New Models of Travel Behavior for Independent Asian Youth Urban Cultural Tourists

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March 2014

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The Asia Research Institute (ARI) was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The mission of the Institute is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research on the Asian region, located at one of its communications hubs. ARI engages the social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. Through frequent provision of short-term research appointments it seeks to be a place of encounters between the region and the world. Within NUS it works particularly with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Law and Design, to support conferences, lectures, and graduate study at the highest level.

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INTRODUCTION

Regional tourism began emerging as a significant field of enquiry a number of years prior to the conference on Asian Tourism in 2006 at the Asian Research Institute, National University of Singapore. This conference and its publication, *Asia on Tour: Exploring the Rise of Asian Tourism,* were important for two reasons. First, as the world enters the twenty-first century, Asia is witnessing a rapid growth in domestic and intra-regional leisure travel. In some countries, the scale of tourism development can be best described as unprecedented - and with 40 percent of the world's population living in the region - this is likely to be a long-term trend. The conference organizers were concerned that the impact it will have on Asian living culture needs to be clearly understood. Second, while much has been written about the rise of Asia, so far, very little attention has been given to the role played by intra-regional and domestic tourism; and how changing travel patterns and behaviour create new forms of citizenship, transform local environments and foster unforeseen political tensions. This conference and its subsequent publication were integral to the current study as they "set out to situate tourism within its wider social, political and cultural contexts, addressing an array of topics, including aesthetics, postcolonialism, heritage, healthcare, and nation-building" (Winter, Teo and Chang 2009:6).

One of the contributors to this work, Chan (2009) observed that Asian residents that he had studied tended to negotiate between the modern and the pre-modern tourist attractions through their accumulated life experiences. Evidence of cultural awareness is not limited to interest in expressions of urban infrastructure, such as tall buildings and subway trains as it could also include perceiving differences in freedom of expression, and global linkages to a plethora of cultures that creates a more cosmopolitan ambience. The scale of tourism growth in Asia today is unprecedented, and research is needed to identify the degree to which increasing numbers are delivering social and cultural changes. Questions arising out of this work for researchers included; do today's patterns of consumption and nature of experiences sought represent a break with tradition or is today's Asian tourism merely a continuation of previous forms of travel? The project this paper is based on deliberately started with the term 'independent Asian youth tourist' rather than the term 'backpacker', because this term is too deeply rooted in a nest of Western assumptions about young people's travel behaviour that may not necessarily apply to the group studied in this research study.

Research on the nature of independent travel in the region is at an early stage, although the works of Ong (2005), Muzaini (2006), Winter (2007) and Teo and Leong (2006) have given birth to further enquiry. Such inquiries include studies on Chinese independent youth tourists (Lim, 2009; Shepherd, 2009; Ong and du Cros, 2012; du Cros and Liu 2013). This work has uncovered communal nature; intense use of Internet forums for socialisation and shorter length of stay. However, it has not revealed clearly how - all these factors and possibly others - affect lived cultural experiences. Such research efforts happen alongside increased scholarly interest in Chinese outbound tourism (Arlt, 2006; Chan, 2009; Cheng, 2007; Arlt and Burns 2013). In particular, Arlt (2006) argues that his research into Chinese outbound tourism in Europe has shown that China's tourism industry has developed beyond its early heavily institutionalised beginnings and arrived at a third stage of increased diversification of tourism motivations and practices. As such, this country's industry has a great role to play in regional Asian tourism.

Currently, Hong Kong is a city that is an increasingly popular destination for tourists from China and elsewhere in the region with evidence of both the positive and negative impacts of high arrivals. In 2012, when this research was largely undertaken, the city attracted 48,615,113 (representing an increase of 16 percent over 2011). Of these arrivals, tourists who travelled to the Hong Kong from China comprised 34,911,395, 73 percent of the total number of arrivals (66 percent of this total arrived on independent visas, not as part of a tour group). Tourists from within the region made up an additional 19 percent. Less than ten percent therefore arrive from outside Asia, according to these figures. The key points of origin for Asian short-haul tourists to Hong Kong are Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand (in that order). The number of Asian visitors who stayed overnight in 2012 was 579,244 or 63 percent (an increase of three percent over 2011) (HKTB, 2013).

Length of stay for tourists from the People's Republic of China is constrained by the visas issued. The Independent Tourist Scheme (ITS) is of interest as it allows Chinese tourists to visit the Special Administrative Regions of China, namely Hong Kong and Macau, without being attached to a tour group for the length of one week. Chan (2009) notes that the term 'tourist' or *luke* is seen by some Chinese tourists a demeaning one. 'Free walk' implies an eventual emancipation from the collectivity of packaged tour groups when visiting Hong Kong. Macau studies (such as du Cros 2009; Ung and Vong, 2010) show a similar situation where preference for self-guiding is indicated over taking local tours, even when the guide is locally trained and knowledgeable. Also, it is possible that self-guiding and travelling under the radar for Chinese youth tourists means that they will not be automatically identified with their tour-group country-folk, who are becoming increasingly unpopular at many Asian destinations when visiting in tour groups that exhibit discourteous or culturally insensitive behaviour towards local communities (Chan 2009, du Cros and Liu 2013).

While outbound Chinese tourists are arguably a massive proportion of Hong Kong's tourism market, they are not the total story. The nearly 20 percent and growing market share from the rest of the region should also be examined in addition, particularly in relation to how both groups may yield future purposeful, mindful or 'culturally sensitive' cultural tourists for the region. The present paper will examine the nature of independent Asian youth tourists' travel experiences of living culture and cultural activities in Hong Kong to this end. This group is defined as "fully independent (of family and tour package decision-making) youth tourists (15-29 years), whose main growth and development has been in Asian local schools (as against overseas located or run institutions). These are individuals, as the cultural consumers of the future, who have spent most of their education in the region, who are most likely to be open to independent travel, blog and chat about their travel experiences. Basically, there one key research question being asked and answered in this article about this group: what kind and depth of experience of local culture are they looking for?

CULTURAL DISTANCE

Given the above scenario of massive numbers of short-haul regional tourists visiting Hong Kong in increasing numbers, cultural distance was considered in the study as possibly having some role to play in the choice of destination and the responses of Asian youth tourists to it once they had arrived. The notion of cultural distance has appeared regularly in the literature in regard to Western-centric studies of tourist-host relations, but rarely has the alternative been considered, probably under the erroneous assumption that it would not be a major factor. Some comparative studies have been attempted between Asian and non-Asian subjects (Heine, 2001; Ng, Lee and Soutar 2007; Moufakkir 2011), which illustrate that differences can be expected between these groups. Of these comparative studies, the social psychology study by Heine (2001) began by inquiring into how his subjects may become self-aware of how their cultural values might differ from those of the places

they visited. His study went into depth about how this was influenced by underlying beliefs held about the nature of individuality and the role of the individual in society. The three East Asian groups of visitors that were studied for the project were China, Japan and Korea which all have a strong relationship still to the Confucian philosophy in this area. The nature of participation in a social environment while travelling would have been influenced by this philosophy, as would expectations of its utility to personal growth. Heine (2001) also noted marked differences when examining how his subjects (East Asian and North American) explained their successes and failures in understanding local cultures that they visited. The Asian subjects tended evaluate themselves more critically than the North Americans and learnt more from their failures than successes. Of greatest impact were any experiences that caused the former to 'lose face'. The study did not go into further depth as to whether there were intercultural differences on this point or others between the Chinese, Japanese and Korean subjects studied.

