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The Trend of Tourism Localization: Mutual Gaze between Destinations and Migrant Tourists

Rationale

For international migrants, visiting and hosting friends and relatives remain behind (i.e., VFR/HFR travel) used to play significant roles in shaping their wellbeing (Backer, 2019; Backer & Weiler, 2018) and geographically stretched ties (Backer & Lynch, 2017; Janta et al., 2015). However, after Covid-19 disrupted global human mobility (Gössling et al., 2020), it is increasingly difficult for both sides to visit each other. In a post-Covid, pandemic-aware era, given the continually emergence of new variants of the virus, ever-changing travel restrictions, and the rise of travel costs (e.g., airfare and quarantine), people tend to be reluctant to participate in international travel (Liu et al., 2021; Martin & Bergmann, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). This unprecedented situation forces migrants to change their tourism behaviours and seek a substitute for VFR visiting and hosting, because adults and young children still need to occasionally escape from daily lives and enjoy leisure benefits, not to mention the rise of catch-up travels after prolonged lockdowns worldwide (Vogler, 2021). Therefore, in many countries, visiting domestic tourism destinations has become a new option (Miao et al., 2021; Neuburger & Egger, 2021), if not the only option, and the costs of visiting domestic destinations have largely reduced, because of the impacts of the pandemic on global tourism industry.

Although tourism destinations have commonly realised such a trend of tourism localisation, it is not clear if they correctly understand the role of migrant tourists in this emerging phenomenon, especially migrants' needs and expectations, which are found to be greatly shaped by their cultural norms, values, and other social nuances. This raises critical questions over equity, diversity, and inclusiveness in post-Covid tourism recovery. As Bramwell and Lane (2008) suggested years ago, the equity in tourism requires more scholarly attention. Therefore, to bridge the extant knowledge gap and achieve an enhanced understanding of the dynamics behind the interactions between domestic tourism destinations and migrant tourists, this qualitative study explores the mutual gaze between the two sides, regarding (1) the destinations' perceptions of the tourists' needs and expectations of visiting, and (2) the tourists' perceptions of the destinations and actual expectations of visiting.

To date, the tourism studies that explored the mutual gaze between the visiting and hosting sides remain insufficient and lack of depth (Tasci & Severt, 2017). Also, the extant studies predominantly used the idea of mutual gaze to examine the confrontation between tourists from the developed world and local residents in the so called Third World destinations (Bandyopadhyay & Ganguly, 2018; Sorokina et al., 2018), investigating the different ways both sides perceive each other in their everyday social interactions. This study thus bridges a current research gap, by exploring the mutual gaze between domestic tourism destinations and migrant tourists in the developed world. In this case, the tourists from cultural minority have less power and are likely to be stereotyped by their hosts, potentially resulting in emerging conflicts and troubled relationships between the two sides (Monterrubio, 2019). New Zealand has comparatively controlled the pandemic (McDougall, 2021) and started to regenerate its domestic tourism industry, using a campaign, 'Do Something New, New Zealand' (Tourism New Zealand, 2020). Therefore, this study interviews the marketing/management managers from popular domestic tourism destinations, and Chinese international migrants in the country. The findings are expected to answer the research question: Do domestic tourism destinations correctly understand Chinese migrants' needs and

expectations of visiting, and develop destination marketing and development strategies accordingly?

