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Economic and socio-cultural impacts of Mainland Chinese tourists on Hong Kong residents

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the economic and socio-cultural impacts from the burgeoning mainland Chinese tourists on Hong Kong residents. Ten individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect Hong Kong residents' views. Content analysis was employed to analyze the data. The results showed that the socio-cultural aspects were reported negatively with regard to culture, shopping and dining, and transportation but conversely, it had a positive impact on education and infrastructure. The economic aspect showed that residents accepted and appreciated the economic benefits brought by the inflow of mainland Chinese tourists. The Hong Kong government should consider these impacts, and then provide better solutions for residents' lives and plans to cope with the upcoming scenario which might arise regarding Hong Kong's economic boom and more tourists traveling to Hong Kong. Recommendations are also suggested in this study for further development.

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Introduction

The tourism industry has become an economic pillar of Hong Kong with the majority of tourists coming from mainland China. Numbers of mainland visitors have boomed (reported at 16.7%), with 40 million in 2013 of the total 54 million tourists in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2014) due to the introduction of the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) in 2003. This exceeds the expected 42 million in 2015 from the forecast in 2011 (Siu, Lee, & Leung, 2013). Since this implementation was announced by China, residents from 49 cities across China (numbering approximately 250 million) are now officially permitted to travel independently to Hong Kong (Want China Times, 2012). Many case studies have reported the general perceptions of residents regarding the impact of tourism (Belisle & Hoy,

1980; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013; Tsundoda & Mendlinger, 2009; Zhuoyang, 2005) which Hong Kong residents have seen to be similar to other areas of the tourism boom as well. Interesting evidence from China Real Time (2014) mentioned a survey in 2012 by the University of Hong Kong, which reported that only 28 percent of Hong Kong residents viewed mainland Chinese visitors in a positive way. Ko (2012) reported that wealthy mainlanders have been welcomed recently because of Hong Kong's struggling economy and are filling hotel rooms and shopping in designer stores. However, there are perceptions by Hong Kong's locals that the mainlanders have driven up overall property prices, leaving even middle-class Hongkongers struggling to afford rents or mortgage down payments, putting pressure on housing, school places, health care, including from locally born babies with mainland parents who have automatic residency (37% of babies born were to mainland families) in an already overcrowded city.

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It should be noted that Hong Kong society was built along British lines and adopted to English values even though the locals were ethnic Chinese. Uniquely, Hong Kong values slowly emerged alongside the city's economic and society development. For instance, Hong Kong residents were well-educated, worked efficiently, and understood the standard manners which were seen as the mark of an educated person (Ko, 2012; Siu et al., 2013). For these reasons, they seemed different from the mainland Chinese and the potential for conflicts and tension was always there. However, there are various benefits that Hong Kong receives from mainland Chinese tourists as well. A study on the impacts of tourism has recognized that the population of the destination has perceived economic and social benefits and costs from tourists on their community and lives (Tsendoda & Mendlinger, 2009). Tourism impacts may be analyzed from four perspectives: economic, society, culture, and environment, with both positive and negative impacts (Kim et al., 2013). Tourism generates economic growth, improves the standard of living, and develops infrastructure, as well as raising investment and business activities (Kim et al., 2013; Tsendoda & Mendlinger, 2009). On the other hand, prices of land, goods, and services are also dramatically raised by tourism which clearly have an effect on local residents (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Kim et al., 2013; Tsendoda & Mendlinger, 2009). However, it seems that the effect of tourism on the cost of land and housing is a neutral perception of local residents (Belisle & Hoy, 1980), which implies that different groups in the community might have different perceptions of the impact on their community and lives (Tsendoda & Mendlinger, 2009). Much attention to this positive attitude has demonstrated that if residents receive more benefits or are economically dependent on tourism, they tend to be more supportive than those who are not (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Zhuoyang, 2005). Siu et al. (2013) agree with this in that if local residents express positive opinions on the impact of tourism, they are likely to support tourism development and welcome more tourists.

Socio-cultural perspectives show that tourism contributes to social problems such as beggars, gambling, drugs, prostitution, increased crime levels, congestion, and crowding (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Kim et al., 2013; Kreag, 2001), while positive views focus on developing and upgrading infrastructure and facilities (Kim et al., 2013). The cultural impact might vary based on residents' social relationships in regions, level of education, the communication between locals and tourists, and image of international tourists (Kim et al., 2013). Interchanges between hosts and guests create a better cultural understanding and can also help raise awareness of the preservation of traditional customs and festivals, while it can also lead to the erosion of traditional cultures. Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996) reported that tourism also influenced the host population's spoken language which can become displaced by the tourists' native languages. Furthermore, some research has indicated that the social and cultural impact has affected community residents regarding their overall sense of well-being which consists of material life, community life, and health and safety (Kim et al., 2013).

This paper studied the socio-cultural and economic impacts on Hong Kong residents from the flourishing number of mainland Chinese tourists visiting Hong Kong. Due to the great number of tourists from mainland China, existing impacts might occur to the local residents' livelihood, as suggested by many studies which have reported the perceptions of residents regarding the impacts of tourism in specific countries and towns (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Tsendoda & Mendlinger, 2009). The main research question of this study was "What are the economic and socio-cultural impacts of mainland Chinese tourists on Hong Kong residents?"

Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to study the socio-cultural and economic impacts of mainland Chinese tourists' influence on Hong Kong residents using qualitative research methods. A qualitative study was designed to be consistent with the assumption of a qualitative paradigm in a process of understanding a social or human problem, building a holistic picture, formed with words, reporting the detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting (Hill, 2012; Maxwell, 2013). Interviews enabled the researcher to explore the richness, depth and understanding of the phenomena in their natural setting (Maxwell, 2013; Veal, 2011). Semi-structured and open-ended questions were used in order to encourage the respondents to give details based on their experience and the researchers gained the opportunity to obtain thoughtful answers. Thus, a semi-structured interview was the main data collection method applied to access local residents' opinions. Table 1 illustrates the interview questions which were guided from a literature review. The questions comprised two main areas of this study: social-cultural and economic impacts. Moreover, the interview protocol included questions prompted by the interviewees. For instance, if the interviewees mentioned a quota was placed on the number of residents entering the school, in subsequent interviews, the researchers incorporated a question about these issues.

The target sample was Hong Kong residents with a total of 10 respondents. A snowball sample was employed to collect data on a few members of the target population by asking those individuals to provide information needed to locate other members whom they knew (Babbie, 2001). The weakness of snowball sampling was that it did not lead to a representative sample but it has been reported as the best method when there is a time limitation (Babbie, 2001; Maxwell, 2013).

Table 1
Samples of interview questions

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- Q1 What aspects do you think have the most influential impact on your daily life effected by mainland Chinese tourists?
 - Socio-cultural impacts
 - Economic impacts
- Q2 How do those aspects affect you in your daily life?
- Q3 What is your recommendation to minimize those impacts or develop the cases?
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