Tourism academics have adopted other approaches to cultural distance to understand more about the impact of the nature of contact between different cultures during travel. Cultural distance (CD) as defined as the degree to which the shared norms and values in one society differ from another society (Hofstede 2001). In regards to tourist gaze, there is one study that is the closest to the current research and more specific than the CD approach promoted by Hofstede and his followers. Moufakkir (2011) married the Foucaldian 'Tourist Gaze' first popularised in tourism studies by Urry (2002) to the notion of cultural distance bringing to his study a more travel orientated focus than that of Heine (2001). In doing this, he wanted the gaze study to "go beyond the hows to uncover the whys of attitudes and perceptions. In this sense, the host gaze starts where perceptions' surveys stop" (Moufakkir 2011:77). As such, studies of tourist gaze should also involve more than perceptions in order to depart from the convention gaze in the way that Urry (2002) originally intended.

One such study was that into Post-Mao Gazes of Chinese budget youth tourists to Macau (Ong and du Cros 2012). Building upon the conceptual architecture of French philosopher Michel Foucault's '*le regard*' or 'the gaze' (Foucault, 1994 and 1995), it responded to Urry's (2002) call to attend to the existence of different forms of gazes and their implications on the tourist self and setting in tourism. In doing so, the analysis focused on Chinese budget tourism in Macau, another SAR of China. Accordingly, it investigated how Post-Mao gazes in Chinese budget tourism have been shaped by shifting discourses in contemporary Chinese society and the ways in which individual tourists make sense of and negotiate their tourism subjectification. Through virtual ethnography of a leading Internet forum, it was discovered that the forum members' post-Mao gazes appropriate the postcolonial spaces of Macau in a number of ways. The tourists (born and raised post-Mao) were presenting views in this context that both collate and contradict their own existing travel ideals as they reflected on their experience of Macau's hybrid Portuguese/Asian landscape and community. The study also provided a new perspective on what had previously been a group of tourists largely ignored in the media and academic portrayal. It was found that the subjects' experiences of Macau's living culture and cultural landscape, which were performed within a 'photogenic budget leisurescape', was influenced by their romanticized expectations from popular culture sources, such as films set in Macau (Ong and du Cros 2012).

LOCAL CULTURE AND SPONTANEITY

Stereotyping of Asian youth in relation to decision-making may have occurred before by assuming that they will respond in the same way to travel-related variables (time, budget, familiarity with destination) as non-Asian or non-youth tourists. For instance, the study examined how much spontaneity is allowed for in a trip. The more themed or specialized tours can sometimes offer useful

insights into local culture. In relation to consuming the local culture of a city destination, McKercher, Wong and Lau (2006) have identified three main groups of variables: time budgets, personality and place knowledge in regard to how structured an experience a visitor may seek from a destination. It is generally argued that for 'time budgets', backpackers (think Western-educated) have more time to travel compared with conventional tourists who normally take shorter holidays. It is also assumed that backpackers, who are also youth tourists, tend to have tight budgets and travel more slowly using cheaper transport to more remote destinations than conventional tourists.

It is possible that spontaneity is also required to find the best opportunities to experience local culture or have a serendipitous deep experience at a city destination, rather than through extension pre-trip research. McKercher et. al. (2006) have also listed three groups of variables for the visitors at a destination: trip origins; attractions; and transportation before coming up with some additional descriptors of the behaviour patterns observed. Their study concentrated on the different consumption styles of long-haul international visitors to Hong Kong through interviewing 25 subjects in depth, who were stopover or secondary destination visitors for some of whom a sense of adventure and spontaneity affected willingness to experience local culture. They found that visitors in the early stages of the trip (less fatigued) or those prepared to take a heritage themed day tour were the ones that hoped for a deeper experience. The end-of-trip and the more timid pre-planner tourists did not seek such experiences as avidly. Eventually, the researchers identified three main styles: the Wanderer, the Tour-taker and the Pre-Planner.

INDEPENDENT YOUTH TOURISTS, TRAVELLERS AND BACKPACKERS

This section will examine the nomenclature and ideas that have developed around the world concerning independent youth travel and in particular, backpacking, as prelude to understanding where Asian youth tourists may fit in relation to their experiences of local culture. According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1991, 2008), youth tourism includes all travel by young people aged between 15 and 29 years. Richards and Wilson (2005) mention that youth and student market should not be viewed as a homogeneous group in term of their style of travel and their motivations. Some authorities consider that youth and student markets are the same, because the majority of youth travellers are presently or have previously been students. Hence, Richards and Wilson (2005) also mention that youth tourists exhibit a higher level of computer literacy and competence, which should mean that barriers to the use of new information and booking channels should disappear a lot more quickly. Since this study, the Internet has become an important platform in providing the increasingly integrated services being sought by young travellers, many of who are combining holiday, study and work in their trips. More sophisticated and flexible cultural experiences also may be sought, which combine travel products with information products making the role of travel agencies almost redundant for this group (du Cros and Liu 2013).

Consequently, it is worth examining the context and historical development of concepts and definitions of independent youth travel that have developed in the literature. At the start of the research identifying this group casually as just 'backpackers' seemed problematic. Particularly as the concept has had a colourful history and is undergoing revision for the current generation of Western educated independent tourists. Significantly, Wilson and Richards (2008) have observed that this lack of consistency likely comes from the study of backpacking being approached from different directions by researchers from diverse traditions or disciplines without much cross-referencing. Originally, the 'backpacker' was characterized as a freeloading 'drifter tourist', one that was often engaged in an alternative lifestyle to start with, such as a 'hippy' (Cohen 1973). Later research refers to 'backpackers' in a number of contexts, usually following common backpacker 'routes' or getting off the beaten track and away from city life (Cohen, 2003; Richards and Wilson, 2004). Much of the

early research appears to be externally based on self-definition by backpackers on whether they fit a particular definition or considered themselves backpackers with subsequent studies attempting to uncover more on this topic (Lee and Musa 2008).

Allon, Anderson, and Bushell (2008:74) have collected evidence based on a study in the city of Sydney for mostly Non-Asian independent tourists and stated that a backpacker should be now defined as a, "highly resourceful individual with considerable reserves of initiative and enthusiasm, actively seeking out new experiences, and often undertaking periods of serious, difficult, and sometimes very demanding and strenuous, periods of work." As definitions change for populations of independent youth tourists more commonly studied, it is also important that researchers of populations of independent youth tourists (especially those who are new to this kind of travel as in Asia) should be aware that these tourists are evolving too and not completely in isolation to trends in the other population, due to globalisation of such trends.

However, not all independent tourists, young or old, are likely to fit even this newer definition of backpacking. The emergence of a less budget-conscious backpacker, known in the literature as the 'flashpacker,' is changing how this market is viewed. Although seeking more comfortable and more conspicuous displays of consumption, typically the latest Iphone, laptop, designer backpack, expensive sunglasses, these individuals can still be seen as tapping the 'experience economy' of independent travel (Hannam and Diekmann 2010). Pine and Gilmore (1999) have described the 'experience economy' as a transition from 'mass tourism' to a diversified market of individual and independent travellers seeking a broad range of eclectic, or apparently 'authentic', and 'original' experiences of local culture. Concern with such experiences is also a feature of some backpackers proclaiming themselves to be 'travellers' not tourists, even if they are not fully aware of or feel responsible for their travel impacts in relation to it (Speed 2008).