Method

Social constructionism underpins this study, which recognises the multiple realities reside in people's minds (Sarantakos, 1998) and co-construction of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Botterill, 2012; Potter, 1996). This approach offers a firm basis for studying the concept of mutual gaze, which derives from orientalism (Said, 1994, p. 2), describing a mutual othering/differentiating process, or the negotiation of relationship, in which "everybody gazes at everybody" (Maoz, 2006, p. 225) in their social interactions. This critical perspective acknowledges an asymmetrical relationship of power between domestic tourism destinations and migrants, so that is used to explain the dynamics behind the interactions between the two sides. That is, using this approach, this study critically examines the ways both sides imagine, view, and understand/misunderstand each other, which potentially lead to their stereotypical views of each other, and the coping mechanisms they may develop in their interactions, such as retreating, resistance, adjusting, and cooperation (Boissevain, 1995; Chhabra, 2010). The aim is to identify and explain the tensions, challenges, and opportunities that derive from the inequalities of power, contribute to an enhanced understanding of cultural diversity (Monterrubio, 2019), and provide practical advice to facilitate social inclusion and emancipation in post-pandemic tourism regeneration (i.e., inclusive tourism).

In this study, Chinese migrants are used to represent the international migrants who are marginalised in tourism development in the host society, because they form one of the largest migrant communities in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2020). Another reason behind the use of the ethnic minority is that the researcher is himself an experienced Chinese migrant and has an established personal social network in the community, which will be used to collect travel experiences and expectations from totally twenty Chinese migrants (ideally there should be an equal number of male and female participants). In particular, this study focuses on the Chinese migrants who have a long-term work visa, permanent residency, or citizenship, which allow them to stay in New Zealand for a prolonged period of time and consider the country their home. Therefore, Chinese international students were not included. Of note, the lack of the involvement of other migrant communities inevitably limits the scope of the findings and offers an avenue of future research. The researcher resides in a large city of the North Island, which is close to some famous tourism destinations in the country, such as Hobbiton Movie Set and Waitomo Caves. Totally five marketing/management managers (minimum three years' experience) from different destinations will be approached. It is expected that a marketing manager from Tourism New Zealand can be approached (i.e., the organisation responsible for marketing New Zealand tourism destinations).

This study collects data using semi-structured in-depth interview, which provides researchers with greater control over the depth and flexibility of data collection, so that deep information can be acquired (Cassell & Symon, 2004), potentially uncovering multi-layered dynamics behind the social phenomenon (Johnson, 2002). The abovementioned sample size meets the requirement for conducting credible research using in-depth interview (Jensen et al., 2013; Waters, 2002). The interviews will follow a purposely designed in-depth interview schedule, in which the interview questions are used to collect the data that frame the mutual gaze. To minimize the risk of catching Covid, the in-depth interviews will be conducted via Zoom. It is expected that each interview will

last for at least an hour to ensure data richness. All the interviews with Chinese migrants will follow Chinese cultural protocols that are important for building mutual trust between the researcher and the participants, which in turn encourages the participants to actively engage in the events. In particular, a gift-giving protocol will be followed to acknowledge the participants' contribution and build harmonious relationships (Kwek & Lee, 2015). All interviews are going to be audio taped with participants' consent. Participants' brief biographical sketches will be collected at the beginning of the events and demographic profiles will be collected at the end, which enhanced my understanding of the research context.

The audio data will be transcribed and translated verbatim, then analysed using constant comparative thematic analysis, which suggests constant comparisons between the selected quotations, frequently taking one quotation and examining it against other quotations both within and between the themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The emerging themes will be iteratively reviewed to ensure that they contribute to answering the research question. NVivo (i.e., a computer assisted data analysis software package) will be used to facilitate data analysis. It helps the researcher rapidly combine, divide, and modify the themes, and easily trace the source of each quotation to a participant, her/his socio-demographic profile, and life experience, achieving contextualisation and enhanced interpretation of the quotation. The researcher intends to fully immerse himself in the data, because the depth of interpretation of their mutual gaze determines the quality of this critical study. As a Chinese migrant himself, the researcher not only understands the language Chinese migrants use, but also can capture the socio-cultural nuances behind their narratives, and the important information lying behind their mood, non-verbal language, and perhaps silence. Of note, the name of the participants and tourism destinations will be replaced with pseudonyms to ensure that this research will not negatively affect their lives and reputations once published.

