



Progress in Chinese hotel research: A review of SSCI-listed journals



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ABSTRACT

As China becomes a major market in the global hotel industry, a growing number of research studies related to Chinese hotel have recently been published in leading journals. Based on the existing reviews, this study aims to review Chinese hotel research from a different perspective. This is the first study to review publications on Chinese hotel studies which were published in the listed journals of Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). A systematic approach was used to analyze 93 articles, and a large increase in Chinese hotel research was observed in the most recent five years (2009–2013). The findings of the most popular publication channels, as well as those of the most active scholars and institutions in this field, are presented to provide valuable information for academic stakeholders. On the basis of the research foci analysis, the gaps between research and industry were identified, which indicated trends and future research priorities.

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1. Background

Despite a modest slowdown of China's economic growth in recent years, Chinese hotel industry is still forging ahead at a rapid pace of development. Hotel operators both in the country and abroad are trying to seek for opportunities in this densely populated nation. Such a trend is largely due to the consideration of proliferation of middle class in China, and the government policy to boost domestic consumption and the emergence of China as a world popular tourism destination. At present, China has become one of the largest markets for different international hotel groups. For instance, Wyndham Hotel Group has approximately 64,800 rooms in the development pipeline in China, and Hilton has more than 90 hotels in its China pipeline, and intends to expand the number during next five years (www.hotelnewsnow.com). As China's hotel industry continues to grow and becomes increasingly global, a growing body of research studies related to Chinese hotels emerged from different perspectives (Chen and Kim, 2010; Ye et al., 2011; Hsu et al., 2012a,b). Although the published academic articles reflect the state of Chinese hotel development in various aspects, a systematic review that can provide a more

comprehensive understanding of Chinese hotel research and the recent trends in the industry is necessary for policy makers, hotel managers, and researchers.

Literature synthesis studies on Chinese hotels are, however, few, and the most recent reviews are limited to articles published until 2009 (Kong and Cheung, 2009; Gross et al., 2013). This status suggests that Chinese hotel research development in the past five years (2009–2013) remains unclear, and a holistic and up-to-date overview is thus necessary. After successfully hosting international mega events, such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, and the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, China has captured the world's attention and attracted an increasing number of visitors. In 2012, visitor arrivals in China reached 132 million, and the average length of stay was 7.5 days (China National Tourism Administration, 2013). The number of star-rated hotels in China reached 11,367, with 1.5 million guest rooms, by the end of 2012 (China National Tourism Administration, 2013). Along with the significant development opportunities in recent years, a series of problems and challenges, such as achieving a balance between state-owned systems that remain dominant in China and dynamic free markets to promote international competitiveness, as well as challenges for expatriate hotel managers to enhance their adaptability to the Chinese cultural environment, emerged in China's hotel industry (Gross and Huang, 2011; Miao et al., 2011). These circumstances provided a wider stage for scholars and industry management practitioners to explore. Thus, to fill in the research void of the recent five years, an important objective of the current study is to provide an up-to-date and comprehensive review of Chinese hotel research.

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Prior reviews on Chinese hotel research usually collected papers from major online academic databases using the keywords “China hotel” (Kong and Cheung, 2009; Gross et al., 2013). Kong and Cheung (2009) developed a profile of existing English language studies obtained from ProQuest Basic Search, EBSCO Host Web, and Emerald Management Review, while Gross et al. (2013) further searched the Hospitality and Tourism Complete as well as Science Direct databases. Although these databases contain a number of academic journals from various disciplines, being included in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) list is increasingly considered by scholars and research institutions because of its quality standard (Law and Chon, 2007). The SSCI is by now the most commonly used source worldwide for comparative bibliometric analysis of disciplines and faculties in the field of economics and social sciences (Verbeek et al., 2002). Furthermore, in recent years, SSCI inclusion is considered as an essential indicator of researchers’ academic quality in different academic institutions and universities. According to a result of a survey conducted to economics department chairs in American universities, SSCI citation counts usually come up in promotion cases, and the trend of putting greater weight on citation counts will likely be extended in the next 10 years (Klein and Chiang, 2004). Hence, another purpose of this study is to review Chinese hotel research from a different and valuable perspective. We focused on studies related to Chinese hotels in the SSCI database, in an attempt to identify the research trend from leading journals, which should be of use to readers of the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

