Sustainable development for Chinese urban heritage tourism: Insights from travelers in Shanghai

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ABSTRACT

As a widely-recognized destination for heritage tourism, China has attracted considerable amount of tourists from both domestically and internationally. Given the delicate nature of heritage in urban areas, this study paid special attention to the sustainable Chinese urban heritage tourism development from travelers' perspectives based in Shanghai. Such perspectives are taken because their experiences perceived at popular urban heritage tourism attractions are the final tourism products. The authors explored the major factors that impact travelers' experiences in urban heritage tourism, including visitation environment, economic impact, and community development. Considering the Chinese urban areas tend to be highly populated and undergoing constructions, such insights should facilitate decision makers to achieve the balance between heritage protection and tourism development in urban areas.

Keywords: *sustainable development, Chinese urban heritage tourism, travelers, Shanghai*

INTRODUCTION

Benefiting from the abundant historical heritage attractions, China is recognized as one of the most famous tourism destinations in the world. According to Ashworth (1994), heritage is a major determinant of the character of a place or places because of the reciprocal connection between heritage and places. Heritage can provide modern visitors with an opportunity to appreciate, interpret, and communicate with the past (Jamal & Kim, 2002). Thus, the heritage has become a popular subject in tourism research. Consequently, heritage tourism is defined as "tourism centered on what we have inherited, which can mean anything from historic buildings to art works, to beautiful scenery" (Yale, 1991, p21).

When planning tourism development for heritage resources, one must take the delicate nature of heritage into consideration. Especially for Chinese urban heritage, the greater population and growing urbanization process have imposed increased complexity in achieving

the balance between economic development and heritage protection. To address this problem, many researchers suggested a sustainable development as the overarching framework to achieve both goals (Drost, 1996; Garrod & Fyall, 2000; Nasser, 2003). A sustainable development is commonly perceived as the development process that both meets the needs of the present and avoids compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Williams, 2004). It also contributes to safeguard social equity and cultural values besides conservation and development goals in heritage tourism (Nasser, 2003). Thus, sustainable development is identified as the underlying rationale and ultimate goal for Chinese urban heritage tourism.

To achieve sustainable development for Chinese urban heritage tourism, researchers and practitioners have identified the need of coordination and collaboration from different stakeholders in successfully implementing sustainable tourism development (Aas, et al., 2005; Byrd, 2007). Any strategic tourism planning can be a complicated issue because of the interdependence of multiple stakeholders and fragmented control over the destination's resources. Thus, the inclusion of key stakeholders to represent the various public interests is crucial (Jamal & Getz, 1995). In particular, researchers noted that sustainable tourism development cannot be achieved if interests of local communities were excluded (Ioannides, 1995). However, the role of local communities has long been minimized in the urban heritage tourism development decisions resulting from the centralized Chinese political structure and local residents' limited capacity and unawareness of tourism impact (Li, 2004). In addition, Travelers are an important group of stakeholders regarding tourism development as they are the end consumers and they interact with the local communities during visitations to establish their travel experiences. This study is set to explore the important factors that should be focused when planning for sustainable development for Chinese urban heritage tourism. The authors took the perspectives from travelers visiting Shanghai, China. Such insights can help deliver a throughout understanding of how travelers expect the future urban heritage tourism products. Further, the important factors recognized by travelers can also provide important implications for other stakeholders.

METHODS AND RESULTS

To understand travelers' perspectives on sustainable development planning for Chinese urban heritage tourism, the authors adapted the measurement scales based on the work by Choi and Sirakaya (2006) on tourism planning under a sustainable framework. They developed six sets of indicators (a total of 125) including political, social, ecological, economic, technological, and cultural dimensions. These indicators can serve as a starting-point for devising indicators for other sustainable tourism planning based on the local or regional characteristics. Since the original 125 indicators were evaluated on ranking mean scores and soundness by the panel of 38 academic researchers, the authors only chose the top ranked items of four dimensions (economic, social, cultural, and ecological) and used Exploratory Factor Analysis under the Chinese urban heritage tourism planning setting. Specifically, 15 items were used to explore the important factors travelers may consider as important in sustainable urban heritage tourism planning.

Data were collected during May, 2011 in popular touristic locations in Shanghai. The respondents include both international and domestic travelers. A total of 428 valid responses were collected. They were asked to indicate their perceived importance of the 15 items on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 in urban heritage tourism planning. During the collecting process, the last item was eliminated due to large amount of missing data. The authors initially checked for the reliability of the items for each of the four dimensions used. The Cronbach's alpha for

economic and ecological dimensions are above 0.7, suggesting acceptable reliability. However, the Cronbach's alpha for social and cultural dimension are below 0.6, suggesting the items were not reliable for these two factors. Thus, EFA was performed on the 14 items to reveal the underlying factor structure that travelers perceive as important based on their traveling experiences. Three factors were identified based on their Eigenvalues (larger than 1) and they are able to explain a cumulative of 53 percent of the variance. The primary result is as follows:

Table 1: Important factors in sustainable Chinese heritage tourism (n=428)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
	Visitation environment	Economic impact	Community development
Promote local business	.115	**.735**	.055
Provide economical benefits to community	.127	**.839**	.082
Increase employment	.047	**.797**	.123
Improve tourist satisfaction	.226	**.408**	.256
Manage litter/pollution	**.582**	.312	.171
Employment growth in tourism	.065	.339	**.597**
Percent of profit/revenue reinvestment in community development	.191	.112	**.707**
Type and amount of training given to tourism employees	.334	.051	**.663**
Comparability of new constructions with local culture	.090	.038	**.739**
Improve environmental conscious	**.678**	.114	.215
Control amount of erosion on the natural site	**.637**	.091	.313
Decrease environmental accidents related to tourism	**.758**	.192	.041
Relieve over-crowding	**.658**	.041	.163
Retention of local customs and language	**.700**	.006	.040
Cronbach's Alpha	0.792	0.711	0.688
Eigenvalues	4.417	1.713	1.287
Percent of variance explained	21.036	16.68	15.26
Cumulative percent of variance explained	21.036	37.716	52.976

Factor grouping are shown in bold

Factor loading that are larger than 0.4 were highlighted in Table 1. Factor 1 is closely related to environmental concerns, preservation of the heritage (both tangible and intangible), and visitation environment. Factor 2 is closely related to economic impact such as promoting local business, adding employment, and increasing tourist satisfaction. Factor 3 is closely related to community development factors such as profit reinvestment in communities and the consistency between new constructions and the original community style.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the items were chosen from social, cultural, economical, and ecological dimensions, the respondents suggested that for urban heritage tourism in China, travelers perceive visitation environment, economics, and community development as the areas that policy makers should focus on. Visitation environment which includes the well-being of the heritage sites, cleanliness, less crowding, and retention of the local customs (intangible heritage) is the most important factor in developing sustainable urban heritage tourism in China. For urban heritage tourism another important factor revealed in this study is the consistency of new construction styles with the local community. This result is consistent with the challenges mentioned in introduction that the stress from heavy population and growing constructions is increasingly threatening the sustainable development of urban heritage tourism.

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