

# SHEDDING SOME LIGHT ON SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES' TRAVEL PREFERENCES IN GROUP PACKAGE TOURS

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## Introduction

There has been dramatic growth in outbound travel from Asian countries in recent years, fuelled by the region's rapid economic growth and rising income levels (March, 1997). In many Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Mainland China, The Group Package Tour (hereafter abbreviated GPT) is one of the main modes of outbound travels (March, 2000; Wang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2002; Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000; Yamamoto & Gill, 1999). Empirical testing has been done in terms of evaluating GPT tourist risks (Tsaur, Tzeng, & Wang, 1997), service features in the GPT (Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000), senior tourists' decision-making in GPT (Wang, Mao, & Chou, 2001), as well as the relative influence between parents and children in GPT (Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004). However, to our knowledge there have been no studies considering single-parent families' travel preferences in GPT.

One global trend is that the population of single-parent families is increasing rapidly (McGrath, Yeung, & Bedi, 2002), and the number of children living with single parents has increased dramatically since the 1960s (Garis, 1998). This situation was noted in the United States (Moriarty, 2004). According to U.S. Census Bureau's (2000) report, 19.6 % of children under the age of 18 lived with only the mother or father in 1980, but this had increased to 26.6 % by 2000. Similarly, the number of single-parent families has been increasing in Canada, where 11 % of all families were single-parent families in 1981, compared to 14.5 % in 1996 (Gucciardi, Celasun, & Stewart, 2004).

In England, 7 % of all families with dependent children were single-parent families in 1972, compared to 21 % in 1994-1995 (Taanila, Laitinen, Moilanen, & Järvelin, 2002). In Australia, there are almost one million (973,700) children growing up in single-parent families, which is one-fifth (around 570,000) of overall Australian families (Goodfellow & Laverty, 2003). Because of increasing divorce rates and other social factors, the rise of single-parenthood has been one of the most striking demographic and social trends (Taanila, Laitinen, Moilanen, & Järvelin, 2002).

The rising phenomenon of single-parent families in Western countries is unlikely to be unique. In Asian societies, the nuclear two-parent family has changed in its relative size (Yang, 2003), and the number of single-parent families in Hong Kong has almost tripled in the past decade, from 34,276 families in 1991 to 116,500 in 2001 (Lau, 2003). Over the past decade (1995-2004), in Taiwan, the overall population has generally shrunk annually, with only two groups' population increasing: the elderly and single-parent families, rising from 6.55 % to 8.09 % (Department of Health, 2006).

From the above discussion, it appears that the number and importance of single-parent families are growing. However, most marketing research has concentrated on two-parent families, and there has been little on single-parent families (Ahuja, Capella, & Taylor, 1998; Michalopoulos & Robins, 2002). An examination of the tourism literature indicates that most previous consumer behavior studies on travel have focused on dual-parent families (Assael, 1995; Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980; Jenkins, 1979; Swinyard & Sim, 1987; Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977; Walmsley & Lewis, 1984; Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004).

However, there are dissimilarities between single-parent and dual-parent families. For instance, research has found that single mothers spend more time at work and less time in leisure and personal care activities (including sleep) than mothers in two-parent households (Sanik & Mauldin, 1986; Wang, Nakamoto, Chan, & Huang, 2005; Zick, McCullough, & Smith, 1996). With regard to lifestyle and functioning of mothers and children, mothers in single-parent families may suffer from task overload (Alessandri, 1992; Crouter, 1984). Moreover, single mother-headed families often experience financial stress, are often socially isolated and lacking in social and emotional support, and have only one parental figure to serve as the agent of socialization (Alessandri, 1992; Hilton, Desrochers, & Devall, 2001; McGrath, Yeung, & Bedi, 2002).

In summary, the preceding rationale may imply that due to lack of time, lifestyles, financial states, and socialization differences between single and dual-parents families, single-parent families' travel preferences for GPT may differ from those of dual-parents families. However, will different styles of

single-parent families entail diverse travel preferences in GPT? What are the single-parent families' travel preferences in GPT? These questions are being explored in this paper.

## Theoretical Background

Behavioral decisions in the past decades viewed preferences are normally constructed through the process of elicitation (Slovic, 1995). In the tourism field, numerous preferences-related issues have been so researched that the theory has hereafter been put on enormous tests empirically, in order to understand travelers' preferences and travel behaviors.

Earlier studies dealing with preferences in tour destination proposes that 10 tourist attractions could be attributed to the personal preference of destinations, passive entertainment, active sports, and outdoor activities (Goodrich, 1978); meanwhile, they reveal another critical issue: product preferences are largely dominated by individual perception, familiarity, and the informative knowledge of the products.

Bojanic's (1992) study on family life cycles and overseas travel, which is considered one of the two relevant studies respectively, brings up the overseas vacation style of single parents. However, the defined mode of overseas travel in that study was not clear and non-specific. According to the questionnaire (attitude statement), the author had not included the GPT characteristics.

