



Feeling superior or deprived? Attitudes and underlying mentalities of residents towards Mainland Chinese tourists

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HIGHLIGHTS

- A psychological mechanism model accounts for resident attitude and mentality formation.
- The proposed model demonstrates how SIT connects SET and SRT.
- Unfavourable attitudes toward MCTs exceed neutral or positive attitudes.
- Hong Kong residents feel both superior and being deprived when evaluating MCTs.
- Hong Kong residents make both latitudinal and longitudinal comparisons with MCTs.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 October 2016

Received in revised form

18 November 2017

Accepted 24 November 2017

Keywords:

Resident attitude and mentality

Social identity theory

Dominant source market

Mainland Chinese tourists

Sense of superiority

Relative deprivation

ABSTRACT

The exponential increase in the number of Mainland Chinese tourists (MCTs) and their sudden influx to popular destinations worldwide have resulted in increasingly frequent media reports on their behaviours and encounters with hosts. However, the academic literature has inadequately analysed resident attitudes towards this surging and, in a few destinations, dominant group. The current study addresses this gap by examining the attitudes and mentalities of Hong Kong (HK) residents towards MCTs and revealing their underlying psychological mechanism. A total of 39 semi-structured interviews demonstrate that unfavourable attitudes towards MCTs have exceeded neutral or positive attitudes. Moreover, HK residents share two intertwined mentalities – sense of superiority and feeling of deprivation. Findings are discussed under the social identity meta-theoretical framework, and a cyclic psychological mechanism of ‘social categorisation–social identity–social comparison’ is identified underlying resident attitude and community mentality formation.

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1. Introduction

The importance of the Mainland Chinese market to the Hong Kong (HK) economy, particularly to the city's tourism industry, cannot be overstated. Given the Individual Visit Scheme launched in 2003, arrivals from Mainland China had a five-fold increase and accounted for 76% of the total arrivals in the city in 2016 (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2017). The influx of Mainland Chinese tourists (MCTs) has added constant and considerable burden to HK,

which is one of the world's most densely populated cities. HK's 7.3 million residents share their living spaces with five times as many tourists in 2015 as in 2003 (see Fig. 1).

The tension between HK residents and MCTs has substantially increased along with these growth figures (Ye, Zhang, Shen, & Goh, 2014), and the negative public opinion on MCTs reached its peak with a series of ‘anti-locust’ protests in early 2014 (Rowen, 2016). Protesters staged satirical rallies to urge MCTs to go back to Mainland China. The ensuing Umbrella Movement has been regarded as ‘a panoply of identity politics and civic passions, some of which was anti-China and anti-Chinese’ (Rowen, 2016, p. 389). The MCT arrivals in 2015 declined for the first time in over a decade and the downward trend continued in 2016, thereby corroborating that the hostility of residents towards tourists could restrain tourism development because tourists are often reluctant to visit places

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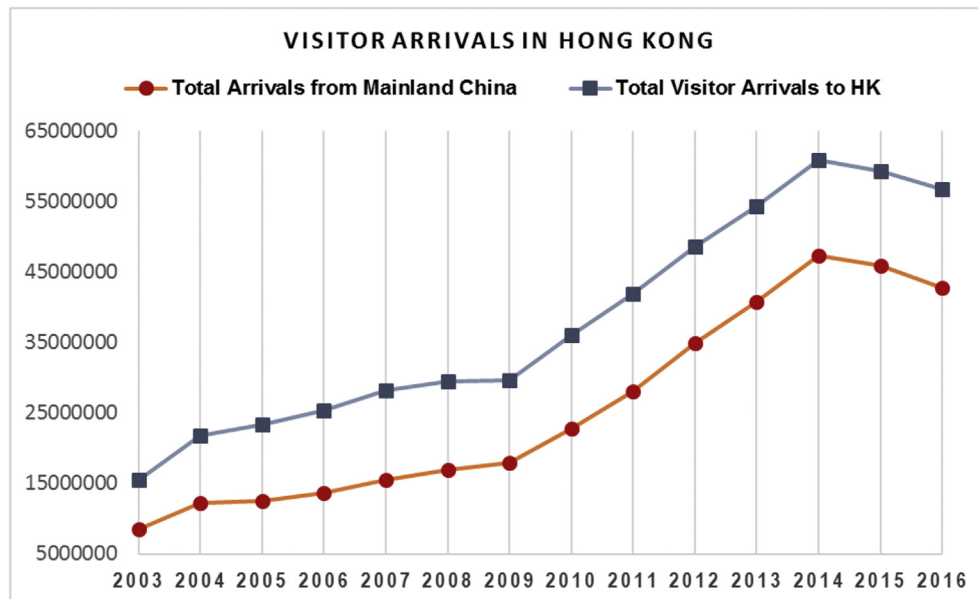


Fig. 1. Number of MCTs who visited HK from 2003 to 2016.

where they do not feel welcome (Yoon, Gursoy, & Chen, 1999).

