Toward an understanding of tourists' authentic heritage experiences: Evidence from Hong Kong

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Authenticity in tourism has been a topic of discussion since the 1960s, but the concept is still to be fully developed. This study focuses on tourist's perceptions of authenticity, and in particular how they evaluate authentic heritage experiences. The appearance and physical settings of attractions were found to be the initial and most important indicators of authentic or inauthentic experiences. Other criteria for assessing the authenticity of heritage experiences include the presence of local culture and customs, constructed elements, commodification, and atmosphere.

Keywords: authenticity; perceived authenticity; heritage tourism; heritage experience; Hong Kong

Introduction

Heritage tourism is extremely popular and widespread, attracting hundreds of millions of visitors every year (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). In Hong Kong, an urban destination, heritage is only a secondary or tertiary reason for visiting, but there is a growing interest in developing heritage tourism. The concept of heritage in Hong Kong was established in the 1980s, when the former traditional Chinese fishing village was transformed into a metropolitan city (Cheung, 1999). Heritage was recently identified as a key component in the long-term strategy for tourism development of Hong Kong (Ho & McKercher, 2004; Hong Kong Planning Department, 2012).

Due to the rapid transformation of Hong Kong since the 1980s, together with the high level of commodification for both tourism and economic reasons, heritage sites in the city have been reconstructed to varying degrees. Curators and managers of cultural attractions in Hong

Kong, interviewed for a recent study, had no objections to commodification; they acknowledged it as an essential means of managing the volume of visitors to their cultural assets (McKercher, Ho & du Cros, 2004). However, it has been often suggested that the process of commoditizing culture/heritage assets for tourism purposes results in a loss of authenticity (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1973), which is an important issue in heritage management and tourism. Authenticity and tourists' search for authentic experiences have been the subjects of much debate since the 1960s.

From a marketing and managerial point of view, it is essential to understand whether tourists acknowledge the authenticity claimed, and to comprehend how they identify the concept of authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Xie & Wall, 2002). The issue of authenticity in Hong Kong heritage tourism is therefore a vital topic for investigation. This paper begins with a literature review of tourism journals, for a better understanding of the concept of authenticity and its studies. The review also helps identify other possible areas of investigation that could contribute further to our understanding of the concept. Previous research into tourists' perceptions of authenticity toward heritage experiences is identified. The majority of these studies focus on identifying different perceptions of authenticity, and the perceived authenticity of heritage sites and products. Very little research into how tourists assess the authenticity of an experience has been carried out, and our understanding of this is therefore incomplete. This study focuses on examining how tourists assess the authenticity of heritage experiences: in other words, the criteria of authentic heritage experiences.

The concept of authenticity

The concept of authenticity was originally developed in the context of museums (Trilling, 1972, as cited in Wang, 1999), and subsequently extended to various tourism products. It is now commonly used as an important selling point in marketing. In a tourism context, authenticity refers to traditional culture and origin, and reflects a sense of realness, genuineness,

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and uniqueness (Sharpley, 1994). Authenticity has also been associated with presenting the past in an accurate manner (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

There are various opinions on how authenticity is perceived. There is two main research opinions concerning its meaning. Some consider authenticity as intrinsic to places and objects, while others suggest that authenticity lies in the perceptions or experiences of tourists (Timothy, 2011). Wang (1999) contended that the concept of authenticity should be divided into two separate issues, which are often confused: tourist experiences and toured objects. This contention arose from the concepts of "real world" and "real self," put forward by Handler and Saxton (1988), and "authenticity as knowledge" ("cool" authenticity) and "authenticity as feeling" ("hot" authenticity), put forward by Selwyn (1996) (as cited in Wang, 1999). According to Wang (1999), it is inappropriate to conclude that "authenticity as feeling" from the "real self" results from "authenticity as knowledge" or from the "real world." The "real self" may have no relationship with the "real world." Nonetheless, one could experience authenticity either through knowledge/the real world or by feeling/the real self, or both. In other words, authenticity can be experienced through objects and through the perceptions of tourists, but one method can be stronger than the other. Indeed, the concept of authenticity is often considered to be negotiable (Cohen, 1988), and therefore different perspectives of authenticity exist. The three most widely discussed and acknowledged perspectives are objective, constructive, and existential authenticity.

