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Neil Leiper

Sun-Young Park

University of San Francisco, sypark5@usfca.edu

Perry Hobson

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COMING OF THE ASIAN GIANTS: SKYSCRAPERS AS TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AND AS ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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Neil Leiper, Naresuan University, Bangkok, Thailand; Adjunct Professor, Southern Cross University

Sun-Young Park, School of Travel Industry Management, University of Hawaii at Manoa

J.S. Perry Hobson, School of Tourism & Hospitality Management, Southern Cross University

INTRODUCTION

The first buildings described as skyscrapers were built in New York and Chicago more than 100 years ago. The term was an adaptation, to tall buildings, of a word long in use for describing small topsails on ships, sails so high they seem to be scraping the sky. These original skyscrapers can still be seen on old sailing ships. Visiting the USA 50 years ago, a French geographer remarked on how "the skyscraper...is a phenomenon spreading all over the world." Recently, increasing numbers have been built in the Middle East and, more numerous, in Asia. There are more high-rise buildings in Hong Kong than in any other city in the world and seven of the world's ten tallest buildings are in Asia. The coming of these 'Asian Giants' reflects prosperity, modernisation and, in some instances, status-seeking. The trend also signifies an attraction in Asian tourism and a source of environmental issues. The tourism literature contains many remarks about skyscrapers, but there are no detailed discussions or theoretical analyses of skyscrapers as tourist attractions. In that context, the present article can be an original contribution. It aims to provide theoretical knowledge of skyscrapers' roles in tourist attraction systems and to indicate environmental issues associated with these roles. As such, it also aims to provide the basis for future empirical research.

RESEARCH METHOD: GLANDER

We used *glander*, a term introduced into the scholarly lexicon by a scholar who used it in research leading to books that have created great interest. This method involves tinkering intellectually in an undirected stochastic process, aiming at exploring or capturing a topic, not conforming to conventional ideas in research methodology. It requires periods of constant, inquisitive and intellectual thinking. We observed many examples and thought about their roles in tourism via various sources (newspapers, the Internet, books, journal articles). We reflected on our experiences working in skyscrapers and staying in skyscraper hotels. We discussed the topic informally with other persons. For its main theme, the research considered three sets of theories from the literature on tourist attractions and applied them to skyscrapers. They are: MacCannell's (1976) theory of the evolutionary process that occurs with many sightseeing attractions, Leiper's (1990, 2004) theory of the causal process of tourist "attraction" and Gunn's (1972) theory about landscape design around

touristic sites.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no commonly agreed definition of skyscraper, although it commonly refers to very tall buildings. For its real estate database, Emporis defines a 'high-rise' building as one with at least 12 stories. In 2003, Hong Kong had more than any other city: 7,250; in New York, the next ranked city there were 5,310. By 2006, Hong Kong had 7,659 and New York 5,573; in 2006 the world's 200 tallest buildings included 89 in Asia, 74 in North America, 22 in the Middle East and 15 located elsewhere. Among the world's ten tallest buildings in 2007, seven are in Asia, two in the USA, one in the Middle East. Property developers and politicians are using heights of tall buildings as symbols of competitiveness linked with status-seeking. Prominent examples are in Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Like in other Asian countries, in Korea, skyscrapers are linked to

tourism promotion (e.g., city branding). Singapore's first skyscraper was the Cathay Building, constructed 1939; half a century later "modern skyscrapers ... represent to Singaporeans a powerful symbol of the county's economic success." Sofield and Li described China's new hotels as following "international trends in skyscraper design". Books on urban tourism refer to skyscrapers. In summary, the literature on tourism contains references to skyscrapers, but they are typically simplistic descriptions and indications, rather than analyses of skyscrapers' roles as attractions and associated environmental issues.

ANALYSIS RESULTS

Theoretical Analyses of Skyscrapers: MacCannell's theory described how sights, in the context of touristic sightseeing, can develop through five successive phases: naming, framing, elevation, enshrinement, and duplication. When a skyscraper is identified by "name," this marker or item of information enables it to become the centre of an "attraction." Leiper discussed markers in more detail, identifying nine functions they can have in tourist attraction systems and analyzing various media by which markers become elements in attraction systems. Skyscrapers are "framed" by the sky around them and "elevated" by their essence as very tall buildings, making them more easily noticed. Skyscrapers might be framed by space at ground level and if the space has a name, the skyscraper has evolved to "enshrinement" stage as a tourist attraction. However, because of high land prices and/or ineffective land zoning, very few skyscrapers have sufficiently large areas of space at ground level to enable effective enshrinement. "Duplication" occurs when a tourist attraction is copied and when the copied version is given the name of the original in the formats of photographs, posters, postcards, models, and other places, businesses or objects that copy a famous name. Skyscrapers generally do not seem to evolve beyond the elevation stage except famous examples by-pass enshrinement and reach duplication. Gunn's

normative model for tourist attractions links features to their contextual landscapes, which has three elements: nucleus, inviolate belt and zone of closure (services zone). In the context of skyscrapers as tourist attractions, the nuclear (central) elements are the buildings *per se*. If very tall, especially if the tallest in a city or one of the tallest in the world, a skyscraper becomes an object that many tourists will expect to see if they are visiting the city and will derive some kind of satisfaction as a result. Skyscrapers typically lack inviolate belts. Instead of entering via a quiet zone, tourists enter directly from noisy, crowded city streets and plazas. That lack of inviolate belts seems to impair skyscrapers as attractions. Skyscrapers typically have relatively adequate services zones, in the form of shops and restaurants located inside and nearby.

Environmental Issues: Our analyses indicate that skyscrapers involve complex environmental issues. They are the dominating features of the physical environments in many cities. With concerns about climate change leading to strategies for reducing energy usage and carbon emissions, skyscrapers can be criticized for consuming large quantities of electricity. In addition, other problems of skyscrapers include: "congestion of road and mass transit services, wind currents at sidewalk level, fire hazards, despoiling neighborhoods, visually despoiling the skylines of cities." Similarly, Doxiades criticised high-rise buildings' "working against nature (environment), because they prevent the units of social importance (families, neighborhoods) from functioning as naturally and as normally as before.....High-rise buildings work against networks of transportation, communication, and of utilities, since they lead to higher densities, to over-loaded roads, to more extensive water supply systems." Skyscrapers are not buildings on a human scale, and this might help be why one study found that the main weakness of Hong Kong as a tourist destination is its urban environment. In contrast, the urban environments of many

cities in Europe with no skyscrapers are regarded as attractive by many tourists.

CONCLUSION

Skyscrapers dominate the urban environment in the centres of many cities and there are more in Asia than any other part of the world. Generally, except for very tall examples, skyscrapers are not major attractions but minor, behind other features and characteristics of cities. Skyscrapers cause complex environmental problems, especially when many are located in close proximity. This negative condition diminishes the effectiveness of skyscrapers as attractions. Skyscrapers also contradict the principle that buildings for residences, offices and shops in cities, are best when constructed on a human scale, less than five stories in height. Skyscrapers induce a feeling that urban environments have been designed to benefit sectional interests, not humanity at large. Competition to have the tallest skyscraper in Asia will diminish, as it has in the USA, where competition was explicit for several decades after 1900. A trend away from competition is consistent with the cultural and economic development of industrial societies, which begin as highly competitive environments progressively develop to a condition where coexistence and cooperation are paramount, where competition remains only within limits, within the necessary bounds of cooperation.