

CHINESE OUTBOUND TRAVELERS' MOTIVATION TO VISIT HONG KONG

Cathy H.C. Hsu
School of Hotel and Tourism Management
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Visitor arrival statistics showed that the total number of travelers from mainland China to Hong Kong increased from 2.7 million in 1998 to 12.5 million in 2005, which accounted for 53.7% of all inbound visitors (Hong Kong Tourism Board [HKTB], 2006a). Mainland visitors to Hong Kong mainly came from Guangdong (35.1%), Beijing (9.9%), and Shanghai (6.4%), which represent the most affluent regions of China and are among the first wave of cities and provinces whose residents are allowed to visit Hong Kong as individual travelers (HKTB, 2006b). Giving the importance of the China outbound market to the overall tourism industry in Hong Kong, it is of great significance to understand their motivation of visiting Hong Kong.

The decision-making process leading to the choice of a travel destination is quite complex. One of the decision-making process models related to travelers' choice of a destination focuses on travel motivation (e.g., Crompton, 1979). Tourist motivation has been a focus of tourism research for several decades. However, as Pearce (1993) argued while there have been many papers in the tourism literature discussing motivation, there are few widely adopted theoretical approaches. The reason behind this phenomenon could be that tourist motivation is a complicated psychological construct, which lacks widely accepted methodology and validated measurement. In addition, although tourism motivation studies abound; the majority of them were conducted in Western countries using Western population based on Western motivation theories. Very few cases have examined mainland Chinese travelers' motivation.

A questionnaire was developed based on a review of relevant literature and three focus groups held in urban areas of mainland China. Two pilot studies were conducted to refine the instrument. The final questionnaire had 20 motivation items, with the following instruction provided to respondents: "There are 20 statements describing the possible reasons of visiting Hong Kong. Think carefully about each statement, and indicate the degree of your agreement/disagreement by circling the appropriate number following the statement where 7 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree".

Data were collected in three major cities in China (Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou) from individuals who were 16 years and older and had shown an interest in travel. The top three cities were selected because residents in those cities tend to have higher income and therefore higher propensities to travel. A group of interviewers who were college juniors, seniors, and graduate students was hired. Interviewers received training on research methods and were briefed about the design of the questionnaire. A supervisor randomly stopped by the various data collection sites, with approximately 10% of the data collected under supervision. Interviewers stationed at airport terminals, train stations, shopping malls, and outside of travel agencies. Potential respondents were invited to participate. The effective sample size for Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou was 505, 505, and 504, respectively.

Results of the factor analysis showed that Chinese outbound travelers were motivated by four underlying dimensions: knowledge, novelty, relaxation, and shopping. Applications of the knowledge gained from this study will be discussed at the presentation. Implications for Hong Kong destination marketers will be explored.