colonial past, some of the Chinese tourists afterwards referred to China's own past as a semi-colonial nation, and expressed their understanding of the painful position of contemporary Greenland in relation to the former colonial power, Denmark.

Similarly, **society and everyday life** is often addressed through somewhat simplistic views of Greenlandic ways of life. For example, a visit to an orphanage arranged by the travel agency was somewhat troubling to us as researchers, because of the seeming intrusion into the lives of children that had most likely suffered from various types of hardships in their lives. The silence among the tourists at large in the subsequent conversations gave us a cue that either it was too taboo-ridden and sensitive to talk about what may have happened to these children, or there were underlying assumptions at play, which could indicate that this was self-explanatory and that there was no reason to address this sensitive matter. The latter would mean that explanations would most likely be different for each tourist due to the different frames of reference already mentioned, and thereby not at all self-explanatory. This would also be a harsh contrast to the neutrality of weather as a conversational topic, but nonetheless, the activities of these children – playing music and singing to uphold their Greenlandic roots – were somewhat less intimidating, and the fact that these children were performing for tourists was seen as a more positive encounter, promising a better future for these children.

The Chinese tourists were often much more direct in asking questions about **daily life** in remote settlements, probably because their understanding of Greenlandic society was not troubled by colonial reminiscence and pre-understandings of harsh social conditions. For example, Chinese tourists visiting a settlement were very eager to know how a local man had found a wife – considering that this was an isolated settlement of around 20 people. This contributes to the idea of a space and place with significant social challenges to overcome, if what is considered normal life in most civilized societies is to be upheld. Thus culture as space and place is very much attached to ideas of living in a Greenlandic social space constrained by nature, while contributing to a construction of what type of place Greenland is, and how its characteristics as a space puts a heavy stamp on the place that is accessed and understood.

Conclusion

The question in the title of this article "*When will the iceberg melt?*" was chosen as representative of the encounters between the fact-seeking, knowledge hungry tourists and local Greenlandic communities. The stranded iceberg provided a nice backdrop for the many photographs taken on the beach where the inhabitants served coffee and cake and attempted to sell their locally produced goods. The question was never answered, and although the tourist probably viewed the iceberg as something unique and spectacular, worthy of attention, it was a mundane object to our guide who of course also knew that the melting of an iceberg is not a process easily defined, as icebergs will break apart and drift away rather than melt slowly in the same place like a giant ice cube.

Similarly, we found that the narratives used to make sense of the touristic experiences of the trip was constructed based on the different pre-trip imaginaries of the tourists. Basically, the Danish tourists were visiting Greenland, a familiar, unfamiliar space and place, while the Chinese tourists were touring the Arctic. Understanding these different narratives and their sources are extremely important in discussing Chinese tourism as a resource to Greenland and in understanding why Arctic nature is perceived as a resource to the busy Chinese tourists escaping from polluted and crowded mega-cities in China. If the tourism industry as well as tourism scholars are to understand the attraction value as well as motivational factors of these tourists, it becomes crucial to explore underlying perceptions, which surface through narratives like these.

The exploration of the narrative themes has shown that there are various dimensions playing central roles in the construction of Greenland, namely related to natural places and spaces as well as cultural spaces and places. The different narratives encountered on this cruise were interconnected and covered many different aspects of the construction of an understanding of Greenland/The Arctic. The narratives we have chosen to highlight in this article are quite literally only the tip of the iceberg, but still provide an important insight into how Greenland is understood by tourists from widely different backgrounds. Although the context of tourism puts a particular frame around the experience for these tourists as well as our research, the wider consequences of these impressions may reach beyond the scope of tourism. The narratives that are negotiated and constructed through these touristic experiences are not simply constructed as tourism narratives and separated from a general understanding of what Greenland and the Arctic is, but may very well spill over into other more general discussions. Therefore, these narratives are not just innocent stories of tourist perceptions, but can become quite significant in a wider context of global understanding of Arctic places and spaces.

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Notes

1. ‘We’ are two Danish researchers from Aalborg University. A tourism researcher with an interest in Arctic tourism and previous experience in Greenland and China scholar with Chinese language skills but no previous experience of Greenland.
2. In order to protect the anonymity of our respondents, the travel agency will remain anonymous in this paper.
3. According to Visit Greenland there was a growth of 43% in the number of Chinese passengers leaving Greenland by air between 2016 and 2017. With 1426 Chinese visitors in 2017, Greenland now receives more travelers from China than from Norway or Sweden. (*Visit Greenland*, private communication).
4. The definition of the middle class in China remains elusive as it is largely based on self-identification and life-style rather than objective indicators of income etc., which are difficult to use in a society with a very high degree of inequality in terms of both income and cost of living (see for instance Goodman (2014) or Zhang (2017)). We base our identification of this particular group as upper middle class on their affiliation with one of the major universities in China placing them in the intellectual elite, as well as their ability to afford not only this particular rather expensive cruise, but also previous tours to remote and expensive destinations.

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