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Authenticity and commodification of Hong Kong heritage tourism

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Authenticity and commodification of Hong Kong heritage tourism

Abstract| This study aims at examining the level of commodification and authenticity of heritage tourism in Hong Kong from a tourist standpoint. It also attempted to examine the influence of perceived commodification on perceived authenticity in the context of Hong Kong heritage tourism. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied, whereas the focus was on the later one. Findings indicated a fairly authentic heritage experiences perceived by tourists. Commodification was not considered as a problem by respondents although signs of commodification were found. The findings also suggested that commodification indeed "does not necessarily" ruins the tourist's perception of authenticity.

1. Introduction

Hong Kong is commonly known as an urban tourism destination, which offers a spectacular skyline view, diverse shopping and recreational facilities. This cosmopolitan metropolis attracts millions of visitors a year, continuously growing over the years (HKTB, 2016). The concept of heritage has been established in Hong Kong in the 1980s when the fishing village with Chinese traditional features quickly transformed into a metropolitan city (Cheung, 1999). In addition, the British colonial history has left Hong Kong with special Western features. It is often referred to as a fusion of Chinese and Western culture, as well as the combination of tradition and modernity which makes Hong Kong a unique tourism destination with an image of 'East meets West'. Although heritage is not the main tourism product to attract international tourists, there is a growing concern for developing this type of tourism in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Planning Department, 2012). Different heritage trails have been established and promoted since 1993, specially designed heritage tour routes, events and exhibitions related to heritage were held (Commissioner for Heritage's Office, 2012). Nevertheless, due to the quick transformation of the city since the 1980s together with strong commodification for economic purposes, heritage sites in Hong Kong are reconstructed at various levels. While some keep their original forms, others are totally renewed and even others are built for newer purposes. As a result, the issue of authenticity of heritage sites is a vital topic for Hong Kong as a tourism destination.

The association between commodification and authenticity has been long discussed (such as Cohen, 1988; Goulding, 2000; Lanfant, 1995; Prideaux & Timothy, 2008; Shepherd, 2002). Still the influence among these two concepts is not agreed upon. Lanfant (1995) and Shepherd (2002) believe that commodification of heritage site lead to inauthenticity, hence "cheapen" the site. Whilst, Cohen (1988) advocates that it does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural product nor ruins the tourist's perception of authenticity. Prideaux and Timothy (2008) suggest that commodification

process creates a new form of authenticity. The relationship between these concepts, hence, still merits attentions and investigations.

Accordingly, this study aims at examining the level of commodification and authenticity of heritage tourism in Hong Kong as well as assessing the influence of commodification on authenticity from a tourist standpoint. Hence, the concepts of commodification and authenticity are investigated as evaluative notions.

2. The concept of authenticity in tourism

The concept of authenticity was first discussed in tourism journals in 1986 and there is a substantial increasing concern on the topic in the last ten years (Nguyen & Catherine, 2015). Authenticity in tourism and leisure field is claimed to be originating in the context of museums (Wang, 1999). Subsequently, it was extended to various tourism products and is currently used as one of the important tourism marketing selling points.

In a tourism context, Sharpley (1994) states that authenticity refers to traditional culture and origins, a sense of realness, genuineness and uniqueness (as cited in Wang, 1999). On a more general basis, Timothy and Boyd (2003) define authenticity as associated with presenting the past in an accurate manner. Generally, there are two main directions in regard. Some scholars consider authenticity as intrinsic to the objects, while others suggest authenticity lies within tourists' perceptions or experiences (Timothy, 2011). As a reaction on this divide, Wang (1999) contends that the authenticity concept should be differentiated into separate issues, which are often confused as one: tourist experiences and toured objects.

The concept of authenticity is often considered to be negotiable (Cohen, 1988), and therefore, different perspectives on authenticity exist. Scholars have indeed recommended various typologies of authenticity. Among the various types of authenticity, the three most discussed and acknowledged are objective, constructed and existential authenticity. They are formed through objectivism, constructivism and existentialism respectively.

