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Cover Page Footnote

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Attractiveness of a Religious Theme Site: The A-Ma Cultural Village in Macau, China

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Specific attributes of a destination and visitors' perceived value are two major and complementary components of tourism destination attractiveness. Based on 329 questionnaires, this study evaluates the level of attractiveness and specificity of A-Ma Cultural Village in Macau, China in the context of the emerging significance of Mazu-related heritage and religious tourism in Asia. Also, the similarities and differences between visitors from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan, regarding visit motives, satisfaction, needs and preferences are examined. The statistical tools of analysis used in this study include descriptive statistics, ANOVA and chi-square test. The survey found that the A-Ma Cultural Village's existing resources and created resources are reputable destination attributes, but the upstream factor needs to be greatly improved. Sightseeing is the most popular reason to visit the site amongst visitors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. Hong Kong and China groups showed a comparatively higher level of satisfaction than the Taiwan group which expressed the strongest sense of dissatisfaction about the services and facilities of the site.

The A-Ma Cultural Village's attractive attributes or features and its weaknesses or limitations provide points of departure for further research and discussion on the emerging Mazu theme-site tourism in general, and a useful reference for the operator to enhance and strengthen its theme attractions to visitors in particular.

Key Words: Macau, destination attractions, cultural tourism, religious tourism, Mazu

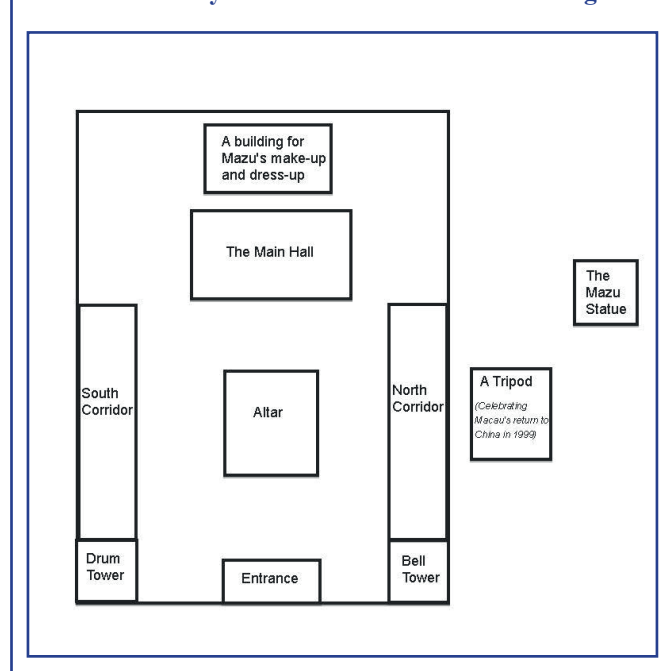
Introduction

Travelling to a holy destination / religious site is a specific form of leisure allowing visitors to achieve different goals (e.g., enjoyment of goods, services and facilities, and cultural or spiritual pursuits) or to pursue different modes of experience (e.g., the quest for meaning and authenticity) (Cohen, 1979; Moal-Ulvoas, 2016; Duran-Sanchez *et al.*, 2018). Shani, Rivera and Severt (2007:39) have noted that there is a new phase in religious tourism, that is, the emergence of religious theme-sites (characterised by human-made buildings with religious themes, designed to attract and satisfy visitors) in the market. Since religious tourism is on the rise, destination attractiveness of such sites as a subject requires much scholarly attention.

Destination attractiveness literature (Cracolici & Mijkamp, 2009; Gabrea, 2014; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Krešić & Prebežac, 2011; Navickas & Malakauskaite, 2009; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Ritchie & Zins, 1978; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007; Vengesai, 2010, 2009, 2008) has generally focused on the ranking of attractiveness attributes and features, the multifaceted

factors for visiting, destination supporting services and facilities, and the multidimensional satisfaction of visitors. In particular, the visitor's experience as well as the destination's attributes and supporting services and facilities, both complementary and symbiotic, are two important measures for destination attractiveness. Formica (2000, 2006) and Vengesai (2003, 2010) have therefore suggested that tourism attractiveness is an interaction or a reciprocal relationship between tourist demand (perceived attractiveness in relation to personal preferences or motivation) and the issue of supply at the destination (the availability of existing attractions and supporting services and facilities). This paper adopts Formica and Vengesai's approach to examine (1) the visitor's experience and (2) the destination's attributes and supporting services and facilities in evaluating the overall attractiveness of a recently developed, emerging religious theme park called A-Ma Cultural Village in Macau of China.

Today only a few large religious theme sites/parks operate throughout the world (Moal-Ulvoas, 2016:59-60). The A-Ma Cultural Village in Macau is one of them. Founded in 2001, the Cultural Village is a 7,000-square-

Photo 1: Layout Plan of A-Ma Cultural Village

metre religious-cultural complex dedicated to A-Ma (also known as Mazu or Tianhou). As one of the goddess in Taoism, Mazu is a tutelary deity of seafarers, fishermen, sailors and marine traders, who is widely worshipped in southern China, Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries since the 12th century. The Cultural Village attracts not only Mazu devotees (both local and overseas) who pray to the god for good weather, peace, health and general well-being, but also tourists who want to explore Mazu culture and heritage and/or the surrounding environment of the site.

In recent years, the Macau government has been putting much effort into promoting cultural heritage and religious tourism, encouraged by (1) Macau's historic centre having been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005 and (2) Mazu-based culture and beliefs having been inscribed on the World Intangible Heritage List in 2009.