Findings

This section discusses the expected results of this study (this study is currently close to the completion of literature review and a clear direction has been confirmed. It is highly expected that data collection and analysis will be completed before May 2022, and final manuscript submitted before June 2022). As a new puzzle in tourism research, the idea of sustainable tourism development involves a wide range of theoretical perspectives, while the emergence of critical perspectives has been largely inhibited (Bianchi, 2018). Using the critical perspective of mutual gaze to uncover the potential exclusion of migrants from tourism, this study may identify a sense of orientalism in the minds of tourism destinations. That is, the destinations' understandings of migrant tourists are not based on appropriate investigations, but somehow reflect long-lasting preconceptions against the ethnic minority. This largely constrains the tourism destinations from (1) developing effective marketing strategies to attract the migrants, and (2) meeting the migrant tourists' needs and expectations of visiting. Another expected result is that Chinese migrant tourists may not have adequate knowledge about, and correct understanding of the tourism destinations 'in their own backyards', and therefore find it difficult to make the travel plans that meet the needs of their family members. These two interrelated issues reflect the lack of harmony in their mutual gaze, which in turn potentially lead to reduced desire of travel, unpleasant travel experience, the exclusion of migrant tourists from tourism regeneration, and to some extent, inhibited post-Covid tourism recovery in the country.

Implications

This study aims to provide actionable suggestions to tourism planning and management, and more importantly, to benefit the marginalised group of migrant tourists. Overall, this study suggests that migrant tourists should be well included in the post-Covid regeneration of tourism industry. To achieve this goal, domestic tourism destinations should pay more attention to this previously marginalised group, by conducting more investigations to achieve an enhanced understanding of their culturally nuanced needs and expectations of visiting, so that more effective destination marketing and sustainable tourism development strategies can be developed, and migrant tourists can be well included and better supported.

Of note, to enhance mutual understanding in their everyday mutual gaze, domestic tourism destinations are encouraged to proactively communicate with Chinese migrant communities on popular social networking and travel guidance platforms, such as Facebook and Tripadvisor, where people frequently share reviews and opinions regarding their expectations of, and experiences in visiting the destinations. This includes the periodic collection of voluntary guest feedbacks. Of note, WeChat is the most popular social networking platform among Chinese migrants, instead of Facebook, so should be well involved in future marketing and research effort. As Zou et al. (2021) noted, direct interactions between tourism destinations and tourists help both sides better understand each other and effectively promote the destinations. Also, important festivals among the ethnic minority, such as Chinese New Year, should be officially acknowledged and celebrated on the platforms, to create a stronger sense of social inclusion in Chinese migrants' minds and brand the destinations as friendly places for everyone to visit. According to Benjamin et al. (2021), actively encouraging marginalized groups to participate in tourism is essential for developing inclusive tourism.

In addition, this study argues that the critical approach of mutual gaze plays an important role in explaining the dynamics behind the interactions between domestic tourism destinations and migrant tourists. Regarding the contribution to theory development, several dimensions are expected to be identified, through which both sides gaze at each other. For instance, a tourism destination may perceive/stereotype Chinese migrant tourists from five distinct dimensions: (1) tourists' needs and expectations, (2) budget and economic impact on the destination, (3) environmental consciousness, (4) tolerance of mistake, and (5) potential impact on local social environment. Meanwhile, Chinese migrants may evaluate a destination from five dimensions: (1) leisure benefits, (2) unique experience, (3) accessibility, (4) helpfulness and politeness of service, and (5) a good place for family. That way, the two sides gaze at each other from different but closely interrelated perspectives, which collectively explain the dynamics behind their interactions. Future studies are encouraged to further explore the use of mutual gaze approach in the exploration of the confrontation between domestic tourism destinations and migrant tourists in more socio-cultural contexts to examine the findings in this study, enlarge the depth and scope, and more importantly, ensure that the post-Covid tourism development is planned and managed on more equitable grounds.

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