The search for authentic places and experiences in tourism has been a topic for discussion since the 1960s (Timothy, 2011). There are two principal, and contrary, streams of thought: (1) tourists are not concerned about the authenticity of places they visit and (2) tourists really look for authentic experiences and places. One of the earliest discussions of authenticity was by Boorstin in 1961, who contended that tourists are not concerned about the authenticity of the places they visit or the experiences they have, but mainly travel for fun and entertainment

(as cited in Timothy, 2011). He also suggested that touristic places are often inauthentic and fabricated for tourists, and that tourists actually sought out these kinds of experiences. Similarly, Urry (199) claimed that even if they can distinguish between real and unreal heritage, tourists prefer inauthentic destinations, which provide unrealistic experiences and do not require mindfulness, thoughtfulness, or effort (as cited in Timothy, 2011). MacCannell, in 1973 and 1976, indicated that tourists did look for authenticity, but often misidentified it. He suggested the concept of "staged authenticity," where everything is set up for tourist consumption (MacCannell, 1973; Timothy, 2011). The terms "front stage" and "back stage" are used to clarify the concept. The "front stage" presents local culture and life in a tourist-oriented way, while real local life takes place "back stage" (Timothy, 2011). Most tourists only experience performed culture and living conditions on the front stage.

A review of tourism studies on authenticity

To explore the progression of tourism studies concerning authenticity, the top 25 journals[*] in tourism have been reviewed in this study. The strategy of this review is to include only studies that contribute significant and direct value to the literature of authenticity. Hence, the key words "authentic" and "authenticity" were used to search the titles of the papers, and only full journal articles were included. A total of 101 articles were found from 18 tourism journals. These were examined through a content analysis approach, which is effective in producing descriptive information and identifying themes or categories (Silverman, 1997). The focus was the published journals and the publication dates, the research topics and/or themes, and the key findings.

The topic of authenticity was first discussed in a tourism journal, the Annals of Tourism Research, in 1986, but it has only become a common subject of discussion in the last decade.

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[*] The journals were chosen with the guidance of journal ranking literature, such as McKercher, Law, and Lam (2006).

Nearly 70% of articles concerning the issue of authenticity were published in the last eight years, between 2006 and 2013. The Annals of Tourism Research has the highest number of publications on this topic, including 31 out of 101 collected articles.

Table 1. Themes and/or topics of tourism studies on authenticity

Themes/Topics	Details
Authenticity and relevant concepts (32)	*Including:* Anthropology, Aura, Commodification/Commoditization, Creativity, Cultural identity, Emotion, Equity, Ethnicity, Freedom, Hyper-reality, hyper traditions, authentic fake, Illusion, Interpretation, Locality, Location, Manipulation, Nationalism, Othering, Post-modernism, sincerity, Spectacularization, Spurious/reality construction, Sustainability, Tour guide identity, Tourist identity, Tourist role, Welcomeness.
Authenticity in particular settings (21)	*Including:* Aboriginal arts performance, African nature-oriented tourism, Craft souvenir, Cultural motifs in souvenir clothing, Discourse on tourism in film, Everyday leisure, Film tourism, Food service, Historic city, Historic theme parks, Industrial heritage, Literary tourism sites, Local food, Local provenance, Medical tourism, Older retail districts, Pilgrim experiences, Real-ale tourism, Re-enactment events, Residential tourism, Rural heritage architecture.
Different types of authenticity (12)	*Including:* Customized authenticity, Existential authenticity, Experiential authenticity, Geographically displaced authenticity, Object authenticity, Performative authenticity, Pine and Gilmore (2007)'s genres of authenticity, Theoplacity.
The perception of authenticity (25)	*From perspectives of:* Artists, Government, Museum curators, Operators, Residents/ Locals/ Villagers, Students, Tour guides, Tourists (such as mass ecotourists, adventurers, backpackers, solitary travelers).
The role of authenticity/ perceived authenticity (8)	*In:* Decision to become heritage tourists, Farmer's double role (farmer and tourist host), Loyalty, Motivation, Product quality, Seaside resort choice, Shopping behavior, Souvenir-repurchasing intentions, Tourist cultural behavioral intentions, Tourist satisfaction.

