# Unpacking Tourist Experience: A Case Study of Chinese Tourists Visiting the UK

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**Abstract :** This study aims to provide an explanatory account of how the leisure tourist experience emerges from tourists and their surroundings through a critical realist lens. This was achieved by applying Archer's realist social theory as the underlying theoretical ground to unpack the interplays between the external (tourism system or structure) and the internal (tourists or agency). This theory argues that social phenomena can be analyzed in three domains - structure, agency, and culture (SAC), and along three phases – structure conditioning, sociocultural interactions, and structure elaboration. From the realist perspective, the world is an open system; events and discourses are irreducible to present individuals and collectivities. Therefore, identifying the processes or mechanisms is key to help researchers understand how social reality is brought about. Based on the contextual nature of the tourist experience, the research focuses on Chinese tourists (from mainland China) to London as a destination and British culture conveyed through the concept of the destination image. This study uses an intensive approach based on Archer's M/M approach to discover the mechanisms/processes of the emergence of the tourist experience. Individual interviews were conducted to reveal the underlying causes of lived experiences of the tourists. Secondary data was also collected to understand how British destinations are portrayed to Chinese tourists.