The historic centre of Macau encompasses a group of Portuguese and Chinese buildings and public spaces which demonstrate a unique testimony to the meeting and exchange of cultural, aesthetic, religious and architectural values between East and the West for more than 400 years. As for Mazu, one of the most influential sea gods in China, there are more than 10,000 temples in 40 countries and regions dedicated to her, and Mazu culture and beliefs (e.g., virtues of truth, mercy, benevolence and compassion) are deeply integrated into the lives of over

300 million devotees in the world today (Hong, 2019). Li and Cheng (2010:132) note that there are three major trends of tourism in the 21st century: cultural tourism, eco-tourism and leisure tourism. The typical cultural tourism includes visits to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, historic cities, architectural sites, temples and cathedrals, and battlefields. Therefore, in contrast to the Las Vegas-style gaming-entertainment industry, the development of cultural tourism can be 'one of the triggers to a better image, more versatile attractions and a sustainable Macau' (Li & Cheng, 2010:131). As shown in the paper, the development of the A-Ma Cultural Village, the first and largest religious theme-site in Macau, can make a contribution to Macau's tourism image (a centre for tourism and leisure promoted by the government in 2017) and tourism diversification.

Against the backdrop of cultural heritage and religious tourism with a special focus on Mazu history, culture and beliefs in Macau, this paper attempts to address the question: To what extent does the A-Ma Cultural Village appeal to visitors (including tourists and Mazu devotees who make a pilgrimage), and are there any similarities or differences in the motives and satisfaction of them, particularly those from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, who constitute the majority of Macau's tourists?

Based on a survey of 329 visitors, this paper will identify and evaluate the A-Ma Cultural Village's attributes or perceived ability to satisfy the needs of visitors. It also reveals the relationship between tourists' characteristics (in terms of country of origin, purpose of visiting and number of times visiting) and the perceived attractiveness (personal preferences or motivations) of the site. By revealing the motives, satisfaction, needs and preferences of the visitors from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, this paper will show the level of attractiveness and specificity of such a religious theme site, as well as the similarities and differences among these three major tourist groups in their experience of the place.

Contribution of Study

The study makes two academic contributions. First, it is an exploratory study on what influences visitors' experience (with reference to the visitors' perception of destination attractiveness and level of comfort and satisfaction) of a Mazu-themed site. This is an under-researched topic in the study of Mazu cultural and religious tourism. As noted earlier, there are over 300 million Mazu believers

Photo 2: The Main Hall of the A-Ma Cultural Village

in the world today, but very few developed Mazu-themed sites / parks in China, Macau and Taiwan. The A-Ma Cultural Village is the first site in Macau to combine a religious theme and educational entertainment to offer a unique amalgamation of spiritual and traditional touristic experiences. Since religious theme-sites / parks are a new type of leisure and experiential consumption, this case study makes manifest the value, driving force and potential of emerging Mazu-themed tourism. The findings contribute to the destination attractiveness literature on the identification and measurement of core and secondary determinants / attributes of destination attractiveness and the associated satisfaction with those determinants / attributes in contrived themed religious sites. Also, the findings provide a useful reference for the operator and the government to improve Mazu cultural and religious tourism in general and the provision of services and facilities at this site in particular.

Second, by revealing visitors' motives and experiences, this survey illustrated the ways in which a Mazu-themed site integrates faith-based tourism (spiritually-motivated to travel for experiencing and learning about religion), leisure travel (taking a vacation from everyday life) and cultural tourism (travelling to experience and learn about other cultures, history and lifestyle) into a single excursion. In other words, a single trip covers visiting

a theme park, a holy destination and a cultural heritage site. This echoes many religious tourism studies (e.g., Aukland, 2018; Drule *et al.*, 2012; Shani *et al.*, 2007; Terzidou *et al.*, 2018) which illustrate that the distinction between tourists and pilgrims (in terms of the nature of the visit) and between sacred (a holy destination for spirituality and psychological well-being) and profane (a site for cultural pursuit, entertainment or leisure) no longer holds. The elements of seriousness and casualness inherent in this form of leisure travel or faith-based travel are not mutually exclusive. The Mazu Cultural Village case has shown that diversity has thus become an essential element or a common feature of today's cultural-cum-religious tourism which aims at catering for a wide range of needs, wishes and expectations of both tourists and pilgrims.

Literature Review

Attractiveness: Definitions and Studying Approaches

According to Mayo and Jarvis (1981:22), destination attractiveness refers to

a combination of the relative importance of individual benefits and the perceived ability of the destination to deliver individual benefit.

Photo 3: The World's Second Tallest Mazu Statue in the A-Ma Cultural Village



Attributes of destination attractiveness generally include:

- (1) physiography and climate;
- (2) culture and history;
- (3) mix of activities;
- (4) special events;
- (5) entertainment;
- (6) infrastructure, and;
- (7) market ties (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003).

Goeldner, Ritchie and McIntosh (2000) have also suggested that attractions could be categorised into five groups: nature, cultural, recreation, events and entertainment. In sum, the more a destination can offer its visitors, the more it is perceived to be attractive. Also, tourists' preferences or motivations are also significant variables in determining visiting rates and the level of attractiveness of the destination (Formica, 2000; Milman & Pizam, 1995).

Therefore, many tourism-attractiveness studies (Crompton, 1979; Fodness, 1990; Dann, 1981; Formica, 2000; Formica & Uysal, 2006; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Kaur, 1981; Lew, 1987; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981; Tam, 2012; Vengesai, 2003) have focused on supply-and-demand

factors, or adopted a pull-and-push approach, to evaluate their overall contribution to destination attractiveness. In particular, as noted earlier, Formica (2000, 2006) has suggested that tourism attractiveness is an interaction or a reciprocal relationship between tourist demand and the issue of supply at the destination. Vengesai (2010) has even highlighted the important complementary role of the supporting services and facilities in enhancing the attractiveness of a destination and concluded that without providing adequate supporting services, most tourism destinations would not be attractive.

This paper will adopt Formica and Vengesai's approach to examining both the supply (destination existing attributes and supporting facilities and services) and demand sides (visitors' needs, wishes and expectations) of the A-Ma Cultural Village in evaluating its overall attractiveness. In so doing, it attempts to identify the major value or core determinants of destination attractiveness of an emerging religious theme park in Macau.