In addition, Standing (2001) emphasizes less leisure time for single mothers has led to choosing short-ranged trips, and that expenditures, spaces and time period are their priority concerns on outbound travel decision making. However, the study does not specifically outline the leisure activities that single mothers have actually enrolled in the trip.

Though the previous studies of preferences have been pragmatically informative, the literature focusing on single-parent families' on GPT has been relatively little; critical issue, like, "what do single-parent families perceive to be the key important preference factors in GPT?" are still waiting to be solved.

According to the preceding rationale, single-parent families tend to choose outbound GPT with concern for prices, security and convenience. Though the numbers (Garis, 1998; Department of Health, 2006; McGrath, Yeung, Bedi, 2002; Taanila, Laitinen, Moilanen, & Järvelin, 2002) and leisure time allocation (Zick, McCullough, & Smith, 1996) of single-parent families are relatively smaller than dual-parent families, statistics show it is a potential market growing rapidly (Ahuja, Capella, & Taylor, 1998;

Department of Health, 2006; Directorate General of Budget Accounting & Statistics Executive Yuan, 2005; McGrath, Yeung, & Bedi, 2002; Taanila, Laitinen, Moilanen, & Järvelin, 2002).

Technically, in terms of outbound GPT, single-parent families remain a critical niche market. If travel marketers could have an overall comprehension of travel preferences of single-parent families, a phenomenal niche market could be instantly identified. This paper aims at the exploration of the single-parent families' market, explicating the insightful views on their travel preferences of GPT.

## **Methodology**

### ***Definition of Single-Parent Family***

Most researchers, from diverse perspectives, define a single-parent family from two significant criteria: (1) the single parent has children and at least one is a minor-age child residing in the respondent's home; and (2) husband and wife are either legally separated, filing for divorce, widowed, cohabitating, or never married at the time of the survey (Ahuja, Capella, & Taylor, 1998; Alessandri, 1992; Bumpass & Raley, 1995; Heath & Orthner, 1999).

Numerous studies on the single-parent family have mentioned the importance and effects of children on family decision-making (Ahuja, Capella, & Taylor, 1998; Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989; Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Jenkins, 1979; Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977; Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004).

Hereafter, the operational state of single-parent families for this study is: "a single-parent family formed due to the death of one of the parents, divorce, separation, or cohabiting, with at least one child living with a single parent."

### ***Respondents Selection***

The divorce rate worldwide continues to climb, a trend that includes traditional Chinese society. But the Chinese have had a high regard for family values, which explains why many people in this society still find divorce unacceptable (Lau, 2003). Most members of single-parent families do not like to disclose their real situation in order to avoid discrimination.

To approach the qualified respondents, several single-parent associations are invited, such as the Chinese Single Parent Self-Help Association, the Single-Leaf-Orchid Widow/Widower Association, and the International

Single Parent Educational Foundation. It is believed that respondents from these above-listed organizations encompass the widest scope among all the other community groups of single parents in Taiwan. Thirty single-parent families with at least one outbound GPT experience over the previous three years were invited for the study (Bojanic, 1992; Lang, Milman, 1993; O'Leary, & Morrison, 1997).

### ***Research Questions***

Given that the study was exploratory, no theoretical hypotheses were engaged. The funnel approach of questions designed was used in the interviews, which goes from a wide range of questions to a narrow range of questions in order to draw a conclusion, with interviewers clearly expressing themselves (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Interviewees answered five main target questions and recounted real stories as much as possible. As past research has indicated, storytelling is a genuinely human way of making meaning out of individual experience (Glover, 2003; Polkinhorne, 1995).

As suggested by Woodside and Lysonski's (1989) traveler destination choice study, a survey question was formulated:

*What countries would the single-parent families be interested on GPT?*

The GPT visited places are not always the ones in which travelers are interested. To understand the destination preferences of the single-parent families, two critical questions were asked:

**Q<sub>1</sub>:** As a single-parent family, which destination would you most prefer to visit on an outbound GPT? Why? Please illustrate some true stories.

**Q<sub>2</sub>:** As a single-parent family, which destinations do you usually visit when joining an outbound GPT? Please illustrate with some true stories.

Some researchers found that Chinese travelers are highly concerned with the lodging quality on GPT (Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000; Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004). Suggested by Woodside and Lysonski's (1989) study, a question about hotel preferences of single-parent families was asked.

**Q<sub>3</sub>:** As single-parent family, what kind of hotel do you prefer on outbound GPT?

According to Woodside and Lysonski's research (1989), and Rao, Thomas and Javalgi' (1992) concerning travelers' activity preferences,

GPT activities of single-parent families' are relatively critical; therefore, this question was asked:

**Q<sub>4</sub>:** What activities have you ever enrolled in on outbound GPT, and what kinds of activities are you interested in at those local destinations? Why? Please illustrate with some true stories.

Ahuja, Capella, and Taylor (1998) see children of single-parent families having ultimate influence on GPT decision-making. Meanwhile, several studies on children's influence related to the travel decision-making process have been revealed (Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980; Jenkins, 1979; Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977; Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004). According to the preceding rationale, children's influence on family decision-making is clearly confirmed. However, children's influence regarding single-parent families is relatively limited.