Owing to the important function that research foci serve to reflect the trends in the areas covered by recent studies, many synthesis studies on hospitality research regarded these foci to be a crucial part of the research discussion. Current hospitality review articles notably show growing diversity in research foci. For instance, Park et al. (2011) covered 11 fields of hospitality studies in their framework, which was based on the study conducted by Baloglu and Assante (1999), while Law et al. (2012) updated their work by adding consumer behavior (CB) as a new focus in hospitality research. However, previous review articles on Chinese hotel research only identified a few research foci, namely, strategy and development, human resource management, service quality, marketing, hotel operation and performance, hotel business environment issues, and finance (Kong and Cheung, 2009; Gross et al., 2013). We determine whether this status could be attributed to the difference between international and Chinese hotel studies in terms of research foci or to the limited number of review years. More importantly, it is unknown whether the absence or/and the high concentration of some specific research themes truly reflects the industry development. Some scholars argue that the tourism industry does not pay much direct attention to research (Buckley, 2008) and topical trends in academic journals should therefore change to meet the industry practice (Yoo et al., 2011). In the past decade, hotel development in China has become a new type of asset for Chinese real-estate developers in light of local governments’ encouraging policy for mixed-use projects (residential, commercial, retail and hotel). However, the driving force behind hotel development in China is quite different from the West and the traditional hospitality management perspective. It would thus be valuable to examine if these China-specific items have gained attention from the academia. Additionally, it would be useful to find out whether the existing Chinese hotel research can meet the industry practice. Based on the existing synthesis studies on hotel research, this study also aims at identifying the gap between research efforts and industry practice as well as the unique feature of Chinese hotel research, thereby to suggest possible directions for future research. More specifically, we adopted the most recently modified framework of hospitality research foci proposed by Law et al. (2012),

and compared and contrasted the difference between Chinese and international hotel research foci. In addition, this study examines the cross-tabulations of research foci and sample source of different types of Chinese hotel.

2. Methodology

To provide a representative and comprehensive overview of the contemporary development of Chinese hotel research, this study adopted a systematic review approach to examine all articles related to Chinese hotels that were published in SSCI-listed journals. A systematic review is a useful approach in mapping out areas containing diverse knowledge by integrating and categorizing articles pertinent to a specific topic, according to a predetermined framework (Weed, 2006). On account of its exhaustive, objective, and transparent characteristics, the systematic review approach has been widely applied in various fields (Cook et al., 1997), including tourism and hospitality (Law et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2013), to provide a comprehensive summary of the literature.

The first step was a thorough search of relevant papers within the SSCI database in November 2013, using keywords “China” and “hotel”. All articles related to Chinese hotel research were obtained from the SSCI-listed journals, which can be accessed via the Web of Science. “Chinese hotel research”, it should be noted, refers to the research on all ownership types of hotels in China including state-owned, collective, private, alliance, stock, foreign-invested and Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan-invested hotels. SSCI is a significant and influential journal list compiled by the Institute for Scientific Information from leading social science journals across 50 disciplines. In view of its international recognition and representativeness for high-quality research, we selected SSCI-listed journals for synthesis, providing valuable academic references for scholars. Only full-length papers with novel contributions to Chinese hotel research development were included for further analysis. Book reviews, literature reviews, conference papers, research notes, and editor prefaces were excluded because of their limited contribution to knowledge development (Yoo et al., 2011; Law et al., 2012). All authors independently read through each article to select relevant papers to be included, and any disagreement on inclusion and classification was discussed until a consensus was reached. The first selected article was authored by Ma, Buhalis and Song in 2003 which discussed how information communication technology changed the hotel industry structure in China. At the end of the selecting process, a total of 93 articles related to Chinese hotels which were published between 2003 and 2013 were identified and included for analysis in this study.

The next step was to examine each article in terms of publication year and journal, methodology, authorship, and research foci by content analysis. To ensure objectivity and reliability, the grouping and classifying process was also conducted by individual authors, followed by a cross-comparison and further discussion until a consensus was reached. It is possible that personal bias may exist during such a classifying process. As such, when we encountered different grouping results, we compared and contrasted the findings among each other to determine the accuracy and objectivity. For the methodology review, each article was examined based on research approach (i.e. quantitative, qualitative, and mixed), data collection methods, sample, and major data analysis methods. With reference to authorship, institutional and regional contributions were measured, and the rankings in recent years were provided. One of the key features of the systematic review is the appraisal of relevant studies according to a pre-determined framework. Researchers conducting systematic reviews believe pre-determined exclusion and quality criteria can reduce the likelihood of bias from the authors during the selection

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