Objective authenticity is believed to be based on 'pseudo-events' by Boorstin and 'staged authenticity' by MacCannell (Wang, 1999). As a museum-linked view, it refers to the pure, original and genuine version of objects (Chhabra, 2012; Wang, 1999). Objectivists contend that authenticity is an obvious feature of the objects and can thus be measured by certain criteria (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Objective authenticity appears to be simple, as the real has to be logically differentiated from the false. Objective authenticity is strongly based on the knowledge of the object and is therefore criticized as being able to be differentiated only by experts, intellectuals or elites. Constructivists, on the other hand, see the 'real world' as the result of interpretations and constructions (Schwandt, 1998). Constructive authenticity is, therefore, suggested to fulfill the complex and constructive nature of authenticity through the influence of capitalism and commercialization (Chhabra, 2012; Wang, 1999). It implies that an object is understood by tourists' interpretations and their knowledge in regard. The authenticity of an object is constructed through perspectives, beliefs, and

expectations. Constructivists argue that tourists search for authenticity, however, this is not objective but rather symbolic, i.e. authenticity which results from social constructions (Wang, 1999). The two aforementioned conventional concepts of authenticity are directly relevant and important for several types of tourism connected with the past, such as culture, heritage, history and ethic tourism (Wang, 1999). However, they are also claimed to be "too simple" for explicating contemporary tourism (Urry, 1991, as cited in Wang, 1999). Wang (1999) proposes another perception of authenticity, which is existential authenticity. Existential authenticity advocates a subjective version of authenticity which can be irrelevant to the realness of the toured objects (Chhabra, 2012; Wang, 1999). The object is only a medium through which to find and channel existential authenticity. Existential authenticity denotes a state of mind and perceptions, existential state of Being, and self-discovery (Chhabra, 2012; Wang, 1999). Tourists are searching for their authentic selves by travelling, experiencing activities and toured objects (Wang, 1999).

Previous studies have furthermore found that authenticity is hardly a 'standalone' concept (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Various antecedents and outcomes of authenticity have been suggested, discussed and empirically tested. One of the concepts which are frequently linked with authenticity is commodification. The following section is presenting the association between the two concepts in details.

3. Authenticity and commodification

Commodification, though originating from Marxism, has become popular for non-Marxists (Castree, 2003). The concept is often discussed in tourism studies as an outcome of the tourism industry (Greenwood, 1977). It is commonly defined as culture being turned into a commodity, packaged and sold to tourists (Cole, 2007). Commodification refers to the process through which cultural products are evaluated, primarily through their trading exchange value (Goulding, 2000). It is believed to be able to hide the element that determines its value (Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994). Based on Smith (1909)'s conceptualization of natural price and market price, Shepherd (2002) claims that market value is inauthentic, as it is veering from the natural and implies unnatural. When heritage is transformed into a tourism product, its 'cultural value' is converted to a 'commercial value' (Lanfant, 1995), hence become inauthentic. Subsequently, commodification is argued to diminish or even destroy the authenticity of local cultural products and human relations for both, locals and tourists (Cohen, 1988; Halewood & Hannam, 2001).

Shepherd (2002) provides a vivid example of the commodification of the Great Wall of China. It is being transformed into a modern tourist site, completed with parking lots, shops, restaurants, a restored section and even a roller coaster. This, accordingly, makes the site seem "desacralized, ruined, corrupted, cheapened" (Shepherd, 2002, p. 192). As a result, tourists who look for the 'real' Great Wall have to travel longer to see its remote parts, where there is less human interference. Commodification is also believed to be associated with the concept of stage authenticity. Goulding

(2000) states that a series of stage authenticity occurs in the commodification process, which transforms culture into popular culture.

Offering another perspective, Cohen (1988, p.383) suggests that commoditization "does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural product" nor ruins the tourist's perception of authenticity. Taking the example of Balinese ritual performances, he argues that tourists are frequently prepared to accept tourism commodities as authentic and that, with superficial touristic experiences, few traits of authenticity suffice for tourists' acceptance of an authentic product. Moreover, according to Cohen (1988, p.383) "tourism is a form of play". Hence, both tourists and performers are willingly to pretend that a commoditized product is authentic. He suggests that, rather than openly assuming commoditization as a negative impact on authenticity, it should be examined in an empirical context (Cohen, 1988).