Government statistics show nearly half of single-parent families are supported by their children (Directorate General of Budget Accounting & Statistics Executive Yuan, 2005). Therefore, the linkage of children's preferences to the overall GPT preferences is fundamentally crucial.

**Q<sub>5</sub>:** Will your children's preferences affect your choice and preference in arranging an outbound GPT and in what ways? Please illustrate with some true stories.

In Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, and Dufur's (1998) parenting style study, parental gender is critical because women and men are inherently different; they have unique parenting styles and ultimately make distinct contributions to their children's emotional development. Kelly (1992) also states, "life-defining elements, such as race, gender, and social class are more than differentiating numbers: they are basic life conditions shaping how we see the world and view possibilities as much as they determine access to resources." Therefore, this study explores whether different parental genders cause different perceptions on GPT preferences.

Finally, respondents are requested to provide information with regard to socio-demographic status and travel experiences related: the length of single-parenthood, gender, age, and educational background of children, in terms of single-parent family (Bumpass & Raley, 1995), as well as the annual average numbers on GPT.

## **Data Collection**

The respondents were contacted in advance to arrange proper time for interviews, given by interview themes to assure confidentiality (Yuksel, Bramwell, & Yuksel, 1999). Each interview was approximately 1.5 hours,

tape recorded and fully transcribed; a topic guide was engaged, steering the overall interviewing process. The respondents were asked detailed questions formulated for the study; they were encouraged to talk as much as they wished without any interruptions, except for clarification of information (de Chernatony & Riley, 1999).

### ***Member Checking***

Before the data analysis, member checking had been conducted, verifying the trustworthiness of the interview data. The transcripts were forwarded to each interviewee via registered letter with a stamped addressed envelope to verify that the transcripts represented accurate records of the interviews (Decrop, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All 30 transcripts were returned, of which 28 had no further changes and two indicated some typing errors: noted new events/accidents, and revision of some events/accidents.

### ***Characteristics of the Sample***

Of the 30 interviewed families, single female-headed versus single-male-headed is 22 to 8, leading to a ratio of 72.9 to 27.1. This figure corresponds to Taiwan demographics of single female-parents versus single male-parents: 7 to 3 (Directorate General of Budget Accounting & Statistics Executive Yuan, 2005).

Among the respondents, 36.7 % of the interviewees were in their early 50's to 60's, with 40 % possessing primary school diplomas, and 20 % with college degrees. Meanwhile, 30 % of interviewees were multiple-children-oriented, with at least two children in their 21-30's; nearly 27 % of the respondent-children are high school educated. And, 60 percent of the respondents have been through the loss of spouses transforming the family structures to the single-parent status. Additionally, 56 % were from government statistics. (Directorate General of Budget Accounting & Statistics Executive Yuan, 2005).

Finally, 46.7 % of them have been single parents for less than 10 years, with another 40 % for 11-20 years. Regarding the annual GPT experiences, the average number is one, accounting for 69 % and two for 20 % of the interviewees.

**TABLE 1**  
**Units of Analysis from the Content Analysis**

| <i>Question</i> <sup>a</sup> | Original Units | Removed Units | Remaining Units | Category | (%) <sup>b</sup> |
|------------------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|----------|------------------|
| <b>Q<sub>1</sub></b>         | 127            | 18            | 109             | 13       | 40.6 %           |
| <b>Q<sub>2</sub></b>         | 41             | 7             | 34              | 3        | 9.4 %            |
| <b>Q<sub>3</sub></b>         | 54             | 3             | 51              | 3        | 9.4 %            |
| <b>Q<sub>4</sub></b>         | 185            | 45            | 140             | 11       | 34.4 %           |
| <b>Q<sub>5</sub></b>         | 33             | 18            | 15              | 2        | 6.3 %            |
| <b>Total</b>                 | 440            | 91            | 349             | 32       | 100 %            |

a.: *Q<sub>1</sub>*: Destination preferences and considering reasons;

*Q<sub>2</sub>*: Destinations visited most frequently;

*Q<sub>3</sub>*: Preference for hotels;

*Q<sub>4</sub>*: Experience and preference for leisure activities;

*Q<sub>5</sub>*: Influences of children's preferences on the preferences and choices of the whole family.

b.: % =Category/Category total amount

### *Category Development and Reliability*

Once the basic unit of analysis was established, the next step was sorting the 440 units of analysis to five major questions which further developed the individually- specific categories. The single classification was recommended by Weber's category development (1990).

First, both judges (A & B) conducted an interactive process to individual unit which further classified the samples. Then, they re-read them and individually classified them into single categorization. Finally, 32 categories were initiated via accurate execution of inter-judge and intra-judge reliability testing.