	Including:
Other issues (9)	Affirming authenticity, Conceptual clarification, Determinants of authenticity, Indicators of authenticity, Marketing/ Construction of authenticity in travel literature, Negotiation of authenticity, The process of authentication, The process of authenticity.

* Numbers in brackets indicate numbers of articles bearing the theme/topic
** The sum of the bracketed numbers is larger than 101, i.e., total number of articles, since there are 6 articles classified into 2 theme/topic categories.

Five main themes were identified in the study: authenticity and relevant concepts, authenticity in particular settings, different types of authenticity, the perception of authenticity, and the role of authenticity/perceived authenticity (as shown in Table 1). The first of these, the discussion of authenticity with reference to relevant concepts, is the most prevalent. In this theme, the notions of commodification, identity, and interpretation are most often associated with authenticity. It is often argued that commodification can diminish or even destroy the authenticity of local cultural products and human relations, for both locals and tourists (Cohen, 1988; Halewood & Hannam, 2001). Cohen (1988), however, argued that commodification does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products. Using the example of Balinese ritual performances, he stated that tourists are often prepared to accept tourism commodities such as these as authentic, and that in superficial touristic experiences only a few traits of authenticity are required for tourists to accept the products as authentic. Empirical studies have produced divergent findings, reporting different effects of commodification on authenticity, ranging from negative to positive to no effect at all (Cole, 2007; Halewood & Hannam, 2001; Matheson, 2008; Xie, 2003; Yang & Wall, 2009). Thus, the influence of commodification on authenticity may vary depending on the context. The degree of commodification may also have an effect.

The perception of authenticity has also been the subject of much academic attention. As discussed earlier, there is an ongoing debate on whether tourists are concerned about and/or really look for authentic experiences and destinations. Many scholars have drawn on these initial works concerning authenticity, and proposed various findings. For example, Moscardo

and Pearce (1986) concluded from their research on Australian historic theme parks that authenticity is important in the visiting choices of tourists, and that it is often promoted as a part of the visitor experience. Herbert (1995) was particularly interested in authenticity regarding the heritage of literary places. He believed that "some visitors, though probably a small minority, are extremely interested in the authenticity of the site and are likely to be disappointed if things are not 'real'." (Herbert, 1995, p.45). Timothy (2011) believed that tourists may not be aware of fabricated experiences; they are in fact blinded by previous stereotypes or false images. Tourists' perceptions of what is authentic are actually not real and authentic experiences, as what they think they are searching for is in fact not genuine. Accordingly, the role of authenticity is different among different types of tourists. Some do actually seek out authentic places and desire authentic experiences; others do not care about authenticity and only want to enjoy fun and relaxed experiences.

Previous research has focused on identifying different perceptions of authenticity, with few investigations into how tourists assess authenticity, or the criteria of authenticity. Studies of souvenirs and crafts are exceptions to this, such as those of Littrell, Anderson, and Brown (1993), and Revilla and Dodd (2003). In the research conducted by Littrell et al. (1993), eight categories emerged from tourists' descriptions of authenticity: uniqueness or originality, workmanship, aesthetics, function and use, cultural and historic integrity, craftspeople and materials, shopping experience, and genuineness. Revilla and Dodd (2003) identified five main factors of authenticity in local crafts: appearance/utility, traditional characteristics and certification, difficulty to obtain, locally produced, and low cost. These studies recognize different characteristics of authenticity, but only for tangible objects, i.e., souvenirs and crafts. Intangible concepts, such as tourist experience, are more complex. A significant feature of a tourist experience is that it is highly subjective. It is multifaceted, as individuals experience similar things in different ways, and construct meanings from their own intellects and

imaginations (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Gouthro, 2011). The above characteristics cannot be applied in the context of heritage experiences, therefore our understanding of how tourists assess authenticity or perceive heritage experiences is incomplete.