Prideaux and Timothy (2008) offer a further interesting thought on this topic. They argue that the tourism industry encourages the commodification process of old authenticity, in order to create a new form of authenticity. This new authenticity presents a new type of cultural expression, which is contended to be acceptable to tourists (Prideaux &Timothy, 2008). The commodification process can accordingly provide a new symbol of culture, which can be used as a marketing tool. It can thus be assumed that commodification is not necessarily a negative force.

The association between authenticity and commodification received much attention and has been discussed and empirically evidenced frequently in tourism literature. Findings on this relationship seem to be varied between various contexts and respondents, ranging from negative to positive (Cole, 2007; Finn, 2009; Halewood & Hannam, 2001; Xie, 2003; Yang & Wall, 2009). These studies, however, have not yet tested this relationship quantitatively. This study thus attempted to examine the relationship between commodification and authenticity, particularly, from tourists' perceptions.

This study is conducted in the city of Hong Kong. This city has gone through a rapid transformation from a fishing village with Chinese traditional features into a current metropolitan and cosmopolitan city since the 1980s (Cheung, 1999). The local tourism development which follows neoliberal directions encourages extensive commercialization and commodification (Chew, 2009). As a consequence, it is assumed that the degree of commodification of Hong Kong heritage attraction is rather high. Thus, the influence of commodification on tourist's perception authenticity is proposed to be negative.

4. Research method

This study mainly applied both qualitative and quantitative approaches, although quantitative study was the main focus, to explore the influence of commodification on authenticity in the context of Hong Kong heritage tourism. Although authenticity is rather subjective and is often investigated with a qualitative approach, this study aims at understanding tourists' perception of authenticity and the relationship between authenticity and commodification also from tourist's perspective. The majority quantitative approach adopted for this research is thus deemed as appropriate.

Semi-structured interviews were first conducted with 21 tourists visiting different heritage sites of Hong Kong. These interviews primarily aim at facilitating the process of instrument design. The key questions therefore focused tourists' perceptions towards the authenticity of the visited heritage sites. Additionally, tourists were asked to indicate the factors which affect their view of authenticity or inauthenticity towards the visited sites.

A survey questionnaire was used to collect the data on perceived authenticity and perceived commodification from tourists' point of view. An instrument to measure perceived authenticity and perceived commodification were developed through three sources, including their definitions, previous empirical researches and the prior qualitative study. As discussed earlier, the concept of authenticity contains various dimensions, in which the three main ones are objectivist, constructivist and existentialist. These three dimensions were applied to form the measurement scale for perceived authenticity. Accordingly, a scale of 21 items was developed for perceived authenticity and 5 measurement items were designed for perceived commodification. In addition, information on the trip and personal profile of respondents were also obtained.

The survey was conducted in the first months of 2014, at six different heritage attractions in Hong Kong (including Wong Tai Sin Temple, Man Mo Temple, Po Lin Monastery, Ten Thousand Buddha Monastery, Chi Lin Nunnery and Ping Shan Heritage Trail). A total of 625 valid questionnaires were obtained and usable for data analysis.

A structural equation modeling (SEM) approach was adopted to analyze the relationship between perceived authenticity and perceived commodification. The three dimensions of authenticity were suggested to be distinctive and independence. Thus, the associations between commodification and the three dimensions were supposed to be varied and hence tested separately. The data analysis was facilitated by SPSS 21.0 and AMOS 21.0.

5. Results of quantitative study

Among the 625 respondents, the number of female respondents was slightly larger than the male respondents, with percentages of 54.8% and 45.2% respectively. Most of the respondents were from 25 to 45 years old, making up 63.5% of the total. Respondents came from 45 countries and territories. The largest group was from Asia, making up more than half (53.3%) of the total and the second largest group came from Europe (32.3%). About 40.7% of the respondents were repeat visitors to Hong Kong. Most of respondents (58.7%) stayed in Hong Kong for 3 to 6 days.