CULTURAL TOURISM AND INDEPENDENT ASIAN YOUTH TOURISM

After 2000, there are a number of research studies into cultural tourism conducted the region that are relevant to this study. The first wave comes as a result of researchers based at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University conducting the first Omnibus survey of tourists to the city on exiting it (McKercher and Chan, 2001). Of specific interest, are three publications that used data from that year's survey (McKercher and Chow, 2001; Ap, 2001; McKercher, 2002). McKercher and Chow (2001surveyed both international and regional tourists with analysis centring on the three largest regional markets for Hong Kong from Asia of mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Singaporean tourists highlighted for discussion of cultural distance. They found that in relation to the types of cultural tourism activities undertaken by those tourists in Hong Kong, the closer cultural relationship between the tourists and the host society meant that the former participated in less cultural tourism activities than tourists with more distant cultural ties with the exception of visiting temples. For instance, at least one in three of these Asian tourists surveyed had visited Wong Tai Sin Temple, which was a much higher number than for non-Asian tourists from outside the region. Ap's (2001) statistical analysis of tourists interested in cultural exchange complemented this research quite well as it investigated the same groups regarding the nature of contact. While he found that most respondents were satisfied with the nature of the experience, it was recommended that more research into its exact nature was needed using different research methods. Finally, McKercher (2002) published a classification of cultural tourists based on the Omnibus study sample for 2000 that has been cited widely since in relation to cultural tourism studies. The classification used concepts generated by Moscardo (1996) about 'mindful tourists' and depth of experience initially and which used the Hong Kong Omnibus findings to identify five kinds of possible cultural tourists of

which 'purposeful' was one type that was similar to Moscardo's and was less than ten percent of the total (see Table 1).

Table 1. Five Kinds of Possible Cultural Tourists Adapted from McKercher, 2002.

purposeful cultural tourist	cultural tourism is the primary motive for visiting a destination and the individual has a deep cultural experience
sightseeing cultural tourist	cultural tourism is a primary or major reason visiting a destination, but the experience is more shallow
serendipitous cultural tourist	a tourist who does not travel for cultural tourism reasons, but who, after participating ends up having a deep cultural tourism experience
casual cultural tourist	cultural tourism is weak motive for visiting a destination and the resultant experience is shallow
incidental cultural tourist	who does not travel for cultural tourism reasons, but who none the less participates in some activities and has a shallow experience

This work was followed by a dissertation by Brieke (2008), on the travel behavior of local university students in Macau that used in-depth interviews and an online survey to collect information and some minor insights into how travel is valued by this group. The interviews revealed that Macau students were more interested in intra-regional independent travel (organized with friends) than in package tours. There was a higher interest in meeting new people and experiencing new cultures amongst the online survey sample for this study than shown in an earlier McKercher and du Cros (2008) study sample of all ages visiting both Hong Kong and Macau.

In Macau, another related project that started January 2010 titled 'Symbolising Macao: Tourism, Culture and Social Change' aimed to compare data collected about Macau's cultural tourism and resident attitudes to tourism pre- and post-World Heritage Site inscription. Early results show that a larger than normal number of mainland Chinese students visited cultural heritage sites in Macau over the summer period specifically to visit the World Heritage site, experience the food, enjoy the company of their friends, but not to gamble (Kong, du Cros and Ong, forthcoming).

ASIAN CITIES, THE INTERNET AND SLOW TRAVEL

Slow travel is a concept that is yet to gain a strong foothold in Asia. In academic tourism studies, the need to spend more time at a destination has been recognised for a while as an ideal of sustainable tourism and is central to Moscardo's (1996) ideal of a purposeful or mindful tourist (see also Table 1), which is also evident in the quote from Krippendorf (in Moscardo 1996:376) at the beginning of her groundbreaking paper on the topic:

> How can we get from extensive to intensive travel,
> From devouring miles to lingering,
> From ticking off items in the travel guide to stopping and thinking . . .
> For we are all looking for meaning and humanity.
>
> (Krippendorf in Moscardo 1996:376)

Moscardo then went onto apply the spirit of this to site interpretation as a way to aid sustainable tourism through reducing social and other impacts. However, what about the other side? Where does the demand come from for a kind of 'humanistic' tourism that encourages personal growth through learning, self-discovery and exploration? It is possible that the most recent evidence of this is coming from the Internet in terms the promotion of the Slow Travel movement. The official website for the movement (that originated in Europe) states that it provides "the opportunity to become part of local life and to connect to a place and its people. Slow travel is also about connection to culture" (Morgan 2012; Slow Movement 2013). The movement emerged out of calls for 'slow food' and also 'slow cities'. The Slow Food Movement is relatively well known in Asia with chapters in most major cities, including Hong Kong (Slow Food Hong Kong 2013). Recent research by the author on this topic (du Cros and Liu 2013) found that Chinese outbound youth tourists discussed these concepts in their own language before travelling and sometimes implemented their principles. However, all this travel and the advice for it appears to be taking place domestically within China at this point, probably because of the visa issue. It shows that a number of mainland Chinese residents are aware of overseas' travel trends and are already trying them out, despite the limitations on travel freedom that the current visa framework imposes upon them.

'Slow cities' seems a concept unlikely to take root in Asia where many are known and appreciated for the dynamism and high rate of change. However, what the Slow Movement is advocating is spending longer in a city and perhaps a week or more in a temporary rental apartment that allows more access to local space. Again, this might appeal to Asian youth with demanding jobs that are seeking some kind of stress-break. It is possible that once de-stressed the opportunity to experience local culture would be an added attraction. With urban tourism still under theorized for the Asian region, more investigation should be made into whether cities are sites of adventure, as well as leisure, in terms of dealing with any cultural differences that a longer slower experience of a place may provide. One researcher keen to understand cities generally as locales for adventure is Beedie (2005). Following from Page and Hall's (2003), concept of cities being "the landscapes of production" for tourism, Beedie proposes that opportunities exist to test the more adventuresome visitor in numerous ways. Experiences of local culture that might challenge an individual's assumptions about the people there without causing them seriously harm or loss of face could come under this category. Studies by Ong and du Cros (2012) and du Cros and Liu (2013) both found examples of this in terms of how urban landscapes previously only experienced by youth tourists through films or television proved to be more challenging in real life, particularly some of the seamier streets of Hong Kong's Mong Kok district.

Finally, it should be noted that studies are finding that the Internet and social media have a major role alongside the traditional media of building youth tourists' expectations and forming travel itineraries. Information sharing/decision-making in regard to cybercommunities (in Chinese/English) that was explored briefly in du Cros and Lui (2013) will be expanded upon in this paper. Much has been written in the last eight years on the usefulness of tourism forums and online diaries of travellers for tourism. Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts (2007), for instance, have considered the usefulness and implications of travel blogs as destination marketing tools. Other tourism researchers, in turn, have looked to tourism blogs as research materials and spaces for understanding tourist characteristics, motivations and preferences (Carson, 2008; Wenger, 2008), tourists' decision making (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan, 2007; Mack, Blose, and Pan, 2008) and the ways in which destination image are framed (Pan and Ryan, 2007). Existing research has also considered the role of tourism blogs as tools for facilitating tourists' travel planning (Sharda and Ponnada, 2008), for educating hospitality students (Cobanoglu, 2006) and tourism blogging as social media for human interactions (Thevenot, 2007). Inevitably Asian independent youth tourists, as potential cultural tourists to cities, are most likely to be open to the Internet and social media to blog and chat about their travel

experiences and in one way or another reveal something of the kind and depth of experience of local culture for which they are looking.

METHODOLOGY

An innovative three-pronged multi-method research approach was utilised to understand more about what might lead novice independent Asian youth tourists to seek deeper experiences or not of Hong Kong local culture. A study of chatrooms and blogs was made and observations of discussions of lived experiences over a long period and combined with data from in-depth interviews conducted. Short semi-structured interviews provided more data from a larger sample of face-to-face surveys. Details of the data collection and analysis are provided below for the three-pronged approach.