Research on Macau and Mazu Tourism

Macau is regarded not only as a gaming destination, but also as an appealing city of culture and heritage, especially since being added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005 as an Historic Centre. Many studies (Aktuell, 2009; Dewar, du Cros, & Li, 2012; Kim, Park, Gazzoli, & Edmund Sheng, 2011; Kong & Chang, 2012; Lam & Crossley, 2015; Lam & Vong, 2009; Tang, Scherer, & Morrison, 2011; Ung & Vong, 2010; Vinnicombe & Sou, 2014; Vong, 2013a, 2013b; Wan & Pinheiro, 2014; Wan & Cheng, 2011) have demonstrated and evaluated the potential and capacity of this small city to develop enticing and sustainable cultural heritage tourism. They have shown the strength and weakness of Macau's cultural heritage tourism development. Remarkably, existing research has primarily focused on the must-visit sites and attractions (which are mostly situated in the city's historic centre), while certain emerging sightseeing destinations like the A-Ma Cultural Village are overlooked.

The A-Ma Cultural Village deserves our attention for two reasons. First, Mazu is one of the popular icons of Macau due to Macau's unique historical relationship with the deity (see below for details). Second, Mazu beliefs and culture have been inscribed on the World Intangible Heritage List since 2009. The existing studies on Mazu temples in Macau have largely focused on their history, development and architectural features. The

A-Ma Temple (locally called *maa-gok*, literally meaning ‘the pavilion of the mother’), one of the oldest in Macau, (See Photo 5) is a case in point (Cheng, 1999). Its appeal is taken for granted by the existing literature mainly because it is one of the must-visit destinations. To what extent is the A-Ma Cultural Village, which encompasses a grand structure, the world’s second tallest Mazu stone statue and an impressive panoramic view, also attractive to visitors and pilgrims?

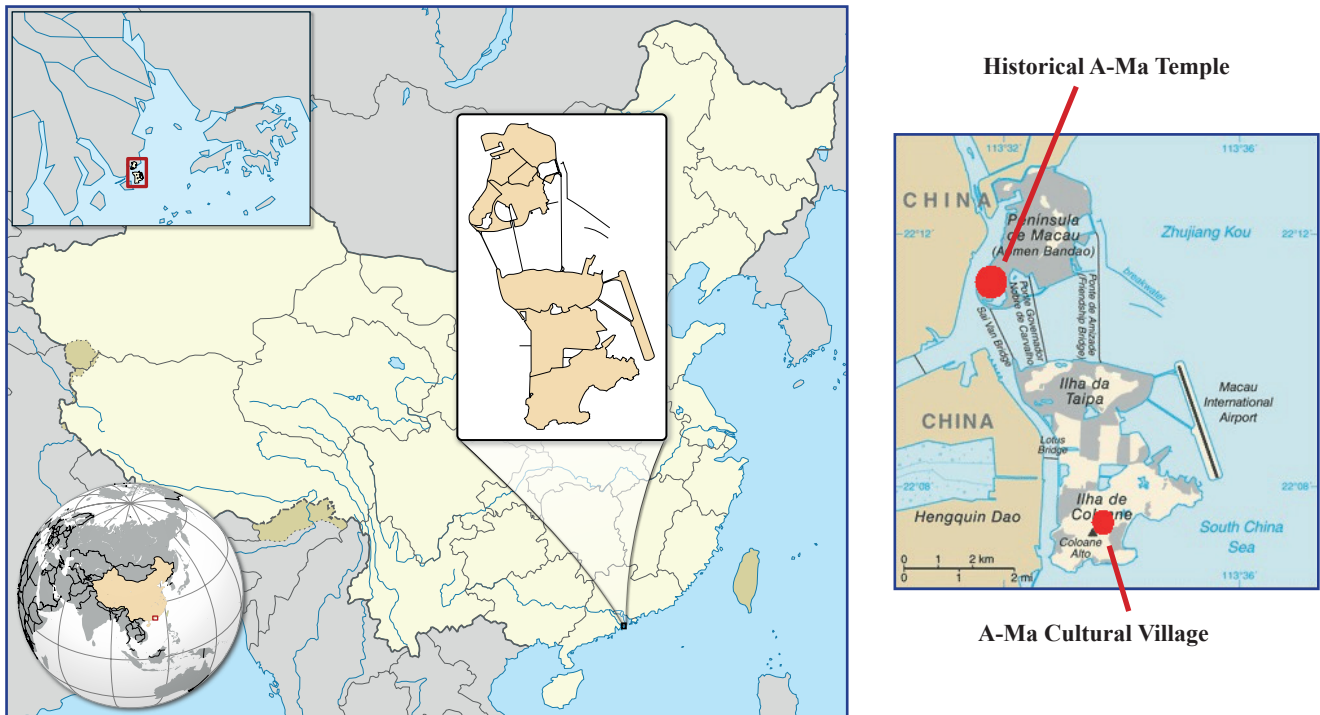
There are some studies done on Mazu pilgrimage and cultural and festival tourism in China and Taiwan (Chang, Lin & Huang 2020; Chang & Wang, 2006; Cheng & Chen, 2014; Yeh, Ryan, & Liu, 2009; Huang & Lin, 2005; Huang & Zeng, 2010; Jiang, 2007; Wan, 2008). In studying Mazu in Taiwan, Cheng and Chen (2014) have investigated image transformation among participants with regard to Mazu pilgrimage tourism, and Chang, Lin and Huang (2020) have examined the ways in which religious destination image affected pilgrims’ expectations towards the service quality of the Mazu temple. Regarding Mazu cultural tourism development in China, Jiang (2007), for instance, has revealed its historical and practical significance and evaluated the current trends and development issues. Undoubtedly,

Mazu-related tourism and travel has received much scholarly attention; nevertheless, the attractiveness of Mazu which is promoted in the form of a theme-site or park to integrate faith-based tourism, leisure travel and cultural tourism into a single excursion has never been addressed by those studies. The purpose of this paper is to fill this gap.