As introduced in the previous sections, the perceived commodification was proposed to have direct negative influences on three dimensions of perceived authenticity, namely objective authenticity, constructive authenticity and existential authenticity. A model comprised of four constructs were designed and tested.

A principle component analysis (PCA) was then conducted to derive the underlying dimensions of the four constructs. In order to ensure a valid and reliable finding for future analyses, the following

criteria were applied. 8 items were eliminated due to cross loading or low factor loading (less than 0.5) (Field, 2009; Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). The results of the PCA, as shown in table 1, suggest 4 factors extracted from the remaining 18 items. The KMO statistic (0.800) and the results of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi2$ = 4839.756 and p<0.001) were well above Kaiser's (1974) minimum thresholds, indicating sampling adequacy sufficient correlations between items. The factor loadings of all items were larger than the 0.50 minimum requirement, ranged from 0.587 to 0.879, indicating the achievement of convergent validity (Field, 2009). Within each factor, reliability was assumed as the Cronbach's alpha values were all above the 0.70 standard (Field, 2009; Hair et al., 2010). Thus, the factor structure resulting from PCA was found to be adequate, valid and reliable for further analyses.

Table 1. Results of the principle component analysis

Component/ Item*	Mean*	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	%variance explained	Cronbach's alpha (a)
Objective Authenticity			4.845	26.917	0.835
True to its original	5.16	0.827			
Kept from the actual period	5.34	0.771			
Verified by historians/ authorities	5.04	0.761			
Has a documented history	5.30	0.717			
Represent the past of Hong Kong	5.54	0.663			
Old and ancient	5.30	0.587			
Constructive Authenticity			2.407	13.375	0.853
Represent local ways of life	5.23	0.879			
Represent local community	5.29	0.864			
Allows for interaction with local	5.13	0.772			
Opportunity to experience local culture and customs	5.55	0.679			
Still in use for original purposes	5.31	0.666			
Existential Authenticity			2.087	11.593	0.772
Feel relaxed	5.92	0.873			
Enjoy myself	5.95	0.859			
Calm & peaceful atmosphere	5.81	0.750			
Enjoy being together with my companions	5.97	0.595			
Commodification			1.890	10.499	0.772
Too commercialized	3.33	0.864			
Overly managed and regulated	3.65	0.818			
Made for tourism purpose	3.76	0.790			

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) = 0.800	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: χ2 = 4839.756; p<0.001	
Total variance explained = 62.383%	

* 7 point Likert scale

From the above results of PCA, a measurement model containing four constructs with 18 items were created. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then executed to validate or confirm the factor construct. Due to the low factor loadings which affected the convergent validity of the constructs, two items were further eliminated. The goodness-of-fit indices (χ^2=242.525, df=92, χ^2/df=2.636, GFI=0.954, RMSEA=0.051, CFI=0.965, TLI=0.954) provided evidence of a good fit between the measurement model and the observed data (Hair et al., 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 2 shows the results of reliability and validity check of the measurement model. The composite reliability (CR) values of all constructs were greater than the 0.70 minimum requirement (Hair *et al.,* 2010). Hence, the reliability of all constructs could be assumed. The factor loadings of all variables were larger than 0.50 and significant (t-value greater than 1.96) as well as the average variance extracted (AVE) values of all constructs were above the critical limit of 0.50. Thus, the convergent validity of the constructs was deemed as acceptable. Also, the AVE values are greater than the maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV) estimates and hence, discriminant validity of the constructs was achieved (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Table 2. Reliability and validity of the measurement model

Component/ Item*	Loading (t-value)	AVE	CR	MSV
Objective Authenticity		0.502	0.832	0.209
True to its original	0.838			
Kept from the actual period	0.753			
Represent the past of Hong Kong	0.708			
Verified by historians/ authorities	0.663			
Old and ancient	0.546			
Constructive Authenticity		0.541	0.852	0.209
Represent local community	0.890			
Represent local ways of life	0.832			
Allows for interaction with local	0.669			
Opportunity to experience local culture and customs	0.644			
Still in use for original purposes	0.598			
Existential Authenticity		0.644	0.843	0.073
Enjoy myself	0.878			
Feel relaxed	0.847			