Filtering was applied to the sample so that only fully independent (of family and tour package decision-making) youth tourists (15-29 years) were targeted, whose main growth and development has occurred in Asia. In order to ensure some level of cultural distance from Hong Kong, all subjects were chosen from the region as well as from provinces and cities of China beyond Guangdong and Macau, which are neighbours of Hong Kong with high number of Cantonese speakers, who visit it more frequently than residents of other provinces and cities. Many researchers have argued that studies of national culture do not follow national boundaries and are more likely to miss the differences within countries, especially where language, religious or social practices play a role. Ng, Lee and Soutar (2007) have observed that quantitative measures should be accompanied by others in order to identify these differences more clearly.

Virtual Data Collection and Observation

This study has treated tourism blogs as representational spaces for observing communication, interactions and motivations of the target group. To help probe the intricate qualitative aspects of the tourism motivations and practices, this study has adopted a virtual ethnographic approach in the Chinese and English language Internet forums and web-blogs analysed. Virtual ethnography in Internet forums and web-blogs is meant to serve as a less intrusive platform for understanding the nature of youth tourists' lived experiences. Ethically, Internet forums are public domains. It is hoped that the youth tourists would reveal themselves anonymously in their most relaxed way - before, during and after travel. Furthermore, as current research on independent youth tourists has shown that the Internet, through the development of Web 2.0 that supports social media networking platforms, now provides opportunities to form cybercommunities (Chan, 2009; Lim, 2009; Sparkes and Pan, 2009).

Hence, a study of eight cybercommunities (Chinese and English-speaking), as well as individuals within them, has been conducted to research how deep a resource this avenue might be for understanding the values and experiences that may be associated with any collectivity underlying their travel decisions. For instance, *douban.com* is a Chinese language social media site that attracts mostly China-based Internet users with interests in cultural sectors, such as, (intellectual or independent) books, movies, independent music, and travel. Except for major social media functions that allow people to share online resources, the website also has the following sections which allow users to participate in unique activities: create their own video, music clip, or book database. Users can also form and join many groups based on their particular interests; create and join events; set up meetings while travelling; access an online radio service; read excerpts of arts, leisure and cultural topics from diverse blogs; and effectively create their own cybercommunity that matches their interests.

Previous research has indicated that Chinese speaking/ethnically dominated chatrooms often exhibit very different characteristics to Anglo-American ones, particularly in regard to policing shared community values (Ong and du Cros, 2012). As such, this research will be especially relevant to gauging youth tourists' sense of collectivism by observing whether the pattern is as evident in similar chatrooms and in relation to travel discussions in chatrooms dominated by other participants. The observation of Chinese and English language chatrooms by a non-participant research assistant, who checked at regular intervals to get the longest perspective possible on threads and topics possible within the study timeframe (from November 2011 to November 2012).

In-depth Interviews

The study that was undertaken for this paper included 15 in-depth interviews and used a mixed approach for sourcing subjects. Some interviewees were acquaintances of the research team, while others were interviewed at youth hostels, or after an email request to selected forum/chatroom subjects. Six interviewees were from mainland China and the rest from other parts of Asia visiting Hong Kong (Taiwan, India, Thailand, South Korea, Philippines and Mongolia). There were slightly more females than males (8:7). A few of the subjects who were relatively inexperienced travellers, while the rest more experienced ones. Interviews were conducted between May and November 2012.

How similar or dissimilar independent Asian youth tourists were from traditional backpackers was a question best answered in the in-depth interviews, where respondents could detail more of their decision-making processes and nature of peer support in choosing to undertake cultural activities or experience local culture. Hence, the selection criteria outlined above. The subjects who were ultimately chosen were travelling or had recently travelled independently of their families or package tour groups, on their own or with friends or partners. Subjects who are in paid work were included, as well as students or graduates.

Short Semi-Structured Face to Face Surveys

Filter questions were used to target the right group i.e. fully independent (of family and tour package) youth tourists whose main growth and development occurred in China (beyond Guangdong) or Asia at schools that followed local curricula. Overall, 271 subjects were interviewed with a short semi-structured questionnaire in English and Chinese (Mandarin) with a mix of demographic and psychographic questions. The emphasis on novice travellers (four trips or less in the region) meant that 48 percent of the sample was between 15 and 24 years old and 51 percent between 25 and 29 years old. More female respondents (58 percent) than males (42 percent) were interviewed. However, this was unintentional as random sampling procedures were being applied in selection of subjects at the locations chosen. Out of this group, 58 percent were in paid full-time employment. Less than 19 percent had any connection with culture at home (i.e. working or studying in a cultural or creative area).

The questionnaire largely aimed at elucidating and grounding the initial findings from the in-depth interviews and the digital anthropological research. The subjects were interviewed at several key Hong Kong attractions by student helpers when they were available to conduct the work (between December 2011 and December 2012) with a range of open-ended, multiple choice/response and Likert questions to gather data about educational background and lived experiences of creative arts, heritage and regional cultures and Hong Kong as a destination for these experiences. The analysis of the Likert and multiple choice survey data was undertaken using the SPSS statistical program package and the open-ended questions by thematic contents analysis.

Analysis

The study investigated cultural distance issues, awareness and travel motivation for independent youth tourists in Asia in order to answer the key research question 'what kind and depth of experience of local culture are they looking for?' The study's key objective was to provide a new outlook on travel and how it 'broadens the mind' in an Asian context through examining whether the underlying values that influence the nature of travel and cultural awareness in the region for these youth tourists are similar or different in some ways from other youth travellers mentioned in tourism literature, namely: traditional backpackers (see Horak and Weber, 2000) or flashpackers (Hannam and Diekmann, 2010). By including a multi-method approach to analysing the subjects' dialogues on places and people they visit, the study hoped to remain rigorous without introducing much of the researchers' own views (Saukko, 2003). The experiences from in-depth interviews and chatroom/forum observation were treated thematically using the ten themes already identified and then added to large matix, along with the data from chatrooms/forums. The key statistics from the larger sample of face-to-face surveys were scrutinized first then applied to the relevant sections of a matrix. In addition, analysis of these experiences in relation to the region's socio-political context was made using a contingent or lateral approach. That is, once any major socio-political issues appear in dialogues or discussions of experiences, some study was made of how this affects the patterns of cultural consumption identified. Hence, the mixed methods of the research approach assisted in narrowing down the most common behaviours and motivations. Mindfulness in this instance would mean that these youth tourists are also showing evidence of actively processing information and thinking about the new situations they experience in ways that might question their earlier assumptions about other cultures. Moscardo (1996) study of mindfulness in relation to sustainable tourism management found that mindful visitors are more likely to learn more information and pay attention to safety and other warnings, while enjoying their experience more.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND THEMATIC DISCUSSION

Overall, it appears that most of these subjects stayed for only 7 days or less (the majority stayed 2-3 nights), despite being independent travellers from beyond neighbouring Guangdong province, because of the visa stay requirements of the mainland Chinese participants and a host of other reasons for the rest as will be discussed below. This also seemed to fit with the popularity of the destination as either a weekend break or stress break destination for many of the study's subjects (see Table 2) and only six had stayed over a week in Hong Kong. Even so, the mean length of stay for the group was 2.8 nights, which is one night longer than the average for that of all overnight visitors to Hong Kong, whose mean length of stay was 1.8 nights for 2012 (HKTB 2013).

The ten themes addressed in analysis as a result of the literature review and contents analysis included: nature of travel experience, decision-making mode, information sources, desire for spontaneity and adventure, types of spending patterns/length of trip, depth of local cultural experiences sought, types of cultural experiences sought, mementos/souvenirs obtained, general experience of destination, evidence shown of self-reflection on cultural experiences/distance and impacts of tourism.