The A-Ma Cultural Village in a Tourist City

Macau is a coastal city situated in the southern part of China. It is composed of three islands, namely, Macau Peninsula, Taipa, and Coloane. From 1557 to 1999, Macau was a Portuguese colony. On 20 December, 1999, China reclaimed sovereignty over Macau. The name Macau is said to be derived from the A-Ma temple which was built in the fifteenth century in the south of Macau Peninsula. The temple is composed of six main parts, all containing a series of classical Chinese architectural treasures. Besides Mazu, Buddha and Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy) are also worshipped there. The A-Ma temple has long been considered one of Macau’s most attractive tourist destinations. It is also a famous city landmark in Macau, especially since being declared a world heritage monument.

Map 1: Location of Macau Illustrating Study Site



Main map: © Sémhur / Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8983402>

Insert map: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/maps/MC-map.jpg>

Photo 4: A Parade Team Leaving the A-Ma Cultural Village



Since the late 1990s, Macau has experienced a significant growth in tourist arrivals for both gaming and general tourism. In 1999, for example, there were approximately 7.4 million visitors, but in 2018 this number had reached 25.3 million (Department of Statistic and Census Service 1999, 2018). Of these visitors, most were from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In 2018, for instance, mainland Chinese visitors represented over 70% of the total arrivals, followed by those from Hong Kong (18%) and Taiwan (3%). Such a significant increase in arrivals is due mainly to three factors. Firstly, many casinos entered the market to provide a variety of gaming and non-gaming entertainment options and facilities after the monopoly on gambling was lifted in 2002. Secondly, the Chinese government has relaxed travel restrictions on its citizens, allowing them to visit Macau. Thirdly, the Historic Centre of Macau, which comprises more than 20 historical monuments and urban squares in the city, was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005.

Notably, in 2001, there was a new development of Mazu cultural and religious tourism. A large-scale development project was launched to build an A-Ma Cultural Village atop the hill on Coloane Island. It is the first Mazu-themed site in Macau and was constructed as a new pilgrimage destination and a tourist attraction. Bounded by a park,

the Cultural Village is a gigantic religious-cultural complex. The building project was completed in 2003. The complex is built in a distinctive style, reminiscent of the southern Fujian architecture of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The roof eaves are built in the shape of the tails of swallows, and the wood, stone, and tiles of yellow glaze are used as material for all the structures. The main hall (Photo 2) of the complex, which houses a giant Mazu statue (almost 4 metres in height and 2 metres in width), is built on a huge terraced platform, with a magnificent carved marble altar standing about 15 metres away. Behind the main hall is a 2-storey building (covering an area of approximately 400 square metres), labelled as the dressing hall of the goddess. Besides these two buildings, the complex also comprises a bell tower, a drum tower, shops, and a spacious courtyard. All these constitute what is now called Tianhou Palace. The entrance to the Palace is an impressive gate (Photo 4) with lavish decoration and handcrafted wood carvings. It is linked by six flights of stone stairs carved with auspicious images of Chinese animals, namely, tiger, phoenix, lion, and crane. Standing next to the Cultural Village is a large Mazu statue (Photo 3). The statue is made of 120 pieces of white marble and is 19.99 metres high (commemorating the year of Macau's handover). The statue is now the second tallest Mazu statue in the world.

The Cultural Village stands on the top of the hill, with a grand arched entrance gate made of stone positioned at the foot of the hill to indicate the route towards the complex. The gate is approximately 15 metres high and 27 metres wide. It is also built in classical Chinese style with impressive artwork and carving.

Since its completion in 2003, the Cultural Village has become a new sightseeing destination and a sacred place of reverence for worshippers (both local and overseas) who come for blessings. In addition, it hosts a large annual celebration called the Mazu Cultural and Tourism Festival which lasts for several days to celebrate the ascension of the deity Mazu into heaven (Chan, 2015), which attracts thousands of locals and visitors annually. Nowadays, it is one of the major events promoted by the Macau Government Tourist Office, with the support of Macau and the Chinese authorities.

Methodology

In this study, purposive sampling was used to collect data in the Cultural Village during the periods March to May 2013, April to July 2014, and April to June 2015. Visitors were invited to take part in this survey before leaving the site. This type of non-probability sampling method is the most cost-effective and time-effective sampling method available when there is no list of Mazu visitors (primary data sources) or when it is difficult to create such a list (Babbie, 2016). The targets of the survey were non-local tourists. Local tourists were not included in the sample because of their different sense of distance, perception of place (e.g., the most visited attractions), needs, pattern of life, and identity. Each questionnaire took approximately six to nine minutes to complete. To avoid obtaining a low completion rate and incomplete questionnaires, two research assistants administered the survey orally. Consequently, they collected 116 questionnaires in 2013, 100 in 2014, and 113 in 2015, totalling 329.

The questionnaire comprised two parts. One part collected basic data such as country of origin, history of travelling to Macau, and duration of stay in Macau. The second part included 13 questions seeking visitors' responses to the following items:

- (1) reasons for visiting;
- (2) time spent on site and views on different attractions of the destination;
- (3) suggestions for improving the site's facilities and attractiveness;

- (4) knowledge of the Mazu Culture and Tourism Festival, and;
- (5) overall impression of the uniqueness of the destination in comparison to the well-known and popular A-Ma temple.

Except for a few questions using a dichotomous scale, most questions in the survey were closed-ended.

Regarding the notion of attractiveness, this was operationalised as visitors' feelings, and opinions or perceptions of the attractive attributes of the destination. The respondents were therefore asked to reveal their perceived attractiveness in the following areas:

- (1) the location and surrounding environment of the site;
- (2) the whole landscape and design of the complex;
- (3) the appeal of a single historical or cultural building or structure;
- (4) the Mazu Cultural and Tourism Festival, and;
- (5) the provision of facilities and services.