Study sites

Hong Kong is commonly known as an urban tourism destination, which offers a spectacular skyline view, diverse shopping and recreation facilities, and a special mix of Chinese and British culture. This cosmopolitan metropolis attracts millions of visitors each year, with almost 42 million tourists visiting in 2011 (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2012). The Hong Kong Government has recently turned its attention to widening the range of tourist experiences and to diversifying tourist attractions to attract new visitors, keep them longer, and encourage repeat visits (Hong Kong Planning Department, 2012). The focus for long-term tourism development is on ecotourism and cultural tourism (Hong Kong Planning Department, 2012). In cultural tourism, special attention is given to arts, culture, and heritage attractions (Hong Kong Planning Department, 2012).

In Hong Kong, the notion of heritage developed in the 1980s, when the traditional Chinese fishing village rapidly transformed into a metropolitan city (Cheung, 1999). There are a total of 101 declared monuments and more than 1,000 historic buildings in Hong Kong (the Antiquities and Monuments Office, 2013), which include a wide range of Chinese heritage structures (e.g., temples, festival buildings, villages) and British colonial heritage/historic buildings. However, only a few of these heritage sites are able to attract tourists. In their study, McKercher, Ho, and du Cros (2004) found that more than half of almost 100 declared monuments and museums promoted by the Hong Kong Tourism Board recorded no visitors at all.

In this study, to achieve the proposed objectives of investigating tourists' perceptions, the chosen heritage attractions should not only have cultural or/and historical value, but also a significant number of visitors. From reviewing the literature, and from actual visits by the researcher, six different heritage attractions were selected: the Wong Tai Sin Temple, the Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery, the Man Mo Temple, the Ping Shan Heritage Trail, the Po Lin Monastery, and the Museum of Heritage.

Study method

The study was carried out in two stages. Stage one applied a qualitative approach, aiming at exploring a set of criteria for assessing the authenticity of heritage experiences. Primary data in this stage was mainly collected through semi-structured interviews. This approach not only allows the researchers to obtain relevant information related to the pre-set topics of interest, but also lets the respondents express their thoughts and stories spontaneously. It is particularly appropriate for investigating the perceptions of tourists, and a list of open-ended questions was prepared in advance. The key questions concerned tourists' perceived authenticity of their heritage experiences, and how they assess authenticity. Follow-up issues were also discussed during the interviews, on a case-by-case basis, and the order of the questions was flexible.

Tourists visiting the above selected sites were approached and asked for interviews. Participant recruitment stopped when information saturation was reached, i.e., the information gathered became repetitive. A total of 21 interviews were carried out in April and May 2013, mostly through face-to-face dialogues at six different heritage sites in Hong Kong. Each interview lasted from 15 to 40 minutes. All were audio recorded and then transcribed into data scripts. The transcripts were then coded and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10.

Stage two utilized a quantitative approach. A set of scales to measure the authenticity of heritage experiences was generated from the criteria identified in stage one. A survey questionnaire was then developed, including the measurement scale for authenticity of heritage experiences, and the respondents' demographic information. The survey was carried out at the Hong Kong heritage sites in September 2013. A total of 108 out of 112 questionnaires collected were valid for the analysis. Using SPSS 20.0, factor analysis was performed to examine the structure of the measurement scale. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and T Test were also run to detect the differences, if any, in terms of perceived authenticity.

Findings

Stage 1: Qualitative study

Respondents' profile

The interview respondents were inbound tourists to Hong Kong, including seven short-haul tourists from Asian countries and 14 long-haul tourists from non-Asian countries. They were between 21 and 52 years old. They had various reasons for visiting Hong Kong, such as convenience (language, safety, proximity to China, etc.), visiting friends and relatives, business, and vacation.

Guidebook recommendation was the main reason the majority of the non-Asian respondents visited the heritage attractions. For most Asian tourists, religion was the primary or secondary purpose of the visits, as almost all the surveyed attractions were religious sites. Word-of-mouth, i.e., recommendations from friends and relatives, was also an important factor for the respondents when selecting attractions. Almost all respondents claimed to be interested in heritage. The ultimate motivation for visiting these sites was therefore to acquire knowledge about Hong Kong, and to learn about the local culture and customs. Hong Kong's architecture

and lifestyle is supremely modern, so heritage and tradition present "another side of the city," which was another point of interest for many respondents.