Calm & peaceful atmosphere	0.667			
Commodification		0.546	0.779	0.025
Too commercialized	0.889			
Overly managed and regulated	0.688			
Made for tourism purpose	0.613			

Following the confirmation of the measurement model, a structural model was built with constructs, including one exogenous (Perceived Commodification) and three endogenous (Objective Authenticity, Constructive Authenticity and Existential Authenticity), and three hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The model fit indicators (χ^2=372.063, df=95, χ^2/df=3.916, GFI=0.932, RMSEA=0.068, CFI=0.935, TLI=0.918) were within the acceptable range, indicating a fit between the model and the observed data (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The final model is presented in figure 1. The findings indicated that perceived commodification had negative, yet rather weak, effects on three dimensions of perceived authenticity.
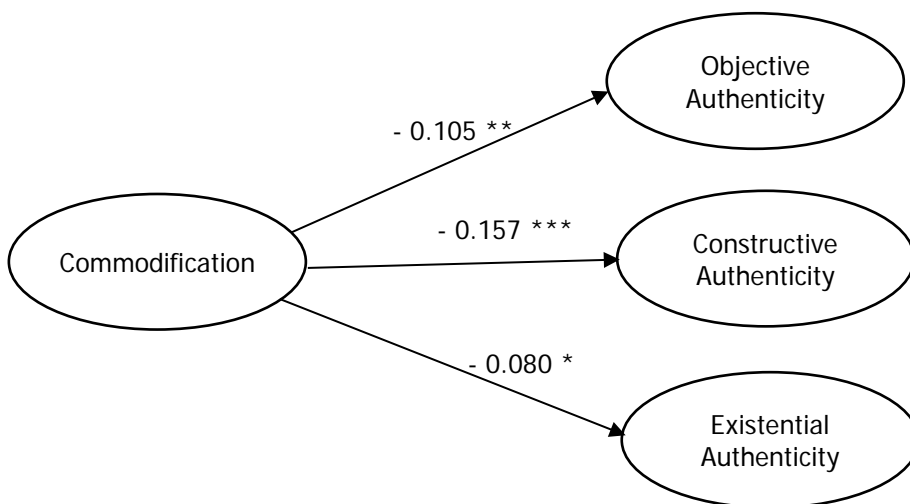

Figure 1. The structural model

Note: * : p-value= 0.087; ** : p-value=0.022, *** : p-value <0.001

6. Discussions

Tourist perception of authenticity and commodification towards Hong Kong heritage tourism

In general, the perceived authenticity level of Hong Kong heritage tourism was found to be positive. The scores were ranged from 5.04 to 5.97 (out of a 7-point Likert scale), indicating rather authentic heritage experiences as perceived by the respondents. Among the four dimensions of perceived authenticity, the highest scores were given to existential authenticity. The fact that most studied sites are religious related may explain for this relatively high level of existential authenticity. The

spiritual, peaceful atmosphere and spaces somehow separated from the bustle city life of these sites help to create calm and relaxing experiences during the heritage visits.

Among the studied sites, the Man Mo Temple seems to be perceived as the most authentic. This small temple, located in the Central district of Hong Kong Island, is one of the oldest temples in Hong Kong. The temple possesses an old appearance with minimal reconstruction signs. It is still in use for its original purpose and is in fact a popular and trustful religious site for locals. The Po Lin Monastery appears to be the least authentic ones, especially in terms constructive. This site was originally functioning as a monastery. The Po Lin Monastery is currently overshadowed by a tourism-purpose-built Giant Buddha and a Ngong Ping themed village. It became a popular tourist attraction and is frequently found to be busy with visitors.