When a destination is faced with an influx of a dominant tourist group, monitoring the perceptions and feelings of the local community towards this specific group becomes necessary. The reason is that such sentiment could affect the overall support of residents for local tourism development. MCTs, as the largest source market for many international destinations in recent years, such as South Korea, Thailand, Japan, Russia, Vietnam and the UK, have become crucial to the sustainable development of the local tourism industry, and even the overall economic health of these countries. Therefore, examining the attitudes of local residents towards MCTs and identifying the underlying psychological mechanism will facilitate the understanding of host–tourist interactions and sustainability of tourism development. Subsequent policies can be formulated to minimise the negative impact on the host community and the dominant tourist group.

Host community is an essential stakeholder of tourism development and tourist experience creation; thus, local resident perceptions of and attitudes towards tourism development have attracted considerable research since the 1970s (Sharpley, 2014). However, most studies have either focused on the perceived impacts of tourism/tourists (e.g., Brunt & Courtney, 1999) or examined the influence of host–tourist interactions on tourist experience (e.g., Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000). Limited research has investigated resident impressions of, or attitudes towards a specific group of tourists (Monterrubio, 2016), and even less on identifying why and how residents form/develop such attitudes (Sharpley, 2014). On the other hand, research on MCTs mainly focused on their travel motivations or constraints (e.g., Huang & Hsu, 2005; Sparks & Pan, 2009), cultural values (Hsu & Huang, 2016), perceived destination images and marketing effectiveness (e.g., Kim, Guo, & Agrusa, 2005), experience evaluation (Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011), and involvement in special leisure activities (e.g., Wong & Rosenbaum, 2012). Few studies have examined MCTs from the perspective of a host community (Keating, Huang, Kriz, & Heung, 2015). Therefore, the research objectives of this exploratory study are three-fold: (1) to reveal the attitudes of HK residents towards a dominant tourist group (i.e., MCTs), (2) to identify local community mentalities that underlie these attitudes, and (3) to examine the psychological

mechanism for developing such attitudes and mentalities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism studies from the host community perspective

Tourism research conducted from the perspective of host communities can be generally divided into two categories. The first category aims to identify resident perceptions of various tourism impacts, thereby predicting their support for local tourism development. This group has been recognised as one of the most systematic and well-studied fields in tourism (McGehee & Andereck, 2004), within which the two popular approaches are to (1) identify resident perceptions of impacts and test influential factors of the perceptions, and (2) segment residents based on their support for tourism development (Sharpley, 2014). Perceived tourism impacts are commonly discussed in a recognised framework of triple bottom line (Almeida-García, Peláez-Fernández, Balbuena-Vázquez, & Cortés-Macias, 2016). Among the three types of impacts (i.e., economic, sociocultural, and environmental), sociocultural impact covers most influences from tourists. However, tourists were mostly viewed as a homogeneous group in sociocultural impact studies. This view is fundamentally problematic because no tourism destination receives only one type of tourists (Monterrubio, 2016).

The second category examines host–tourist interactions and considerably focuses on tourist experience satisfaction (Luo, Brown, & Huang, 2015) rather than the resident experience and feelings of the interaction. The analysis of the host–tourist interactions from a unilateral perspective is apparently biased. Research that considers the role of residents' cultural and psychological features in determining their attitudes and behaviours towards tourists is scarce (Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006). The impressions of tourists from a specific ethnic or national background have only received limited attention from stereotype researchers (Griffiths & Sharpley, 2012; Moufakkir, 2015). For example, Evans-Pritchard (1989) conducted an anthropological study that focuses on the effect of Anglo–American stereotypes held by the native Indian community on tourist–host interactions. He introduced two important terms in

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