According to Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990), Bitner, Booms, and Mohr (1994), Keaveney (1995), and Ronan and Latham (1974), if the inter-judge (different judge) and intra-judge (same judge) levels of agreement reach 0.80, the categorization process can be regarded as reliable. This study introduced a new judge C to conduct inter-judge reliability testing; a time-lag period of two weeks had been conducted substantially to reinforce the reliability of intra-judge (A & B) testing, as suggested by Davis and Cosenza (1993).

Judge C categorized all the 440 units to the categorization developed by judges A and B and was encouraged to create new categories, if possible. No new categories emerged in this confirmation process, indicating that no further interviewing was necessary. The tests of inter-judge reliability for judge C and intra-judge reliability for judges A and B were 0.92 and 0.95, all above 0.80.



## Results

After a rigorous classification procedure, 32 categories emerge from five earlier designed questions with respect to the destinations that single-parent families prefer, the impact factors of preferred GPT destinations are found among the 109 units of analysis procedure where 64 units are GPT destinations relevant.

Technically, Asia, Europe, America, and Oceania are the most visited GPT destinations, with Asia accounting for 36 units (56 %); Europe, 13 units (20 %), followed by America, eight units (13 %), and Oceania, seven units (11 %). In terms of individual examination of destination unit set, chi-square is executed, and the result of  $\chi^2=34.63$ ,  $p<.0001$  indicates a significant difference.

### *Destinations Favored by Single-Parent Families When Joining a GPT*

*Asia* (36/64, 56 %): Most respondents indicated that Mainland China, Thailand, and Japan are the top three favorite GPT destinations, with China scoring the most for its historical remains, cultural fascination and communicable language, Mandarin-Chinese. A single father-headed family illustrated, "Just like Yi He Yuan, or the Summer Palace [Beijing], is the best-kept existing royal garden and Shao Lin Temple [Henan Province, Mainland China], which is best-known for its Kung Fu, the martial arts school and Buddhist temple. On the other hand, Thailand was chosen for its inexpensive prices and short-ranged travel distance. "The environment [e.g. seaside and hot weather] is similar to Taiwan's and it's very pleasant to be surrounded by the ocean; plus, people here are also friendly," quoted from the interviewed families. Japan, however, is favored for its developed, high-quality cosmopolitan environment.

*Europe* (13/64, 20 %): the Netherlands, France, Belgium, and Italy were among the top four European GPT destinations. The following quotes were illustrative, "Europe is fantastic, especially France and the Netherlands; there are so many phenomenal castles, and the scenery is spectacular".

*America* (8/64, 13 %): The U.S. and Canada are the most popular North America GPT destinations, generally attributed to their rich culture and phenomenal views.

*Oceania* (7/64, 11 %): New Zealand and Australia are always favorite destinations of Asian travelers for the lovely climate and gentle people. One single father mentioned, "We had a lot of fun in New Zealand and Australia; the weather was very nice for traveling."

To test the independence of each unit of the different factors for preferred GPT destinations, chi-square was run, and the result was  $\chi^2=34.40$ ,  $p<.0001$ , indicating those factors for preferred GPT destinations possess significant difference.

With respect to why single-parent families selected specific destinations for outbound GPT, nine categories emerged and the top three were: (1) the particularities of the destination, which was the most influential factor, accounting for 14 out of 45 units with 31.1 %; (2) time and distance, accounting for 26.7 %; and (3) health and psychological conditions, marking four units with 8.9 %. Besides the above three categories, other categories were suggestions from friends, prices, theme of the GPT, itinerary arrangements, weather, and language.

### ***Factors for Single-Parent Families' Preferred GPT Destinations***

*The particularities of the destination* (14/45, 31.1 %): The destinations included national parks, characteristic spots and spectacular scenery. "It's amazing to see the diverse scenery in Japan" (e.g. Okinawa & Hokkaido). Meanwhile, some single-parent families mentioned that, "...in Thailand, entertainment that is not found in other countries, such as elephant trekking and Tiffany shows [transvestite cabaret show] are easily obtained."

*Time and distance* (12/45, 26.7 %): Length of itinerary, flight time and schedule arrangements are fundamental concerns of single-parent families when it comes to GPT destination choice. "I am getting old and my body can no longer stand long flights." Another single father said, "While my children are on summer vacation, I have to work, or vice versa; it's hard to get together for GPT."

*Health and psychological conditions* (4/45, 8.9 %): These factors include individual health situation, traveling risk perceptions, familiarity, and the willingness to go on a tour. One respondent stated, "My body is not exactly fit so I choose destinations that are very near to avoid long distance flights."

*Suggestions from friends* (3/45, 6.7 %): Several single-parent families note that their friends' suggestions are so crucial that they consult the choice of tour destination with them. "One of my friends invited me to join a GPT [with Japan as the destination] and so I decided to go with her." (an interviewee)

*Price* (3/45, 6.7 %): Destination was chosen mainly by its GPT price. According to two respondents, "We do not consider going to destinations where commodities are very expensive, like the U.S.A. and Japan."