Many of the long-haul tourists were first time visitors to Hong Kong, and for some it was even their first visit to Asia. Their knowledge of Hong Kong and the Chinese culture was limited. For most respondents, guidebooks were the main source of information about the sites, which was rather superficial and mainly related to where to go and what to see.

In general, the respondents had a positive impression of the visited sites, particularly regarding appearance/structural design. All respondents appreciated the aesthetic aspects of the sites. The words "beautiful" and "impressive" were mentioned frequently when tourists were asked about their impressions of the sites.

The criteria of an authentic heritage experience

Tourists were asked to assess the authenticity of their heritage experiences. At three of the sites, the Man Mo Temple, the Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery, and the Ping Shan Heritage Trail, their experiences were perceived as rather authentic. At the other three attractions, i.e., the Wong Tai Sin Temple, the Po Lin Monastery, and the Museum of History, their experiences were not so authentic, according to the respondents' perceptions. To further understand why this was the case, tourists were asked to explain the reasons for their authenticity assessments. These explanations were analyzed and classified by the criteria of perceived authenticity. Six significant criteria for an authentic heritage experience were identified (shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Criteria of authenticity towards heritage experiences

No.	Criteria	Properties	Description

1	Appearance/ physical settings	Aged (i.e., old) In ruin/Desolation Artificial/modern elements New/freshly built Presence of certain building material (i.e., concrete)	When the appearance of the heritage site is old or in ruin, it is considered as authentic, and it is deemed inauthentic if it looks new and modern.
2	Tourist facilities/ Commodification	Construction for tourism purpose Overcrowding Shops, restaurants Commercialization/ Commodification	The concentration of tourist facilities such as souvenir shops, restaurants and other services at a heritage site is likely to leave negative impression on respondents in terms of authenticity. This Criteria can be considered as the effects of commodification.
3	Local culture and customs	Presence of monks/religious practitioners Presence of local people Using for original purposes Interactions with locals	The presence of people or activities which belong to or originate from the site can help to build up trust from visitors and increase the level of perceived authenticity.
4	Management	Government involvement Over-maintenance Over-cleanliness Professional staff	The over-management, indicated by over-maintenance, over-cleanliness or professional staff in a heritage site is likely to reduce perceived authenticity. However, the involvement of authority in developing and managing the site was suggested to somehow create credit among tourists, hence enhance perceived authenticity.
5	Location	Surroundings Historic/original location Necessity of efforts to access	While the original location is most appreciated, appropriate surroundings also help to increase perceived authenticity. The necessity of efforts to visit the site was also revealed as a positive factor to authentic heritage experience.
6	Atmosphere	Spirituality	The sound, sight and smell tourists experienced during the visits significantly shape their

	Senses (i.e., smell of incense, sound of praying)	perceptions of authenticity. A calmly religious ambience tends to increase perceived authenticity, while a noisy, messy place is likely to diminish the authentic heritage experience.

Appearance was found to be the first criteria suggested by respondents for measuring the authenticity of their heritage visits. Most respondents indicated the key determinant of their authentic heritage experience was the ancient appearance of the visited sites. The site appears to be authentic if it looks old, or in ruins. Heritage is typically understood as a legacy of the past, so logically, it should be ancient. A new and fresh look reduced the authentic heritage experience. One respondent, when seeing the zodiac statues in the Wong Tai Sin Temple, stated that: "… it seems all pretty fresh. That's why I don't have an authentic feeling." The obvious appearance of concrete in a temple construction also contributed to a decrease in perceived authenticity. Artificial and modern elements added to the heritage sites disappointed tourists and reduced their authentic experiences. One tourist at the Wong Tai Sin Temple acknowledged that the temple itself was real and original, but artificial elements, such as sculptures, decorations, and a modern logo meant her temple visit was overall an inauthentic experience.

The second factor, *the concentration of tourist facilities*, was in fact a determinant of an inauthentic experience. The presence of shops, restaurants, and other tourist services was found to reduce the authenticity of heritage experiences. A high density of tourist facilities created the image of a tourism-purpose-built attraction, which therefore was seen to destroy the authentic heritage experience. One tourist visiting Po Lin Monastery said:

When I was at the Big Buddha and the Monastery, I saw tourists, shops, Starbucks, etc. That is the main reason that makes me feel it is not authentic. When this kind of attraction is surrounded by shops and touristic facilities it takes away the authenticity.