Pertaining to perceived commodification, the score means were found to be lower than the neutral point (4), ranging from 3.33 to 3.76, indicating that commodification was not a major concern for Hong Kong heritage sites as perceived by tourists. This can be explained by the fact that most of the cultural tourists in Hong Kong (about 80%) are incidental, casual and sightseeing tourists, who usually look for rather shallow experiences when visiting cultural attractions (McKercher, 2002). Another possible explanation is that the perceived level of commodification in Hong Kong is considered in the context of a cosmopolitan city. In an urban destination such as Hong Kong, commodification is commonly expected (Harvey, 2002; Logan & Molotch, 1987). Hence tourists may presume a certain level of commodification in such destinations and that level in Hong Kong is to some extent tolerated.

Furthermore, independent sample tests were performed to identify any differences between long haul and short haul tourists in terms of perceived authenticity and perceived commodification. The results show a statistically significant difference in perceived commodification (p=0.000), yet no significant difference in perceived authenticity. It indicates that short haul tourists perceived a slightly higher level of commodification (in all three statements) than long haul tourists. This dissimilarity might be explained by the distance dynamics or culture distance between these two groups from the local culture of Hong Kong. Short-haul tourists, showing less cultural distance with the destination Hong Kong, were expected have certain knowledge about the destination, its culture and heritage. Hence, they might be able to see commodified parts of the visited sites. On the other hand, long-haul tourists with a higher cultural distance were likely to have less knowledge about the sites, hence not able to recognize the changes. Or that, because of the great difference between two cultures, long-haul tourists can have a higher level of tolerance towards the local commodification works on their heritage sites.

A research on popular cultural attractions in Hong Kong by McKercher, Ho and du Cros (2004) reveals that managers and custodians of the attractions have a pragmatic viewpoint in this regard. They expressed no ideological or managerial objections to commodification and even considered it as both, a valid and desired means of managing an asset (McKercher, Ho & du Cros, 2004). Heritage

attractions in Hong Kong, especially the selected sites for this study, indeed indicate a certain level of commodification. For example, the Ngong Ping village adjoining the Po Lin Monastery, is a purpose-built village with coffee shops, restaurants, souvenir stalls and other services aimed at the consumption needs of tourists. The Wong Tai Sin temple employs a group of professional staff in uniform to guard, monitor and clean the temple area. Similar visitor services are available in other places, such as the Ping Shan Heritage Trail, Chi Lin Nunnery and Ten Thousand Buddha Monastery. Hence, it seems that commodification of Hong Kong heritage sites is not only appreciated by managers and custodians the attractions, but also to some extent tolerated by tourists.

Commodification as a diminisher of authenticity

The findings of in-depth interviews indicated that the major factor contributing to the respondents' perception of inauthenticity was the commodification of the sites. The respondents questioned about the purpose of establishment or maintenance some heritage sites. For example, the Po Lin Monastery was assumed to be primarily built for tourism purpose. They also referred the site as an attraction park, or a form of Disneyfication. Respondents also gave evidenced of the commodification by pointing out the existing of visitor facilities, such as shops, restaurants and the overcrowding of visitors. A tourist in claimed that "*When this kind of attraction is surrounded by shops and touristic facilities it takes away the authenticity*". In addition, the freshly built appearance or the presence of modern and artificial elements made them distrust the authenticity of the sites. This was indicated in the case of the Wong Tai Sin Temple. A tourist in this site stated that the Chinese zodiac statues in the temple seemed to be fresh to him and that restrained him from the authentic feeling. Hence, the findings of qualitative study suggest a negative relationship between commodification and authenticity from tourists' perspective.

Results of quantitative analysis indeed indicated negative associations between perceived commodification and three dimensions of perceived authenticity. Constructive authenticity got influenced the most from commodification ($\beta=-0.157$, $p<0.001$), then objective authenticity ($\beta=-0.105$, $p=0.022$) and existential authenticity got the least and minor impact from commodification ($\beta=-0.080$, $p=0.087$). Thus, the negative influence of commodification on authenticity has been confirmed in this study. These effects, however, were rather weak. Even from statistical viewpoint, these path coefficients (strength less than 0.2) can be considered as not meaningful (Chin, 1998).