*Theme of the GPT* (3/45, 6.7 %): One single mother remarked, "I have a young kid; therefore, I turn to the tour package where amusements or theme park activities are included."

*Itinerary arrangement* (3/45, 6.7 %): “The suitability of the GPT is the biggest concern during holiday seasons.” According to three single-parent families' statements, they found itineraries were difficult to meet their expectations.

*Weather* (2/45, 4.4 %): An older single parent stated, “Since I'm not adaptable to the dramatic change of climates, the weather of tour destination is a concern.”

*Language* (1/45, 2.2 %): The communicable language was another deciding factor. “Without the language barrier, I have indulged myself traveling in China.”

The second questions ( $Q_2$ ) concerned destination-preferences-oriented of single-parent families, with 34 units analyzed. Among the 34 units, Asian countries were perceived as the favorite, accounting for 23 units (68 %), with 10 units viewing America as great tour destination, and one unit for Australia.

To test the independence of each unit of destinations that is frequently visited by the single-parent families on outbound GPT, chi-square has been run. The result  $\chi^2=21.59$ ,  $p<.0001$  showed significant differences:

*Asia* (23/34, 68 %): Mainland China, Thailand, Singapore, Macau, and Japan.

*America* (10/34, 29 %): U.S.A. and Canada.

*Oceania* (1/34, 3 %): Australia.

It is noteworthy that 70 % of respondents have increased the frequency of outbound travels since the transformation of family structures. The Asian Pacific Region remains the most popular GPT attraction, and the preference for Europe and the U.S.A. has increased.

Comparing  $Q_1$  with  $Q_2$ , Asian countries remain the most visited destination for single-parent families, with North America scoring second. Nevertheless, several single parents mentioned the chances of revisiting certain Asian countries are not too high; if given better financial conditions, they would like to choose farther destinations, such as the U.S.A., Europe, and Australia.

For hotel preferences, three categories emerged from 51 units of analysis; 32 units are “high-quality hotels” (63 %) relevant. Meanwhile, “comfort and hygiene” account for 11 units (21 %), and “particularities of destination” for eight units (16 %).

Chi-square was used to study the independence of each unit; the result of  $\chi^2=20.12$ ,  $p<.0001$  indicates the factor of hotel preference of single-parent families is significant.

*High-quality hotels* (32/51, 63 %): In this category, the primary preference units included the best hotels in the destination areas: five star hotels and high-quality and luxurious hotels. Several respondents stated, "...it would be better to stay at the five star hotels to enjoy better accommodations and services."

*Comfort and hygiene* (11/51, 21 %): The chief factors leading to respondents' preferences for hotels were convenience, comfort, clean rooms, hygiene, etc., "In my last outbound group package tour to Southeast Asia [Malaysia], over the entire tour itinerary, we stayed at several different comfortable hotels, which was a great experience for me."

*The particularities of the destination* (8/51, 16 %): This category includes principal units, such as GPT hotels located at well-known beaches are more attractive; local-style cabins and Chinese-style hotels are relatively popular. "I prefer a hotel that is right beside the ocean, which gives me a chance to stroll along the shores in the evening," quoted a single father.

Single-parent families preferred staying at higher-ranked hotels or hotels with local particularities. A number of parents noted they were willing to pay more to stay at better quality hotels. This is found in both older and younger single parents. This phenomenon reflects that Taiwan's economy has improved and that quality requests for GPT accommodation arrangements are higher.

With regard to leisure activities that were experienced on the GPT, "water sports" was the mostly frequently mentioned category (39 %), followed by "static activities" (32 %) and "exciting activities" (13 %). Other categories were also included like "theme parks activities," "snow sports," and "shopping."

To test the independence of each unit of the leisure activities in which the single-parent families participated, chi-square was run, and the result was  $\chi^2=53.32, p<.0001$ , indicating that the types of leisure activities that the single-parent families experienced were significantly different.

### ***Leisure Activities Experienced***

*Water sports* (30/76, 39 %): These units included diving, swimming, water skiing, jet skis [e.g. Hawaii & Thailand], dragging-chute [Thailand], rafting [Mainland China], canoeing [Thailand], submarine [Southeast Asian countries], and kayaking [Thailand].

*Static activities* (24/76, 32 %): Visiting scenic spots, historical monuments, and caves; experiencing cable cars, clubbing, or joining local festivals.

*Exciting activities* (10/76, 13 %): Parachuting and jeep safaris [Phuket, Thailand].

*Theme park activities* (7/76, 9 %): Disneyland visits, [Universal Studios] virtual reality experiences, Sea World tours, etc.

*Snow sports* (3/76, 4 %): Snow skiing and bobsledding, etc.

*Shopping* (2/76, 3 %): Shopping at souvenir stores and local super-malls typically led by tour guides or tour leaders.

Because of the limited time and financial considerations, Thailand, Malaysia, Mainland China, and Japan, where water activities are generally involved, are most visited: Southeast Asia is welcomed for its gorgeous beaches (e.g. Patong Beach [Thailand], Sanur Beach [Indonesia], Pasir Lalang Beach [Malaysia], and Maipama Beach, [Japan]). Historical spots and monuments in Japan are popular on GPT while China is mostly visited for its great historical culture remains.