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In Wong Tai Sin Temple, the commercialized elements also significantly diminished perceived
authenticity. A tourist commented:

> The biggest impression in Wong Tai Sin that I have is that there was a big area for
> fortune tellers. It was too organized, on a large scale. They made a separate area for
> fortune tellers, it looks so professional. It lost the feeling of fortune tellers or a temple.
> It seems like a business, too commercialized.

The presence of local culture and custom was found to be another essential factor of
authenticity. The monks in the monasteries and the locals praying in the temples were indicated
to create an authentic heritage experience. Interactions with locals was also found to increase
tourists' perceived authenticity. A tourist claimed to have an extremely authentic temple
experience when she was instructed by a local worshipper.

An efficient management system often produces good service quality and positive
tourist experiences. However, in this case, it was over-management, such as temples being too
well-maintained and clean and with functional professional staff, which reduced the perceived
authenticity. In the Wong Tai Sin Temple, a respondent explained her assessment of
inauthenticity by the fact that "there are security people or other people who are working here.
There is the guy who removes the ashes with gloves and an orange uniform. It's just so strict,
organized, planned." Also related to management, a tourist from China believed that the
involvement of the authority in the construction of the heritage site made it authentic. It was
uncommon for a site to be considered as authentic if it was known to be constructed. However,
in this case, trust in the authority of the government may have determined the perception of
authenticity.

Location was found to be another criterion for respondents to assess authenticity.
Original or historical locations were mentioned as an element of authenticity. Respondents

perceived some attractions as more authentic if they were located in a residential area and with local residents in close proximity. For example, the Ping Shan Heritage Trail, which goes through a village lined with ancestral halls, temples, and study halls, was considered as highly authentic. The heritage site was "incorporated with other buildings [resident's houses]," it was "something different from a usual heritage, with fences and guards," and was "still in use for daily lives." Tourists could "see how people spend their time with family, gathering and praying together." All these details made tourists feel like they were having "the most authentic Hong Kong heritage village experience." On the contrary, modern surroundings were indicated to diminish the perceived authenticity of heritage experiences. Most of the attractions are religious sites, so non-religious surroundings made the experiences less authentic. These factors of modern surroundings and over-management were particularly remarked on, as in Hong Kong modern elements are dominant and the management system is extremely precise and stringent. Also relevant to location, the effort required to visit the sites was also found to be a source of authentic heritage experiences. A respondent, who had "suffered" climbing up a hill when visiting the Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery, believed her effort contributed to the authentic experience. She said that "it is so difficult to come here. I don't think people would have built this kind of temple if it was not in the old times." In fact, this finding is comparable to those of Revilla and Dodd (2003) concerning the authenticity perceptions of Talavera pottery, a type of souvenir from Mexico. This study indicated that the difficulty in obtaining Talavera pottery contributed to its authenticity.

The final attribute of authentic heritage experiences was found to be the *atmosphere*. Most of the surveyed attractions were religious sites, so the spiritual atmosphere of the sites was an essential element of authenticity. Respondents also used their senses to evaluate their experiences. Many respondents were fascinated to hear the sound of prayers, and to smell the incense at the temples and monasteries. The presence of features that stimulated the senses was

subsequently found to increase perceived authenticity. In contrast, the absence of expected sounds or smells was found to be disappointing. A tourist commented: "It was pretty, nice to look at, but I think I miss the smell. When I think of a temple, there is a smell in my mind."

In addition to the above six determinants of tourists' perceptions on the authenticity of their experiences, another factor, related to the tourists themselves, was discovered to influence their perceptions of authenticity. This is *tourists' previous knowledge of the visited sites*. Respondents with limited or no knowledge of the sites were likely to consider the sites authentic. Others tended to compare their experiences with their knowledge or previous experiences of the sites or of similar sites. Hence, they were more critical when assessing the authenticity. Many tourists reflected on their experiences at heritage attractions in other Asian countries, such as in China, Malaysia, and Thailand. For example, a tourist commented:

> I have been to a really large temple before in Penang, Malaysia. My feelings or impressions of the temple there and here are really different. I really felt inspired by the atmosphere in the other temple. Penang was really spiritual. It's different from here. The feeling that I had is different. I could feel in the air that it is different. For me, here it is just a touristic site.