Table 2. Travel Motivations and Primary Purpose

Key Motivation	Weekend Break	Study Travel	Stress Break	City Trip (hang out in a big city)	First Trip without Family	Other	Total Responses
Semi-Structured Interviewees	59	6	157	28	14	5	269
In–depth interviewees	0	0	7	1	2	5	15
Total	59	6	164	29	16	10	284
Primary Purpose	**Attend Cultural Event**	**Sight-seeing**	**Visiting Friends & Relatives**	**Business**	**Shopping**	**Other**	**Total Responses**
Semi-Structured Interviewees	2	113	15	5	29	1	169
In–depth interviewees	2	4	0	0	2	7	15
Total Responses	4	117	15	5	31	8	184

Nature of Travel Experience

Most of the in-depth interviewees had some experience of travel outside of their home country before arriving in Hong Kong, while the semi-structured (SS) survey sample included over a third (35 percent) for whom the current trip to Hong Kong was their first (and this was of course higher for the mainland Chinese segment of the sample). Even so, it was surprising that their first trip outside of their home country would be to Hong Kong and without the aid of a tour package. However, the chat online indicated that the city was generally considered to be a popular destination amongst this age group and safe place for first time travellers.

Three of the in-depth interviewees (one from China and two from India) mentioned that they travelled independently in their home countries as a prelude to attempting trips outside. In the case of one female respondent (14) she seemed adamant that such travel was considered 'practice' for a longer and more ambitious trip through East Asia, which would require more pre-planning than trips within her home country of India. The amount of pre-planning evident from the whole sample of interviewees will be discussed further in relation to information sources accessed (what and when) and could be an indicator of how cultural distance issues impact on this age group.

Overall, the in-depth interviewees had slightly more travel experience than the survey sample and three had travelled for more than two months within Asia on one trip. One interviewee was half way through a trip that included upwards of 12 countries. This respondent (11) observed that, "if I don't go travel now, the next time (I could go) will be 30 years later when I retire. At that time, even I have money to enjoy life, I probably don't have enough energy to enjoy it (travel)."

Brieke (2008) also noted this attitude amongst a couple of her student subjects in Macau, who had undertaken long-term travel. She speculated that intense feelings about job security precluded some of her Macanese student subjects from considering a gap year to travel, although some were saving for shorter trips of three to six months with the view that even trips of this length would be impossible once they had entered the job market fully. Another factor that is strong in many Confucian-influenced Asian societies is the importance of family obligation. Taiwanese Respondent 11 justified his decision to undertake his trip of 25 months by stating, "something changed in my family, which allowed me to have less responsibility for my family. So I felt it's time to travel. This was how my trip started."

Decision-making Mode

In depth interviews brought the most insight to this theme that included modes ranging from highly collective to highly independent and insular adopted by respondents before and during the trips described. Some interviewees used chatrooms they were regular members of to ask for comments of the feasibility proposed itineraries as well as solicit interest in gaining a travel companion. Also, the possibility for loose collectivity as a decision-making mode, where travel companions were not previously acquainted meet and devise trip itineraries, is made possible through such chatroom discussions. This use of the Internet for such collective decision-making was more prevalent in Chinese chatrooms than English-speaking ones. For instance, Respondent 1 noted that before arriving in Hong Kong, "My original plan was to travel by myself. Later, I posted threads on douban.com and found out several people who were also going to Hong Kong. Most of the time, it was just four of us hanging out together. The girl who came for shopping went back after shopping."

During the trip, "The deal we made was: We share our own itinerary with others. If there were things in common, we could go together. If some places one wanted to go (and) could not match others', he/she could travel by himself/herself to those places, and call others to meet up and move to the next stops together, after he/she has finished visiting those places he/she wanted to go." In this way, Respondent 1's travel companions could keep track of each other, but still retain some flexibility to explore in advance of the group. However, Respondent 15 uploaded an intensely detailed itinerary to one chatroom and expected the kind of response a travel agent would make. Needless, to say this approach was largely unsuccessful, as he had not visited the chatroom before and had no history of helping others.

Information Sources

All research subjects were asked about what types of information sources they used before and during their trip to Hong Kong. Multiple types of sources were used by most surveyed with a stronger response to the question in relation to pre-trip planning (see Table 3). Key information sources before the trip were often a combination of guidebooks, family and friends, Internet websites (30 percent Hong Kong-based; 70 percent other). During the trip by comparison guidebooks and websites remained strong (see Table 3). Even so, more personal sources such as friends and family and traditional ones such as guidebooks are clearly trusted and used by this group both before and during their trip.

Table 3. Information Sources

	Websites	Family & Friends	Guidebooks	Other	Total Responses
Before	112	127	114	32	385
During	76	62	97	21	256

The in-depth interviews found that social media had a role to play in many information sourcing and sharing experiences of subjects. For instance, Respondent 9, a Taiwanese slow travel/bicycle enthusiast, found it useful in this way:

> You know Facebook: If you post a nice snapshot taken during a biking trip, friends of your friends might see it and think this guy is cool. (Then) people will try to bike together if things work out. I've met a lot of friends in this biking circuit who share the similar value and vision. For example, this time, my friend lent me some biking accessories and taught me a lot of tips. (Respondent 9)

An examination of chatroom opinions on available Aps and website information found that youth tourists were more likely to copy local practices (accessing local cultural and lifestyle websites) than seek advice from specific Hong Kong tourism websites, such that of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, about useful Aps to download. One of these Aps of interest to mainland Chinese youth tourists would have been on film/TV locations to visit. The subjects in the project were born in 1980s or later (often known as the 'Post-Mao' generation), when China gradually opened to the outside world and became wealthier. Interviewees often noted they watched Hong Kong produced TV and films when growing up. Hence, Hong Kong environs and popular culture seem familiar to them and signage in Chinese also promotes some familiarity. Finally, Hong Kong is known to actively promote the use of Mandarin in service industries. There is also a strong hint in both travel and shopping chatrooms that such tourists come to Hong Kong to enjoy the benefits of a laissez-faire capitalist world.

In summary, most interviewees (semi-structured and in-depth) were not accessing Internet information as freely during the trip as before it for information, although it is likely that many of these travellers use smart-phones. There were a number who were writing blogs as they went. Respondent 9 found that the evenings in the hostel provided a good opportunity to write a trip blog and "contemplate everything, not only random things but also important national issues". The hostel with free wifi was also where Respondent 10 caught up with friends and family by WhatsApp and other means. It is likely that more hotspots with free wifi for tourists would benefit this group, especially in terms of accessing information on the destination and its arts and culture.

Desire for Spontaneity and Adventure

Once again, more detail on this theme was evident in the in-depth interviews than for the semi-structured surveys. Respondent 7 from South Korea found posts from the popular English chatroom 'Thorntree' stimulating, "I always like to read people's travel stories. It always inspires me as different people have different experiences when they travel." She also noted that these stories had prompted her to try to explore Hong Kong more on her own after she arrived.

However, concern about leaving too much to chance is evident in the pre-trip preparation in the greater sample of the semi-structured surveys (see Table 3). It was also evident in most of the in-depth interviewees. For instance, for the trip undertaken by Respondent 4, whose main purpose was relaxation, she undertook a lot of research through the Internet and also contacted a friend in the city (who is a local culture expert) for travelling tips. She travelled in a group with three friends, who came with her from Fujian Province. For popular sites, they all went together, and for specific sites only some of them were interested in, they went alone or in pairs. Even so, she felt a sense of disappointment because her travel companion's frequent use of the MTR (Hong Kong's fast and convenient subway transport) meant that she missed the experience of walking around Hong Kong to absorb its ambience. She observed, "I felt that my trip lacked a sense of surprise - as in the concept of 'Slow Travel.'" She is one of the few interviewees to mention it directly. However, it is

also present in the *douban.com* Chinese language chatroom group called "Slow Travel" (started in 2010) the an introduction page to guide the theme of the thread, reads,

> (We should) become a temporary resident instead of a tourist. (We should) give up the idea of 'This is gonna be my only chance of trip in my life'. (We should) think: 'There are many opportunities for travel waiting for me.' Do not follow the traditional travel route, but to live in a different place (*douban.com* 2013).