In the following analysis, descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-square tests are used to reveal differences between visitors from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan regarding satisfaction, needs and preferences. In addition, all illustrations, discussion and further analysis in this paper are complemented by ethnographic research at the site during 2011-2016.

Results

(i) Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows that of 329 respondents in this survey, more than half were from mainland China and close to 76% were visiting the A-Ma Cultural Village for the first time. Three distinct motives for visiting include sightseeing (260 times, 79%), worship (132 times, 40.1%) and appreciation of nature (99 times, 30.1%). Notably, 32.2% of the total respondents (n=106) considered the visit primarily as a religious-oriented journey. Of these 106 respondents, 45.3% were first-time visitors and 54.7% had already visited twice or more.

Table 1. Profiles and Visitation Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Item	Frequency	Percent (%)
Respondents' country of origin	Hong Kong	68	20.7
	Mainland China	179	54.4
	Taiwan	32	9.7
	Southeast Asia	29	8.8
	Europe or America	17	5.2
	Others	4	1.2
	Total	329	100
No. of visit	1 st time	249	75.7
	2 nd time	49	14.9
	3 times or more	31	9.4
	Total	329	100
Time spent in the destination	Less than half an hour	112	34
	1 hour	136	41.3
	2 hours	68	20.7
	3 hours	12	3.6
	Total	328*	99.6
Major reasons for visiting (multiple answers allowed)	Sightseeing	260	79
	Worship	132	40.1
	Appreciation of nature	99	30.1
	Hiking	5	1.5
	Social gathering	6	1.8
	Photo taking	2	0.6
Sources of knowing the site (multiple answers allowed)	Official homepage of the site	13	3.9
	Other webpages	64	19.4
	Travel book	88	26.7
	Recommendations by relatives/friends	139	42.1
	Macau Government Tourism Office	46	13.9
*one is missing			

(ii) Destination Attractiveness

84.5% of respondents (n=278) indicated that the A-Ma Cultural Village was attractive. As shown in Table 2, five attractive areas, listed here in descending order of satisfaction, are: (1) the whole landscape and design of the complex; (2) the Mazu statue; (3) the main temple; (4) the giant Mazu statue in the main temple; and (5) the stone arched entrance gate. The figures suggest that the overall layout and composition of the Cultural

Village is the most attractive area of the five suggested. In other words, most visitors like the holistic design and structure of the site and consider the main temple and the two statues in particular to be key elements of its attractiveness.

Besides the A-Ma Cultural Village itself, respondents also stated that the surrounding environment of the site was attractive as it offered a relaxing atmosphere and was a great place for taking photos. The Cultural

Item	Description	Frequency	Percent (%)
Attractiveness of the Cultural Village	Yes	278	84.5
	No	50	15.2
	Total	328*	99.7
Attractive areas of the Cultural Village	The whole landscape and design of the complex	148	44.8
	The Mazu statue	131	39.7
	The main temple	124	37.6
	The Mazu statue in the main temple	91	27.6
	The stone arched entrance gate	85	25.8
Also visited the A-Ma Temple	Yes	213	64.7
	No	116	35.3
	Total	329	100
Motivations for visiting the A-Ma Temple	One of Macau's must-see landmarks	148	44.8
	A world heritage site worth visiting	108	32.7
	To pray for blessings as it is an efficacious temple	81	24.5
	The temple is conveniently located	89	27
Comparison of the A-Ma Cultural Village and the A-Ma Temple	Both are attractive	137	41.5
	The A-Ma Temple is more attractive	52	15.8
	The A-Ma Cultural Village is more attractive	25	7.6
Convenience of the location of the Cultural Village	Yes	232	70.5
	No	97	29.5
	Total	329	100
*one is missing			

Village is surrounded by a country park which is one of the greenest and most natural areas in Macau. Also, it is situated on a hilltop and so allows visitors to enjoy impressive panoramic views of Macau peninsula, Taipa, and Coloane Island.

Only 15.2% of respondents (n=50) thought that the Cultural Village was not attractive. Of these 50, 92% of them were first-time visitors, and 8% had been there more than once. The reasons they gave included: (1) unfavourable climatic conditions; (2) indistinctive architecture; and (3) inadequate facilities and services. The unfavourable climatic conditions usually meant foggy or windy weather in spring and winter, respectively. Regarding the architecture of the complex, some respondents complained that since the complex was very new and unauthentic, it had little appreciative and explorative value. As for the facilities and services, these

were considered by some to be inadequate for the visit to be comfortable and enjoyable. Notably, since 18.5% of the first-time visitors did not find the site attractive and would not return, this highlighted some limitations of the site. Firstly, the natural surroundings as one of the perceived attractions is a double-edged sword because of its unmanageability and uncontrollability. Secondly, the featured architectural structures, which largely replicate the style of important historical buildings in China, may receive criticism on its limited appreciative and explorative value from visitors who thirst for authenticity. Thirdly, the site only offers restricted entertainment content and service facilities.

How long did the respondents spend at the site? Table 1 shows that 65.6% of respondents (n=216) spent an hour or more on site. Of these 216 respondents, 93% thought the site was attractive. These figures alone cannot tell

us whether visitors who spent more time in the Cultural Village also found it more attractive, or whether visitors who found the place more attractive were willing to spend more time there. Despite this, it is clear that the Cultural Village provides a number of attractions that visitors need time to explore and enjoy.

As mentioned earlier, the A-Ma Temple is one of the most attractive local tourist destinations. Nevertheless, as this survey indicated, the A-Ma Temple and the A-Ma Cultural Village are a complement rather than a competitor to each other. As shown in Table 2, 64.7% of respondents (n=213) reported that they had visited both sites. The reasons for their visit (single or multiple) found by the survey were, in descending order of frequency and percentage: (1) one of Macau's must-see landmarks (148 times, 44.8%); (2) a world heritage site worth visiting (108 times, 32.7%); (3) to pray for blessings as it is an efficacious temple (81 times, 24.5%); and (4) the temple is conveniently located (89 times, 27%). When these 213 respondents were asked to compare the A-Ma Temple with the A-Ma Cultural Village, 41.5% stated that both sites have their own characteristics, meaning that while the two places are dedicated to the same deity, they have different attractions.