Stage 2: Quantitative study

Respondents' profile

A total of 108 cases were eligible for the analyses of perceived authenticity. The majority of respondents (57.5%) were from Asia, 29.2% were European, and the remainder from the Americas, Australia/Oceania, and Africa. The number of male respondents was slightly higher than female. Most of the respondents (74%) were under 35, and almost 90% had bachelor degrees or higher. Half of the respondents were repeat visitors to Hong Kong. The majority (84%) were visiting the studied sites for the first time.

Factor analysis of perceived authenticity toward Hong Kong heritage experiences

From the above criteria, acquired through the qualitative study, a scale with 16 items was formulated to measure the authenticity of heritage experiences. Five of these, defined in stage 1 to be determinants of inauthenticity, were used as reversed coded items (shown in Table 3).

Factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to examine the structure of the measurement scale. Initially, the analysis indicated five factors, comprising 13 items. Three items were removed, as their factor loadings were less than 0.5, or they loaded on two factors. The last factor however, which included the items "Old and ancient" and "Suitable surrounding/location," has a low Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = 0.368$). These items were therefore not consistent in measuring one construct. The analysis was performed again without them. Four factors were then determined, as shown in Table 3, explaining 73.17% of the variance.

Table 3. Factor analysis of perceived authenticity towards Hong Kong heritage experiences

	Loading	Eigenvalue	% variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Local culture		2.91	26.41	8.04
Representation of local ways of life	.876			
Representation of local community	.809			
Interaction with local community	.779			
Experience of local culture and customs	.661			
Commodification		2.55	23.17	8.03
Overly managed and regulated*	.859			
Commercialized*	.831			
Made for tourism purpose*	.773			
Constructed elements		1.51	13.70	8.08
Artificial elements*	.893			
Modern elements*	.890			
Atmosphere		1.09	9.89	7.04

Relaxing experience	.867
Calm and peaceful atmosphere	.852

KMO and Bartlett's Test = 0.663

Bartlett's test of Sphericity   Sig.=.00

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Items eliminated: Old and ancient, Suitable surrounding/location, In use for original purposes, Religious and spiritual experience, and Senses
*Reversed coded items

The four identified factors defining tourists' perceptions of authenticity toward Hong Kong heritage experiences were local culture, commodification, constructed elements, and atmosphere. Encountering local culture and residents at the heritage sites was indicated to be the most important factor of perceived authenticity. This can be explained by the linkage between authenticity and the concepts of "locality" and "othering/otherness," which has been discussed in the literature. Tourists engaging in international travel seek out the "authenticity" of the "other" (MacCannel, 1976), and are interested in other cultures and environments. Mowforth and Munt (2003) also suggested that "otherness and authenticity are united in a desire to ensure that culture and ethnicity are preserved and aestheticized" (p.74). Sims (2009) indicated the "locality" was an essential element of authenticity in food tourism. In this study, through witnessing Hong Kong local culture, customs, and community, tourists found the "otherness" and "locality" that indicated the authenticity they were searching for. Hence, they achieved authentic experiences.

A heritage site often provides a sense of atmosphere (Masberg & Siverman, 2007). A relaxed, calm, and peaceful atmosphere was indicated to be another determinant of authentic heritage experiences. It was through existential authenticity that tourists achieved these experiences. This concept refers to an existential state of being, activated by tourism activities (Wang, 1999). The relaxed, calm, and peaceful atmosphere created at the heritage sites activated intra-personal authenticity in the visitors.

Masberg and Siverman (2007) indicated that the quality and condition of the physical environment are important components of heritage tourist experiences. Indeed, this study identified two other indicators of authenticity related to the physical environment of heritage visits, commodification and constructed elements. Commodification, from a high concentration of tourist facilities, and the artificial and modern elements introduced to the physical appearance of the heritage sites, were indicated to negatively affect the perceived authenticity of heritage experiences.