The study found that there is some evidence of conflict in relation to views amongst interviewees regarding importance of travel and the need for spontaneity and adventure. Respondent 11 (mentioned earlier) was clear that he would be taking no more lengthy trips that might provide that after the one he was on that brought him to Hong Kong. However, it is likely that youth tourists visiting a destination with a strong sense of purpose would have another view of how important slow travel is to depth of experience and sense of adventure. For instance, Respondent 9 was visiting Hong Kong for bicycling foremost and was avid to see what the city and its country parks offered for a keen cyclist given the destination is not known for its bike paths, unlike Taiwan his home country. Even so, this interviewee was able to gain a sense of personal challenge from accessing places and experiences 'off the beaten track,'

> Even though for a relatively small city like HK, it's difficult to take normal transportation to get to places such as rural outdoor places, heritage sites, mountain peak or river banks. It's even hard to drive to such places. By contrast, biking is a relatively good vehicle for people to travel to places. It feels really different when you travel to places with your own efforts. (Biking in this way means that) you have put all the things you see in your mind, just like documenting them with a camera. If you love biking, you have to learn to be smart, because you have to learn about directions and positioning yourself (Respondent 9).

Respondent 12 also from Taiwan provided the interviewer with the sense that he was very thoughtful on cultural issues and would purposefully explore unique cultural sites at destinations. His observed that his travel philosophy is about "authentic traveling experience. It shapes my travel mode – more about making friends with locals, visiting hidden spots rather than shopping district/tourist attractions."

Making friends with locals assisted Respondent 8 (from the Philippines) to discover a new and adventurous activity that would otherwise not been open to her in terms of understanding local expatriate culture. Interested in the Western and postcolonial side of Hong Kong, she participating in the Hash Harriers, which is activity that expatriates and some locals in a few Asian cities undertake that involves running up and down hills with a drinking session to celebrate finishing the event. One aspect she had not counted on that caused her some surprise was that on the particular day she was invited to attend the event was done in fancy-dress and her host "the Dutch guy started to take off his clothes, till he had only has pink bathrobes on. Then we started running together."

The more purposeful Respondent 6's original plan was to stay in Hong Kong for three days and then leave after watching the concert of a local stand-up comedian Wong Tze-Wah. However, she liked it so much she extended her trip to just within the visa limit for Chinese nationals). If she had been able to stay longer she stated that she would, "walk around a lot and measure Hong Kong with my footsteps!" She took the tram on Hong Kong Island a couple of times with an eventual idea for destination in mind, but hopped on and off on the way. One time, she ended up in North Point wet market (fruit, vegetables, cold meat and live chickens) and enjoyed this spontaneous experience of local culture.

Types of Spending Patterns/length of Trip

The mainland Chinese youth tourists all undertook trips that were fairly short in nature with only a few staying as long as a week. Therefore budgeting might not be as tight for some, as it would with a longer holiday or one with less focus on relaxation and entertainment as a key motivation (see Table 2 again). Hardly any comments about the expensiveness of Hong Kong were recorded other than one or two about the food and transportation in comparison with China. This might be because the mainland is suffering much higher inflation than Hong Kong and these were short trips. Despite hotel accommodation being expensive in the latter in comparison to other cities in Asia, 73 percent of the surveyed subjects stayed in hotels, nine percent with friends or relatives and only 13 percent in hostels (for both in-depth and semi-structured interviewees). One possible explanation is that the collective nature of decision-making and travel makes it easier for this type of tourist to share hotel rooms and accommodation costs (84 percent of those staying at hotels noted that they were travelling with friends). This finding is very different from the behaviour of certain traditional non-Asian backpackers, who usually stay in hostels, camping grounds or with friends.

Those Asian youth tourists interviewed with the longest length of stay or trips being undertaken were the most concerned about budget. Respondent 11 was attempting to travel on 10 USD a day on average, so was staying with friends (while in Hong Kong) in order to afford to stay long enough to get a sense of its culture. Respondent 14 and 15 were trying to limit their trip to a few days in Hong Kong, because of the poor exchange rate of their home currency, and also the former was only spending time in a few capital cities for this reason.

Depth of Local Cultural Experiences

The most detailed observations on local culture came from the in-depth (ID) interviewees, as they had more time to expound in their interviews than those from the SS survey. Respondent 2 noted that he was "very attracted" to the diversity of Hong Kong – the mixed style of architecture, the language, the transportation, and the food. He was also very impressed by the signage everywhere to regulate public behaviour (such as suggesting people give seats to pregnant women), which is not so prevalent in most of China's cities in his experience. Subjects from the SS survey were impressed that the local public seemed to be abiding by rules, such as, no smoking or littering in public areas. A few negative comments were reserved for shop assistants, though most felt locals responded politely when being asked for directions. One Korean youth tourist surveyed was upset about being mistaken by local people for a mainland Chinese tourist. Whenever another Taiwanese tourist spoke Mandarin, she felt that this misunderstanding occurred. Others were surprised to hear so much Cantonese still being spoken around them, despite Hong Kong becoming part of China in 1997.

In regard to what makes Hong Kong distinct from China, quite a few of the SS interviewees observed that they were struck by the mix of Eastern and Western culture with much diversity in cuisine and nightlife options. Words most common in the short answers from the semi-structured interviews were 'fusion', 'multicultural', 'freedom of speech', 'fashionable', 'modern,' while some Koreans and Taiwanese saw it as similar to their own capital cities. Surprisingly, others commented that heritage was important in Hong Kong (even though the historic built environment is sadly lacking due to constant redevelopment) and that they enjoyed the different aspects of Chinese and British Hong Kong culture still evident.

It is possible that mainland Chinese tourists were more sensitive to how much Chinese culture they witnessed, as against other Chinese and Asians. Mainland Chinese Respondent 6 who also had a stated interest in local culture visited two wet markets on Hong Kong just to see how activities there differed to what she had observed in Hong Kong TV dramas. Alternatively, Respondent 3 (also from

China) had little interest in the city's distinctive fusion of East and West, "as it is not exactly British, but has been influenced by cultures of Guangdong and other close-by regions, which shapes a transformation. I am not particularly interested in this type of culture, to be honest." Rather, he found more appeal in purposefully searching out locations from Hong Kong's films in order re-experience their mood in reality, "today, I went to the Hennessy Road (See Hong Kong movie *Crossing Hennessy*), and went to some roads in Mongkok which showed up in *Teddy Boy* series, and also Portland Street (this red light district showed up in a lot of Hong Kong gangster/cop movies). All famous spots as such." Alternatively, Respondent 4 (from China) found the juxtaposition of the old and new noteworthy, "Hong Kong culture is very multi-dimensional and diverse. There are commercial shopping zones with many people hanging out, and also old street markets for ordinary people." Mongolian Respondent 10 also made a comparison between her hometown and one of Hong Kong's most vernacular shopping areas, "Ulaanbaatar is just like Sham Shui Po in Hong Kong. Nothing particularly fancy, though there is one LV store." Just over 10 percent of youth tourists of the larger sample had visited Hong Kong to experience a larger metropolis than the one to which they were accustomed (see Table 2). Respondent 10 was one of the ones that also had an unexpectedly deep experience of local culture through working with local people as a volunteer on a community service project in Kowloon.