While the A-Ma Temple is conveniently located on Macau peninsula, the A-Ma Cultural Village is situated far away from the city centre and on a hilltop (see Map 1). Visitors who want to go there have to reach the stone arched entrance gate at the foot of the hill by bus or taxi and then take a free shuttle bus (which runs every 30 minutes) up to the compound. Did the survey respondents think the location of the Cultural Village was convenient? Table 2 shows the answer for 70.5% of respondents (n=232) was 'Yes,' with many stating that the site was easily accessible by public transport and the free shuttle bus. 29.5% (n=97) chose 'No,' mainly citing reasons such as the infrequent schedule of the shuttle bus and no direct transportation from the city to the site. In other words, fewer than one-third of respondents found the destination inconvenient.

Besides transportation, the survey respondents were also asked to indicate what areas of the Cultural Village should be improved in order to strengthen its attractiveness and competitiveness. They could choose from any of the following areas:

(1) introducing a guided tour service (170 times, 51.5%);

(2) providing more descriptions of each sightseeing point in the complex (187 times, 56.7%);

(3) offering more descriptions and illustrations of Mazu culture and beliefs (176 times, 53.3%);

(4) selling more religious articles and souvenirs related to Mazu (83 times, 25.2%);

(5) setting up a regular exhibition on Mazu culture and beliefs (144 times, 43.6%); and

(6) providing vegetarian catering (93 times, 28.2%).

The first three items were most popular, closely followed by the fifth. Respondents clearly had a desire for more detailed information about the destination, including the history, structure, and architectural features of the complex as well as Mazu culture and beliefs.

In addition, some respondents revealed that there was a limited choice of Mazu-related souvenirs or religious articles for sale. They recommended more such items be introduced for souvenir or religious needs. Regarding vegetarian catering services, it was found that free vegetarian meals have been offered on a large scale in the Cultural Village to worshippers and visitors during Chinese New Year (in the first lunar month), the birthday of the Mazu (in the third lunar month), and the Chung Yeung (tomb-sweeping) festival (in the ninth lunar month). The Cultural Village is able to organise and manage this because it has been well equipped with kitchen and banqueting facilities. According to the development plan of the A-Ma Cultural Village, there will be a vegetarian restaurant, but this remains under consideration by the Management Board. It is expected that, like the planned museum, the opening of the vegetarian restaurant will attract more visitors. This new development will further strengthen the complex's stature in the context of Mazu cultural and religious tourism.

(iii) Similarities and Differences between Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan Visitors

In this survey, 54.4% of respondents were from China (the largest group of tourists to enter Macau), with 20.7% and 9.7% from Hong Kong and Taiwan, respectively. Visitors from these three places constitute 84.8% of the respondents. Since the cult and beliefs of Mazu are popular in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, our next task is to see if there are any striking similarities or differences between them in terms of their reasons for visiting the A-Ma Cultural Village and in their views about it.

(a) Level of Satisfaction

The survey found that 81% of Hong Kong visitors (55 out of 68), 85.4% of China visitors (153 out of 179), and 75% of Taiwan visitors (24 out of 32) were satisfied. No significant differences across these three groups were found, though the Hong Kong and China groups showed a comparatively higher level of satisfaction than the Taiwan group.

As noted earlier, only a small number (50 in total) felt unsatisfied. Of these 50 visitors, 94% were from Hong Kong (19.1% or 13 persons out of 68 respondents), China (14.5% or 26 persons out of 179 respondents), and Taiwan (25% or 8 persons out of 32 respondents). The Taiwanese tourist group reported the highest rate of dissatisfaction of the three groups.

(b) Purpose of visit

All three groups shared similar views, with most having gone to the Cultural Village for sightseeing: 82.4% for Hong Kong (n=56); 74.3% for China (n=133); and 87.5% for Taiwan (n=28). Though the percentage is slightly lower for the Chinese tourist group than for the other two, sightseeing is clearly the most popular reason to visit amongst tourists from the Mainland. The second most common reason to visit is religious; to be more specific, the chance to worship and give thanks for the deity's blessings throughout the year. From the Hong Kong tourist group, 42.6% respondents (n=29) selected this reason, and the corresponding figures for the Chinese were 44.6% (n=80) and for Taiwan, 43.8% (n=14). The third most common reason for the visit is to enjoy the panoramic view of Macau city from the hilltop. Among the Hong Kong tourist group, 38.2% of respondents (n=26) said that the destination's unique location offered them beautiful views of the city; 30.2% and 18.6% of respondents from the Chinese (n=54) and Taiwanese groups (n=6), respectively, felt the same. This means that

across all three groups, many respondents were struck not only by the attractiveness of the destination itself but also by the wonderful and impressive views it offers.

Interestingly, the figures revealed that the motives for visiting by those from Hong Kong are more varied than those expressed by the other two groups. Also, these visitors expressed a higher level of satisfaction with the destination, as the following paragraphs will demonstrate.

(c) Attractiveness Ratings for the Village

As mentioned previously, survey respondents selected from five attractive aspects of the destination: (1) the whole landscape and design of the complex; (2) the Mazu statue; (3) the main temple; (4) the giant Mazu statue in the main temple; and (5) the stone arched entrance gate. The level of selection of only three of these (1, 2, and 3) is close to or above 40%.

As indicated in Table 3, (1) the landscape and design of the complex is comparatively less attractive to Taiwan tourists; (2) the Mazu statue is considered the second most attractive element by a substantial proportion of all three groups; (3) more tourists from the Hong Kong and China groups are satisfied with the main temple of the complex than the Taiwanese visitors; (4) the attractiveness ratings for the Mazu statue in the main temple given by all three groups are much lower than for the white marble Mazu statue; (5) only a small portion of the Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese tourists are impressed by the stone arched entrance gate of the complex, and this building is considered by the Chinese visitors to be the least attractive aspect in comparison to the other four.