The data analysis here has been classified into 64 units, where “static activities” account for 26 units (41 %), “water sports,” 17 units (26 %), and 7 units (11 percent) for “exciting activities”: “theme park activities” and “local activities.” Meanwhile, chi-square is conducted, and the result of  $\chi^2=22.88$ ,  $p < .0001$  indicates the different styles of the preferred leisure activities were significant.

### ***Leisure Activities Preferred***

*Static activities* (26/64, 41 %): Walking on the beach, eco-tours, outdoor musical fairs, animal shows (e.g. monkey shows in Japan), visiting temples [in Mainland China, Japan, & Thailand], and city tours or sightseeing.

*Water sports* (17/64, 26 %): Snorkeling, swimming, kayaking [Thailand], water skiing, and jet skis [e.g. Hawaii & Thailand].

*Exciting activities* (7/64, 11 %): Bungee jumping [Thailand] and parachuting.

*Theme park activities* (7/64, 11 %): Roller coasters [Magic Mountain], Fantasyland [Disneyland], going behind the scenes where popular movies are being made [Universal Studio], Australia's animal displays and other entertainment [Sea World, Australia].

*Local activities* (7/64, 11 %): Visiting ski resorts in Korea, Thai massage and Simon Cabaret in Thailand, rafting in Mainland China, and experiencing special local customs (e.g. ice sculptures in Haaerbin City, Mainland China).

In short, from the preceding discussion about the leisure activities on GPT, what is most noteworthy is that the leisure activities most frequently experienced by single-families on GPTs are water sports, although, the most desired activities of single-family in GPTs are static activities. This divergence presents some interesting and useful information that can be translated into marketing and managerial guidelines for travel marketers.

Finally, from the results of  $Q_5$ , 15 units emerged in this category. With regard to how children's travel preferences influence the single-parent family's travel preferences, children's feelings ranked highest with 12 units (80 %) while financial support from children was second (3 units, represents 20 %).

To test the independence of each unit on how children's travel preferences influence the single parents' decision-making, chi-square is executed. The result of  $\chi^2=5.40$ ,  $p<.05$ , indicates the different ways children's travel preferences influence single-parent family's travel preferences.

### ***Children's Travel Preferences Influence Single-Parent Family's Travel Preferences***

*Children's feelings* (12/15, 80 %): Travel experience and the willingness of children are the factors single parents emphasized; therefore, the destinations that interest their children are the places that would interest them.

*Financial support by children* (3/15, 20 %): If the children sponsor most of the expenses of GPT, their involvement on tour decision-making is obviously greater.

Single-parent families' travel preferences are affected by children in two ways. First, children's willingness and suggestions on preferred travel destinations. Second, financial support from children. Interestingly, this research has found that some single parents do not enjoy traveling with their children. Seven single-parent families, (six female-headed, one male-headed; three elderly, and four middle aged), indicated not being interested in traveling abroad with their children; instead, they would enjoy spending more time with friends.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This study intentionally discloses the niche market of single-parent families on its diverse GPT preferences. The relatively small sample size has put the database through a microanalysis and meticulous interpretation. The discoveries have led to pragmatic GPT tactical marketing and conductive guides of management.

First, the divorced single-parent families seem to possess particular preferences for Europe, such as The Netherlands, France, Belgium, and Italy. The splendid cultures and elaborate living qualities are so tempting that they perfectly meet their high expectations. Meanwhile, Canada and the U.S.A., with richly refreshing pop cultures, are particularly welcomed by the younger families with either deceased spouses or humble education. Subsequently, a proposition displayed as:

**Proposition 1:** The preferred destination of the single-parent family will be different based on the type of the single-parent family on GPT.

There are three major critical “preference differences” which were found between the single mother-headed and single father-headed families: (1) Destination; (2) Accommodation; and (3) Leisure Activity.

*Destination preferences:* As Asia remains the most popular destination of single parents, it is obvious that fathers found China and Europe (e.g. France, U.K., Greece, and Italy) to be more enjoyable, while single mothers preferred traveling in Southeast Asia (e.g. Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia), followed by the U.S.A. and Canada. Geographically, single fathers are more attached to the splendidly exotic culture; on the other hand, single mothers are fascinated by a leisurely laid-back atmosphere. “We need more fresh air and different space to take a deep breath,” cited a single mother. In short, this inclination leads to proposition two:

**Proposition 2:** The preferred destinations of the single-male and female-headed families would be different on GPT.

*Hotel preferences:* Although high-quality hotels are emphasized by both female-headed single families and male-headed single families, tremendous divergences have still been found. Obviously, single mothers are more concerned with prices and accommodations, whereas single fathers stressed exterior designs and luxuriousness.