Lifestyle that is based on the different spirit and culture of Hong Kong to mainland China was what mainly attracted Respondent 5 to revisit the city. She suggested that an ideal trip would include: "a concert of a Hong Kong singer; seafood in small town by the ocean; museums and galleries/art museums on a Wednesday night (free admission) and drink a bit in Lang Kwai Fong (bar district) at night." Many others also noted that the possibility of enjoying this mix of local culture and lifestyle options was a positive aspect of their Hong Kong visit.

Types of Cultural Experiences

This section examines the types of arts and heritage attractions visited and specific cultural activities that generated shallow or deep experiences for the interviewees. It was noticeable that very few of the research subjects visited arts and heritage attractions in the New Territories or Outlying Islands, outside the core tourist zones of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. Time and budgeting might have been a factor, however, most interviewed were first time visitors to Hong Kong and appear to have intentionally selected a number of the must-see attractions from the core zones in their itineraries, as would other tourists.

Overall, the most popular cultural attraction was Hong Kong Disneyland and the most popular heritage attractions were the local Chinese restaurants and teashops, markets and Bauhinia Square (place of the 1997 Handover of sovereignty to China). Over 77 percent of youth tourists, who visited the latter, were from mainland China and only a third of these were students. Otherwise, there was nothing notable about the origin or occupation of youth tourists who visited these attractions. A sample of key cultural attractions from a question to the semi-structured survey subjects that allowed multiple responses is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Key Hong Kong Cultural Attractions

Attractions	No. of Response
Hong Kong Disneyland	112
Chinese restaurants and tea shops	80
Bauhinia Square	54
Mong Kok Market (for local Chinese)	162
Yau Ma Tei Night Market (for tourists)	56
HK Art Gallery	76
Big Buddha	36
Wong Tai Sin Temple	40
Total Responses	616

Cultural activities surveyed for show a similarly diverse picture. However, although films were popular (66 percent), only two attended a live cultural performance. Respondent 6 was an interviewee who travelled to Hong Kong from China by herself for the purpose attending a specific cultural event. She attended Hong Kong actor Wong Tze Wah's stand-up comedy show. Something of a fan, she was highly motivated to visit the city at a time when she could achieve her wish. The youth hostel where she was staying had an unexpected vacancy, so she was able to stay longer after the performance without spending too much, and was able to pursue her secondary aim of getting to know the city. Significantly, she spend the most of any of the in-depth interviewees which was over HKD 10,000 and much more than the average for overnight mainland tourists to Hong Kong (HKD 8,568), because of purchases of electronic goods and her idol's DVDs. Respondent 12, an interviewee from Taiwan, had purposefully travelled to Hong Kong to attend a pop concert by the UK artist James Blunt, who was only appearing in one city in Asia.

Of the in-depth interviewees, Respondent 4 from China, who styled herself as a "cultural person" in touch with like-minded people in Hong Kong, concentrated her efforts on specialist bookshops. These were popular with youth tourists interested in collecting local comics or political works not available in their country (e.g. China). Respondent 4's comments about the nature of independent publishing here were indicative of deeper self-reflection upon differences underlying cultural processes in the city and at home,

> I think in terms of choosing books, Hong Kong bookstores must be very different from mainstream commercial bookstores on the mainland (indie bookstores in China have been gradually closing down. It's very difficult for indie bookstores to survive in first-tier cities there). I also believe the development of a civilized society does require a group of followers who are passionate about alternatives, otherwise the city culture will be too monotonous (Respondent 4).

Mementos/Souvenirs

Overall, the most common type of souvenir purchased was either a food souvenir/gift or something small, cheap and plastic (e.g. fridge magnet) (see Table 5). Respondent 4 joked that she "bought pork jerky from Koi Kei (a famous brand from Macau also sold in Hong Kong). It's for the elderly to exercise their teeth." While Hong Kong has numerous bakeries and food specialist gift shops, some prefer the Macau items that have been aggressively marketed in the region using young pop music performers popular with Asian youth (du Cros 2013). While not many bought handcrafted or locally

made non-food souvenirs, local books and comics were popular with some. The type of souvenir considered to be 'other' might include some non-traditional types, such as mundane items, that the individual has invested with a particular memory or sentiment from the trip (see Wilkins 2013). However, very little research has been done into what Asian tourists consider important for constructing the self-identity in this respect.

Over 21 percent stated that they would not buy any souvenirs. Also Respondent 2 stated, "I rarely buy souvenirs when I go travelling. I usually have economic considerations. I think photos and memories can replace (objects)."

Table 5. Types of Souvenirs

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Something small and plastic to remind you of Hong Kong	51	18.8	19.0	19.0
Handicrafts/home items made in Hong Kong	31	11.4	11.6	30.6
Food item gifts	101	37.3	37.7	68.3
Nothing	57	21.0	21.3	89.6
Other	28	10.3	10.4	100.0
Total	268	98.9	100.0	
Missing	-9	3	1.1	
Total		271	100.0	

Hence another type of souvenir or memento for this group could be as a result of their own photography. Interviewees were asked what three things they most commonly photographed while on their trip. Curiously, over 30 percent answered "food," meaning either meals or shops/street stalls with foodstuffs for sale. Around 35 percent said they photographed either architecture or street views that they found novel. Nearly 20 percent noted that they photographed people going about their daily life. Mostly, subjects snapped night-views and views from scenic spots, such as the Peak or Victoria Harbour in a similar way to other tourists.

General Experience of Destination

The general experience of expressed by both sample groups about the destination could be considered as a backdrop to other comments. Whether a tourist has a good or a bad overall impression of a place is likely to affect their decision to repeat the experience or modulate or more a completely different set of travel decisions. Overall, the interviewees in both sample groups were very positive about their general experience of Hong Kong. They were impressed by aspects such as orderliness, cleanliness, convenience of transport, local people's manners and the choice of food and other items for sale. The emphasis on orderliness and cleanliness has caused some speculation about whether the members of the SS survey that emphasised these aspects would deliberately choose destinations that could be considered the opposite or not even as a personal challenge. There were also some not so keen on crowded areas and tourist spots with too many tour groups. Respondent 10 from Mongolia had worked out her own way of avoiding the crowds and tour groups,

As most of the tourist groups just came for a day trip without staying overnight, their visiting schedule appears to be visiting the sites in the inner city first, then to sites at outskirts of the city. So in order to avoid tourist crowds, I went to the sites outside the inner city first. I thought there would be less people, and found out there was nobody (Respondent 10).

Evidence Shown of Self-Reflection on Cultural Experiences/Distance and Impacts of Tourism

Not all self-reflection on Hong Kong cultural experiences was positive. Two in-depth interviewees from Taiwan had another view. Respondent 12 was particularly critical about the cultural scene in Hong Kong after only a few weeks in the city. He observed that Taiwan in comparison has a "cultural scene (that) is amazing. Lots of artists and creativity blossoms. Government implements relatively better policies for young people to have an alternative living style, although financial scene is not as great, it's a better place to live for me than in Hong Kong." Long-term traveler Respondent 11 observed, "I think I would describe Hong Kong in this way: It is a place that is highly efficient, free, convenient, and developed till a very mature level in many aspects. However, people here do not necessarily smile more than people living in other places. Is it because Hong Kong is moving too fast, as if it is chased by time, which makes itself breathless." He felt that after staying here he felt much less relaxed than when he was at home in Taiwan. Alternatively, voluntourist Respondent 10 (Mongolia), who assisted with a community development project in Hong Kong, reflected that she received a deep cultural experience of Hong Kong from her engagement with "different families who work in different businesses." When this project was complete, independent tourists would be able to "sleep in different family's place for a night, and they would treat you." She also compared this experience with homestays in Mongolia where,

> Mongolia nomads really could not care less about money. Instead they care about whether they are able to be immersed in nature. Their mindset is that they don't mind whether they are rich or not, and life is good as long as they have nature around them. They could not stand urban life, because it's too crowded (Respondent 10).