This uncertain negative relationship may be due to the fact that the commodification was somewhat perceived as neutral or acceptable, as discussed earlier. Previous research by Yang and Wall (2009) also found that tourists in Yunnan, China seem to accept commodification up to a certain extent and discontent happened when over commodification was found. Indeed, a certain level of commodification is deemed as necessary for the management of a heritage attraction. Tourists, or at least, the majority of them, demand certain level of enablement that facilitates their visit to heritage sites such as refreshing area, instruction signs or persons. Curators also require a degree of control and modification on the heritage assets when transform them into an attraction such as

guard, ticket booth, safety enhancement of the building. Another study by Matheson (2008) shows that although commodification of a festival was recognized, the emotional engagement with music helps to perceive the music as authentic in a commodified context. Referring to this case, it may be that the high level of existential authenticity due to the spiritual and relaxing atmosphere helps tourists to perceive the whole heritage experiences as authentic.

7. Conclusions

The current study investigated the perceived level of authenticity and commodification of Hong Kong heritage attractions. It also examined the influence of commodification on authenticity from tourist perspectives. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied, the focus was on the later one. 21 tourists were interviewed and 625 respondents were surveyed, at six heritage attractions in Hong Kong.

The findings indicated that tourists found heritage experiences in Hong Kong were rather authentic. The spiritual and relaxing atmosphere of the heritage sites was found to be highly appreciated and contributed the most to tourists' authentic experiences. It is also indicated that commodification was not a major concern as perceived by respondents, although indications of commodification such as tourist facilities, signs of reconstruction were found in most sites. In addition, short haul tourists were revealed to perceive a slightly higher level of commodification than long haul tourists. It seems that the limited knowledge of long-haul tourists may make them not able to recognize the modified details or that they may have a high tolerance for the local commodification works. A qualitative follow up study could be helpful to provide further explanation of these findings. The findings also suggested the important role of existential authenticity. Although this study was carryout out in the tangible heritage sites, it was the atmosphere in the sites that contribute the most to the authentic experiences.

Regarding the association of authenticity and commodification, perceived commodification was found to negatively, yet slightly, influence all three dimensions of perceived authenticity. The low level of commodification found in the current study may be an explanation for this minor effect. It is likely that the degree of commodification determines the relationship between commodification and authenticity from tourist perception. A certain level of commodification is deemed as necessary for the management of a heritage attraction. If this level of commodification is considered by tourists as acceptable, it would not negatively influence the perceived authenticity. Commodification indeed "does not necessarily" destroy the meaning of cultural product nor ruins the tourist's perception of authenticity as recommended by Cohen (1988). A moderate level of commodification would not necessarily diminish tourists' perceptions of authenticity. However, "the moderate level" is in the eyes of tourists and different groups of tourists may perceive this level differently. As indicated in the current study, short-haul tourists were somewhat more critical than their long-haul counterparts when assessing commodification. Also, the context of an urban destination, i.e. Hong Kong, may influence tourists' expectations as well as perceptions of commodification. An objective measure of

commodification, such as number of tourist facilities, added elements, etc., may help to determine a proper level of commodification.

Although the present study was conducted with best efforts, several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. Firstly, most studied sites are religious related. This may result on a bias towards existential authenticity. Secondly, heritage tourism in Hong Kong is often treated as a secondary or tertiary attraction only, and there is no world heritage site available for research. The majority of Hong Kong cultural tourists have been shown to have fairly shallow experiences (McKercher, 2002). Whereas, the issue of authenticity which is commonly quested in deeper modes of touristic experiences (Cohen, 1979, 1988). The seriousness of tourists on assessing authenticity and commodification may raise questions. Thirdly, the measurement of perceived authenticity and commodification in this study may draw criticism. This is due to the fact that the concept of authenticity as well as commodification is believed to be highly subjective and individualistic (Connell, 2007; Steiner and Reisinger, 2006). Having said that, it is believed that from marketing and management standpoint, measuring visitors' assessment of authenticity and commodification is necessary. Therefore, the measurement scales of authenticity and commodification needs further validation. Furthermore, a qualitative follow up study is suggested to reinforce results of quantitative findings. Similar research in other contexts, such as rural destination or where heritage is a primary attraction, is also recommended.

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