Preference divergence could be traced to gender differences (Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, & Dufur, 1998), that parental gender is a critical figure in this research, hence:

**Proposition 3:** The preferred hotels of the single-male and female-headed family will be different when taking a GPT.

**TABLE 2**  
**Results of Qualitative Data**

| Questions and Categories   | Units/Overall | Percentage |
|--|---------------|------------|
| As a single-parent family, which destination would you most prefer to visit on an outbound GPT?<br>Why? Please illustrate some true stories. |               |            |
| The destination favored by single-parent families when joining a GPT:  |               |            |
| (1) A. Asia  | 36/64         | 56 %       |
| B. Europe  | 13/64         | 20 %       |
| C. America   | 8/64          | 13 %       |
| D. Oceania   | 7/64          | 11 %       |
| Factors for the single-parent families preferred GPT destinations:   |               |            |
| (2) A. the particularities of the destination  | 14/45         | 31.1 %     |
| B. time and distance   | 12/45         | 26.7 %     |
| C. health and psychological situation  | 4/45          | 8.9 %      |
| D. suggestions from friends  | 3/45          | 6.7 %      |
| E. Price   | 3/45          | 6.7 %      |
| F. theme of the GPT  | 3/45          | 6.7 %      |
| G. itinerary arrangements  | 3/45          | 6.7 %      |
| H. weather   | 2/45          | 4.4 %      |
| I. language  | 1/45          | 2.2 %      |
| As a single-parent family, which destination do you usually visit when joining an outbound GPT?  |               |            |
| (1) A. Asia  | 23/34         | 68 %       |
| B. America   | 10/34         | 29 %       |
| C. Oceania   | 1/34          | 3 %        |



|  |  |  |      |       |      |
|--|--|--|------|-------|------|
| <b>Q<sub>3</sub> :</b>   | As a single-parent family, what kind of hotel do you prefer on outbound GPT?   |  |      |       |      |
|  | A.   | High-quality hotels                    |      | 32/51 | 63 % |
|  | B.   | comfort and hygiene                    |      | 11/51 | 21 % |
|  | C.   | the particularities of the destination |      | 8/51  | 16 % |
| <b>Q<sub>4</sub> :</b>   | What activities have you ever enrolled in outbound GPT, and what kinds of activities are you interested in at those local destinations? Why? Please illustrate with some true stories. |  |      |       |      |
|  | Leisure activities experienced:  |  |      |       |      |
|  | A.   | water sports                           |      | 30/76 | 39 % |
|  | B.   | static activities                      |      | 24/76 | 32 % |
|  | C.   | exciting activities                    | (1)  | 10/76 | 13 % |
|  | D.   | theme park activities                  |      | 7/76  | 9 %  |
|  | E.   | snow sports                            |      | 3/76  | 4 %  |
| F.   | shopping   |  | 2/76 | 3 %   |      |
| <b>Q<sub>5</sub> :</b>   | Leisure activities preferred:  |  |      |       |      |
|  | A.   | static activities                      | (2)  | 26/64 | 41 % |
|  | B.   | water sports                           |      | 17/64 | 26 % |
|  | C.   | exciting activities                    |      | 7/64  | 11 % |
|  | D.   | theme park activities                  |      | 7/64  | 11 % |
|  | E.   | local activities                       |      | 7/64  | 11 % |
| Will your children's preferences affect your choice and preference in arranging an outbound GPT? In what ways do their influences play a role? Please illustrate with some true stories. |  |  |      |       |      |
|  | A.   | children's feelings                    |      | 12/15 | 80 % |
|  | B.   | financial support by children          |      | 3/15  | 20 % |

*Leisure activity preferences*: Statistically, traveling expenditures are more affordable for middle-aged single parents in which physical condition and consultation with children are a concern. Static activities are popular among single-parent families: visiting local sceneries and historical spots. It further suggests one of the major selection criteria of destination: desire for scenic beauty and local attractions, such as visiting natural environments, cultural characteristics, and sightseeing points (Cai, Boger, & O'Leary, 1999; Mok & Armstrong, 1995; Wong & Kwong, 2004), accordingly:

**Proposition 4**: Single-parent families prefer static activities when joining an outbound GPT.

Influence of children on travel decision-making in this study is different from Bojanic's 1992 study of family life cycle and travel, which shows no significance of children on vacations planning. By contrast, this research reversely identifies children as critical figures on decision-making. For example, because of the Chinese value of filial piety, it is the children's obligation to pay partly or entirely the outbound GPT expenses (Wang, Mao, & Chou, 2001), therefore:

**Proposition 5**: The preference of a single-parent family in choosing the destination and leisure activities will be influenced by their children.

Technically, single-parent families have no issues in traveling with those having similar or different family backgrounds on outbound GPT, which overturns the stigmatized Chinese values of single-parent families being ostracized. Several single mothers and single fathers have noted that, "At the initial single parenthood, I could not accept being alone and facing tremendous pressure. To de-pressure myself, instead of joining GPT, I went for foreign individual travel (FIT). Nonetheless, a few years later, I realized that adjusting myself to a positive mindset is necessarily urgent, which incited me to sign up for the GPT.