The unexpected nature of cultural distance between Hong Kong and the rest of China was what struck most interviewees. Respondent 6 reflected on cultural distance between Hong Kong and the mainland in terms of spatial comfort zones, "one thing I think is really scary is the short distance between buildings. I can reach other people's home, if I stretch my arms. This is terrifying." She also acknowledged that language might provide a barrier to understanding or enjoying local culture completely, when changing her mind in this statement, "I also recommend people going to Hong Kong Arts Centre to watch theatre plays. Actually, maybe not, because my friends do not understand Cantonese." Again, the expectation is present that after 15 years inclusion within Chinese sovereignty that Mandarin would be more prevalent in Hong Kong, even in local cultural productions.

A number of the subjects in semi-structured interviews also observed that they should have learned some Cantonese before arriving and would offer this as a travel tip to others, and some said they found the Cantonese accent on locally spoken Mandarin curious. Most of these interviewees had fairly superficial experiences of Hong Kong's cultural distance (e.g. noticing that cars drive on the left and there are fixed penalty fines for smoking in public), while a few made more thoughtful and mindful comparisons. For instance, about the multicultural nature of Hong Kong and its spirit: "people are from everywhere . . . it is more inclusive;" "good social welfare and high level of human rights;" and "people are open-minded here." One complained in the spirit of Chinese nationalism, however, about the prevalence of the Falungong cult religious group (prohibited in China) protesting at key tourist attractions about their treatment within China, as it "will damage image of China".

In regard to the negative impacts of increased mainland Chinese tourism to Hong Kong, a surprising number of mainland Chinese interviewees from both samples commented that local residents were not as unfriendly towards them as they had been led to believe by the mainland media, where reports of negative social impacts of mainland tourism in Hong Kong have been reported. One short-answer was, "before my visit, I thought Hong Kongers are indifferent to others; during my visit, I found people are enthusiastic and nice." Another said, "they are kind and helpful." It might be likely that some of the subjects were already acting like quieter, more mindful tourists than those in tour groups that are criticized by the media in both places, by Hong Kong residents and even by some of the youth tourists in this study.

Overview

The results of this study have been used to model possible types of Asian youth cultural tourists that might visit an Asian city such as Hong Kong (see Table 6).

Table 6. Six possible Types of Independent Asian Youth Cultural Tourists

Quest-packer	A particular activity/attraction is the primary motive for visiting a destination/ the individual actively seeks deep and specific kinds of cultural experiences/ is highly self-reflexive/ usually is a more experienced (sometimes budget conscious) traveler and may work or study in a culture-related field
Same-packer	Cultural tourism is a primary or major reason for visiting a destination, but the experience is a more shallow one/ use collective decision-making mode with choice of popular sights and experiences foremost/ comprises less experienced, less budget conscious travelers who want to avoid commercial tours but enjoy largely pre-planned peer group travel and stay in hotels
Traditional backpacker*	An independent highly budget conscious tourist who does not travel for cultural tourism reasons foremost, but who is open to all new experiences, can be spontaneous and thus manages to have unexpected and deep cultural tourism experiences
Flexo-packer	An independent but not necessarily budget conscious tourist who is travelling to experience another kind of special interest tourism (e.g. adventure, film-induced, voluntourism**), but who manages to have unexpected and deep cultural tourism experiences as well
Flash-packer*	Independent tourists who ape backpacking traditions, but are not budget conscious and for whom hedonistic experiences such as partying, clubbing and shopping are paramount. Cultural tourism is a weak motive for visiting a destination and the resultant experience is shallow
Long-packer	A long-term independent traveler who travels for more than two months/does not travel for cultural tourism reasons, but who nonetheless participates in some activities and has a mix of deep and shallow experiences whether in Asia or beyond

*   Existing terms in academic literature and common usage.
** 'Voluntourism' is a term that has taken over from 'volunteer tourism', as in the case of Respondent 10's experiences

Within the sample for the whole study, there seemed a marked difference between mainland Chinese youth tourists' behaviour and the Western concept of backpackers, because of visa stay limitations. A segment of the sample (including other Asian youth tourists) also differed from the latter in terms of cultural consumption patterns (popularity of Disneyland, shopping, visiting the

cinema and common tourist scenic spots), which seemed to follow those of tour groups (same-packers). They also differed in regard to pre-planning and mode of decision-making, accommodation and souvenir consumption. A seven-day independent visa prevents drifting or 'Slow Travel' for a large portion of the sample from mainland China and many considered the destination a stress and weekend break foremost. Significantly, many Asian youth tourists complained that there is nothing special to buy in the dry street markets (all China sourced), meanwhile this area is still popular with Western backpackers who purchase products, usually cheap souvenirs, that are "Oriental" in style. While same-packers looked to be the largest group (similar to sightseeing cultural tourists in Table 1), the smallest group was Asian youth tourists with particular cultural goal (quest-packers). This type of tourist is likely to be closest to purposeful tourists identified in Table 1. Flexo-packers are a category similar to that of serendipitous cultural tourists, because they set off to do a particular activity in depth and this brings them into contact with local culture in some meaningful way. Meanwhile, the other categories in Table 6 do not correspond as clearly with those remaining in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

This study has been able to discern some striking answers to the key research question regarding the kind and depth of experience of local culture. First, that there is a greater desire overall for discovery of new and spontaneous experiences of local culture in an urban context than first thought, but also an impression of more reliance by some tourists on traditional accompaniments of mass tourism than expected, despite independent status (e.g. many staying in hotels not hostels, preference by most for must-see sights and core tourist areas, emphasis on orderliness and cleanliness of the destination, nature of typical souvenir choices, and prevalence of shopping). The interest in local culture often originates not so much from traditional marketing or tourism website promotions of Hong Kong culture, but from representations in locally produced TV and films that have reached into the region. Popular non-food souvenirs or purchases were therefore DVDs of local productions and performers, comic and other books that are published in Hong Kong (including some that are banned for political or other reasons).

Reflection about the nature of cultural distance between Hong Kong, other Asian countries and China also occurred frequently and on many levels, while concern about negative tourism impacts was not so evident, other than complaining about overcrowding of popular tourist attractions by tour groups. Overall, it appears from this study that the current crop of outbound Asian independent youth tourists could be considered consumers of deep, as well as shallow, cultural experiences of local culture for Hong Kong. There is also potential for this group to be open to slow travel options in a less expensive destination, or in Hong Kong (particularly, if bicycling received greater public policy support).

More research is needed to see if all the Asian independent youth tourist categories listed above are ever likely to be a significant market for responsible cultural tourism products in Asian cities or boost cultural industries in the same way that fans of *Hallyu* (the Korean Wave) have helped boost South Korean tourism. It is likely that the use of the Internet and a (either a loose or tight) collective approach to decision-making will continue to define most of this market, although it includes a small number questing for specific cultural experiences that may sometimes prefer to undertake solo trips. The amount of self-reflective activity evinced by urban cultural experiences very similar but not too close to one's own, and the self-construction of identity through acquiring souvenirs for this group are aspects of this study that require further work to fully understand. Accordingly, further research is needed to compare the results of this study with that of non-Asian groups travelling in Asia or their own regions.

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