Table 4 lists the number of attractive aspects of the Cultural Village in a descending order of the mean scores. The Hong Kong group obtained the highest score

Table 3. Ranking of attractive aspects of the A-Ma Cultural Village

Item	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Mainland
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
1. The whole landscape and design of the complex	30 (53.6%)	13 (46.4%)	70 (52.6%)
2. The Mazu statue (outside the Cultural Village)	27 (48.2%)	7 (25.0%)	81 (60.9%)
3. The main temple	27 (48.2%)	11 (39.3%)	73 (54.9%)
4. The Mazu statue in the main temple	20 (35.7%)	5 (17.9%)	58 (43.6%)
5. The stone arched entrance gate	24 (42.9%)	7 (25.0%)	46 (34.6%)

No. of attractive aspects identified (F=2.52*)	Mean score (average: 2.38)
HK visitors	2.59
Mainland visitors	2.51
Taiwan visitors	2.00
Visitors from other countries	1.90
*=0.1, **=0.05, ***=0.01	

Item	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Mainland
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
Providing more descriptions for each sightseeing point in the complex	39 (57.4)	22 (68.8)	95 (53.1)
Introducing guided tour services	35 (51.5)	19 (59.4)	85 (47.5)
Offering more descriptions and illustrations about Mazu culture and beliefs	36 (52.9)	21 (65.6)	88 (49.2)
Setting up a regular exhibition on Mazu culture and beliefs	34 (50.0)	14 (43.8)	76 (42.5)
Transportation facilities	23 (33.8)	16 (50.0)	50 (27.9)
Providing vegetarian catering services	19 (27.9)	8 (25.0)	58 (32.4)
Selling more religious articles and souvenirs related to Mazu	18 (26.5)	6 (18.8)	51 (28.5)

(m=2.59), which is closely followed by the China group (m=2.51). The Taiwan group had a mean score of 2. All of these three groups have found at least two aspects of the site attractive, which is different from visitors from other countries who have found no more than two attractions to be significant.

(d) Concern with the destination's facilities and services

Table 5, shows that the responses of all three groups are concentrated in the first three areas of concern, meaning that introducing or improving facilities and services is essential to enhance the attractiveness of the site.

The Taiwan group showed much more concern about transportation facilities than did the Hong Kong and Chinese groups.

Table 6 reveals that visitors from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China obtained a mean score of 3.30, 3.00 and 2.81, respectively, regarding number of areas recommended for improvement. The figures show that the Taiwan group expressed the strongest sense of dissatisfaction about the services and facilities of the Cultural Village; meanwhile the China group expressed the lowest dissatisfaction among all visitors.

No. of areas	Mean score (average: 2.91)
HK visitors	3.00
Mainland visitors	2.81
Taiwan visitors	3.30
visitors from other countries	2.94
*=0.1, **=0.05, ***=0.01	

Table 7. Sources of knowing the Village

Item	Hong Kong		China		Taiwan		Chi square
	New Visitor	Repeat Visitor	New Visitor	Repeat Visitor	New Visitor	Repeat Visitor	
No. of the sources of knowing the village							35.1370*
1	0.00%	24.39%	0.00%	70.30%	2.44%	2.44%	
2	0.00%	33.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	
3	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	
4	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	
Relatives' recommendations	0.00%	22.31%	4.96%	65.29%	1.65%	5.79%	13.0114*

*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001

(e) Sources of Knowing the Destination

As indicated in Table 7, the China group (including new and repeat visitors) is the most active group in seeking relevant information about the destination. Particularly, the repeat visitors in this group are found to heavily rely on relatives' recommendations when deciding whether to visit the site or not. There are striking differences between the Taiwan group and the groups of Hong Kong and China.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study reveals that most of the survey respondents found the A-Ma Cultural Village attractive and that there are five attractive areas, namely, the whole landscape and design of the complex, the Mazu statue, the main temple, the giant Mazu statue in the main temple, and the stone arched entrance gate. In accordance with the destination attractiveness literature's suggested seven major categories of attractive attributes and features, the Cultural Village has only two, namely, infrastructure (human-made attributes) and environment (natural features). Notwithstanding that, the site is successful in offering visitors, especially those from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, a high level of satisfaction, unique experiences and benefits.

As noted in the introduction, the overall evaluation of destination attractiveness should be focused on the reciprocal relationship between tourist demand and supply at the destination. In fact, the A-Ma Cultural Village's existing resources (natural and cultural) and created resources (tourist infrastructure) in Dwyer and Kim's terms (2003) are indeed reputable destination

attributes, but the upstream factor (both quality and variety of services and facilities) needs to be greatly improved to strengthen the supply factors of the site (or the perceived ability to provide a higher degree of customer satisfaction from a demand perspective), which are essential for its overall attractiveness and for the enhancement of the experiences offered to make them more engaging, memorable, authentic, educational and spiritual. This is especially important when tourists' motivations for visiting are multi-faceted, divergent and complex even in a single journey.

The survey found that there are three major and distinct motives for visiting the Cultural Village. They are sightseeing, worship and appreciation of nature. These are not mutually exclusive, but rather co-exist, thereby constituting unique or different types of spiritual and traditional touristic experiences in this form of leisure travel or faith-based travel. In other words, this first and emerging Mazu-themed park in Macau can attract both tourists (in search of leisure, entertainment) and pilgrims (the pursuit of spirituality). It is concurrently perceived by these visitors as a theme park, a holy destination and a cultural heritage site, allowing the integration of faith-based travel, leisure travel and cultural tourism into a single excursion. As such, it suggests that the amalgamation of spiritual experience and manufactured edutainment, together with the overwhelming artificiality or replica of the southern Fujian architecture of the Qing Dynasty (which does not impede religious feeling and reduce appreciative and explorative value), is a constitutive and important element or attribute of a new form of Mazu tourism planning and strategy. The A-Ma Cultural Village is a case study resonating with criticism

Photo 5: The A-Ma Temple Built in The Fifteenth Century



of (1) the rigid dichotomy or classification of serious leisure (the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is substantial, interesting and fulfilling) and casual leisure (in pursuit of pure enjoyment or pleasure through a relatively short-lived, rewarding activity) and (2) the separation of leisure and devotion in a single visit.