Travel marketers should be more aware of this shifting preference existing at the different stages of single parenthood. Meanwhile, genders of the single-parent families also have revealed significances on travel preferences, to which marketers could also pay more attention. The success of travel agents relies on their ability to provide products which suit the needs of clients (McKercher, Packer, Yau, & Lam, 2003). Accordingly, if travel marketers tend to develop the niche market of single-parent families, there is a prospective segment that could be targeted.

Therefore, travel marketers should meet single-parent families' needs and differentiate them from other market segments that single parents might

find more enjoyable: for instance, designing more optional tours, reducing the invisible pressure from interacting with other dual-parents structured, or planning closer relationships related to activities on GPT itinerary.

In conclusion, the results of single-parent families' travel preferences on GPT are unlikely to be solely unique in Taiwan. In many Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, and China, GPTs are also very common. This paper undertakes a qualitative analysis and comparison with previous literature, clarifying what are the factors influencing single-parent families on outbound GPT selections. As well, the study has contributed a great deal of meticulous marketing strategies and tactical blueprints for travel marketers. This research is a pioneer which not only complements previous studies on outbound GPT, but also explores the niche market of single-parent family preferences, particularly in evaluating the decision process.

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Chin-Tsai LIN, Kuo-Ching WANG, Ching YEH et Wen-Yu CHEN  
*Quelques éclaircissements sur les préférences  
 des familles monoparentales en matière de voyages à forfait en groupe*

## RÉSUMÉ

Avec les changements de structure sociale interne qu'ont connus les familles à travers le monde depuis la fin des années 1960, les études sur le comportement des familles monoparentales sont devenues l'un des domaines de recherche les plus prestigieux se rapportant aux préférences en matière de voyages à l'étranger. La présente étude, qui porte sur les voyages à forfait en groupe (VFG), est fondée sur l'observation méticuleuse de 30 familles taïwanaises et elle est la première à traiter des préférences des familles monoparentales. Une étude minutieuse et des tests du khi-carré ont donné des résultats différents de ceux obtenus à l'aide de la formule générale appliquée antérieurement aux VFG, en faisant ressortir des préférences notables chez les familles monoparentales.

La présente étude va plus loin en mettant en relief le rôle important des enfants, tout particulièrement dans la prise de décision. À l'encontre de ce qui ressort des études précédentes sur les voyages, les préférences des enfants et le parrainage financier ont une grande influence sur les choix et les préférences. Les auteurs proposent cinq thèses assorties de suggestions d'une portée et d'une valeur éventuelle significatives pour les spécialistes en commercialisation des voyages.

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Chin-Tsai LIN, Kuo-Ching WANG, Ching YEH, and Wen-Yu CHEN  
*Shedding Some Light on Single-Parent Families' Travel Preferences  
 in Group Package Tour*

## ABSTRACT

As the internal social structures of families have been dramatically changing worldwide since the late 1960s, studies of behaviors of single-parent families have turned into one of the most prestige exploring territories on outbound travel preferences. In terms of Group Package Tours (GPT), this study meticulously surveyed 30 families from Taiwan and has been a pioneer in examining the single-parent families' preferences. Through close analysis and chi-square measures, the results have led to significant preferences of single-parent families different from the earlier GPT general formula.

This paper has gone one step further, revealing children's significant roles, particularly on decision making. Inconsistent with prior travel studies, children's preference and financial sponsorship greatly affect choices and preferences. Five propositions are outlined in this paper with significant implications and suggestions for travel marketers.

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Chin-Tsai LIN, Kuo-Ching WANG, Ching YEH y Wen-Yu CHEN  
*Algunas aclaraciones sobre las preferencias de las familias monoparentales con relación a los viajes en grupo todo incluido*

## RESUMEN

Con los cambios de estructura social interna que han conocido las familias por todas partes en el mundo a partir de los años 60, los estudios sobre el comportamiento de las familias monoparentales se han convertido en uno de los dominios de investigación más prestigiosos con respecto a las preferencias en materia de viajes al extranjero. El presente estudio, que trata sobre los viajes en grupo todo incluido (VGI), está fundado sobre la observación meticulosa de 30 familias taiwanesas y éste es el primero que trata sobre las preferencias de las familias monoparentales. Un estudio minucioso y pruebas de Chi cuadrado han proporcionado resultados diferentes de los obtenidos con ayuda de la fórmula general aplicada anteriormente a los VGI, haciendo resaltar preferencias notables en las familias monoparentales.

Este estudio va más lejos poniendo en relieve el papel importante de los hijos, particularmente en la toma de decisión. Al contrario de lo que resalta de los estudios precedentes sobre los viajes, las preferencias de los hijos y el patrocinio financiero tienen una gran influencia sobre la elección y las preferencias. Los autores proponen cinco tesis que contienen sugerencias de un alcance y de un valor eventual significativas para los especialistas en comercialización de viajes.