Since the survey found that sightseeing is the most popular reason to visit the Cultural Village for visitors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, the results echo the findings of Park *et al.*'s study (2014:16) on the motivations of these three groups that 'relaxation and escape were the main motivations for travelling to Macau, followed by knowledge and fun'. Knowledge and fun include increasing knowledge, learning about differences, and having fun; relaxation and escape include relieving stress, physical relaxing, escape from the routine (see Park *et al.*, 2014:10). In light of the fact that the Cultural Village can largely satisfy the travel motivations and preferences of those three groups, which constitute the majority of Macau's tourists, its perceived ability or attractiveness

should not be ignored or underestimated. Moreover, from a global perspective, there are more than 300 million Mazu devotees today, so the Cultural Village, as one of the few Mazu-themed religious parks in Asia, has great potential to contribute to Macau's emerging Mazu-themed tourism in the context of the diversification of the tourism economy and the development of sustainable tourism in recent years.

Meanwhile, the survey results complement Park *et al.*'s study (2014) on the motivations and preferences of tourists from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. First, they provide substantial data to demonstrate the similarities and differences between these three cultural groups (whose members are all of Chinese origin and familiar with Mazu culture and beliefs) regarding visit motives, satisfaction, needs and preference for Mazu theme-site tourism. Second, and related, their concrete suggestions for improvement of services and facilities at the Cultural Village are valuable for the further development of Mazu-themed tourism in Macau.

Besides services and facilities, the Cultural Village operator is highly recommended to put more effort into promoting the site and its annual festivals. This is because the survey findings have shown that most respondents had not heard of the festivals, nor had they browsed the official webpage which contains a lot of relevant information. Um and Crompton (1990) have proposed that perceptual or cognitive evaluation of the attractiveness of a tourist destination is largely shaped by information sources such as symbolic stimuli (promotion of a destination through media) and social stimuli (recommendations of friends and relatives). Clearly, the Cultural Village has accumulated a certain amount of social stimuli from the public, as most respondents had the destination recommended to them by relatives and friends. Nevertheless, the theme-site operator, and also the Macau Government Tourist Office, may also wish to enhance marketing and advertising in order to boost the impact of symbolic stimuli and raise the reputation or familiarity of the site among the general public.

Since Mazu is a deity popular in south China, Taiwan, and the Southeast Asian countries, the A-Ma Cultural Village is clearly in an advantageous position to develop into a prominent tourist-cum-pilgrimage destination and take advantage of the emerging significance of cultural heritage and religious tourism in Macau. This is especially important in the context of Macau's presentation of its centuries-old history and heritage relating to the sea goddess Mazu, as recognised by its inclusion on the 2005 UNESCO World Heritage List, and also the recognition of Mazu beliefs and customs on the World Intangible Heritage List in 2009. These two achievements can provide a fertile basis for the A-Ma Cultural Village to gain a bigger market share in the cultural heritage and religious tourism industry in Macau. In recent times, Mazu-themed sites have been established in China (Putian and Tianjin) and Taiwan (Nangan, Daan, and Kinmen). Given that visitors to the Cultural Village largely come from China and Taiwan, the findings of this study provide a good point of departure for addressing the question of how attractive the Cultural Village's commonly-shared and unique attributes are when compare to those sites abroad. Can Mazu culture and religious beliefs be part of a burgeoning regional faith-based tourism industry?

Moreover, this case study has further implications for development in the global context of the religious theme park industry. As mentioned earlier, the A-Ma Cultural Village promises or attempts to offer a unique

combination of religious and secular activities, products and services, as well as spiritual, cultural and leisure experiences. In so doing, the co-existence, intersection, and interdependent nature of religion and tourism, and of religious travellers (pilgrims) and holiday makers (tourists), have been deliberately developed through visiting a socially-constructed shared place / site (simultaneously sacred and secular). These features or attractiveness attributes are commonly found in other religious theme parks, such as the Holy Land Experience in Orlando (US), The Ark Encounter in Kentucky (US), Tierra Santa theme park in Buenos Aires (Argentina), Haw Par Villa in Singapore, Suoi Tien Park in Vietnam, Krishna Lila Theme Park in Bengaluru (India), Taman Tamadun Islam in Malaysia, and Chinese Islam Park in Beijing (China). Notwithstanding the secularisation of religion as a worldwide phenomenon, religious theme parks assuredly provide a new platform and a great opportunity for the development of a combination of religious and secular activities. Recent years have seen a growing interest in religious theme parks and a substantial increase in the popularity of Mazu culture and beliefs in Asia. In the meantime, Chinese are the largest group of tourists today (Chen, 2018). At this historical juncture, systematic evaluation of Chinese tourists' motivations for, expectations of, and satisfaction with, the above-mentioned religious theme parks, especially in comparison with their responses to the A-Ma Cultural Village experiences, will be a focus of future research.

Limitations

Since this paper adopts a non-probability sampling method for practical reasons, representativeness of data may be doubted and the survey results (the opinions of the target population) may be biased. The results of this survey cannot be used in generalisations applicable to all visitors in Macau. Also, the ability to generalise this explorative case study with respect to other Mazu-themed sites is limited. There is a need to employ a probability sampling technique to gain a more representative and deeper understanding of the attractiveness of the Mazu theme site and touristic experiences.

Furthermore, since the survey respondents' demographics are missing, this study fails to reveal how such factors as age, education and gender affect the respondents' perception of destination attractiveness and level of comfort and satisfaction.

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