No statistically significant difference was detected among the studied sites in terms of perceived authenticity. Comparing Asian and non-Asian tourists, differences were found for the factors of commodification (sig=.025) and constructed elements (sig=.007). Non-Asian respondents were likely to have a higher perceived authenticity than Asian respondents. To some extent, this finding is consistent with previous qualitative study results, which found that knowledge of visited sites could negatively influence the perception of authenticity. Asian tourists were likely to be more familiar with the Chinese culture, customs, and architecture of the visited Hong Kong heritage sites. They could recognize the commodification and constructed elements of the sites. Accordingly, they were found to have a lower perceived authenticity than non-Asian tourists.

Conclusions

To prepare for this study, a review of the literature in tourism journals was first carried out. The knowledge on authenticity was found to have been developed through both conceptual and empirical studies. Five major themes were identified in authenticity studies: authenticity and relevant concepts, the perception of authenticity, authenticity in particular settings, different types of authenticity, and the role of authenticity or perceived authenticity. An area of research that had not been investigated thoroughly was how tourists assess the authenticity of experiences. The aim of this study was therefore to scrutinize tourists' perceptions of

authenticity in Hong Kong heritage tourism experiences, focusing on identifying the indicators

of authentic/inauthentic heritage experiences.

Interviews with tourists at heritage sites in Hong Kong revealed six major criteria for

assessing the authenticity of heritage experiences: the appearance/physical settings of the

heritage sites, tourist facilities or commodification elements at the sites, the local culture and

customs they presented, the site management, the site location, and the atmosphere of the

heritage visits. Of these factors, appearance or physical settings of the attractions were found

to be the first and most important indicator of authentic or inauthentic experiences. The initial

impression appeared to be vital for an evaluation of authenticity. The presence and involvement

of local residents and religious practitioners at the visited sites tended to have positive effects

on tourists' authentic experiences. An excessive involvement by the authorities, in terms of

modifying and maintaining the attractions, was found to potentially damage the authenticity of

the attractions. Certain facilities and levels of comfort are required by tourists, but care must

be taken, as too much development risks destroying the authentic image of heritage sites.

The above criteria were further developed into a measurement scale, to measure the

perceived authenticity of heritage experiences, which were tested in a quantitative study. A

factor analysis was performed and four factors of perceived authentic heritage experiences were

determined: local culture, commodification, constructed elements, and atmosphere. While the

experiences of local culture and a relaxed and calm atmosphere during the visits were found to

positively affect the perceived authenticity, commodification and constructed elements were

likely to have a negative effect.

As discussed earlier, there are few previous investigations into the indicators of

authenticity, with the exception of the research into tangible tourism products, such as the study

of souvenirs and crafts by Littrell et al. (1993) and Revilla and Dodd (2003). This study

attempts to fill this gap by developing a set of criteria to determine authentic heritage

experiences from the perspectives of tourists. The findings of this study concerning indicators of authentic heritage experiences make a valuable contribution to our understanding of tourists' perception of authenticity, and to the literature on heritage experiences. The possible negative or positive effects of these factors on authentic heritage experiences can also help authorities in managing heritage sites, and enhance positive heritage experiences. For example, to reinforce an authentic heritage experience, visitors should experience the proper atmosphere of a site, stimulating all the senses. The conservation process should be considerate, preserving the old, original look of the heritage site. Minimal tourism management and an appropriate amount of facilities are also suggested.

This is, however, a preliminary mapping of the indicators of authentic heritage experiences, with Hong Kong heritage tourists as the sole sample. It must therefore be further developed and confirmed in other contexts, particularly in destinations where heritage tourism is a major attraction. Another limitation of this study is the rather small sample size, which restricts further analyses, such as differences in terms of perceived authenticity, the influences of tourists' characteristics on perceived authenticity, and the validation of indicators of authentic heritage experiences. Future research with a bigger sample size is suggested, with a further validation process, to endorse the indicators of authentic heritage experiences found through this study. Another concept worthy of further consideration is cultural distance. This study found significant differences in the perceptions of authenticity between Asian and non-Asian tourists toward Hong Kong heritage experiences. Cultural distance was also demonstrated to affect tourists' perceptions of a destination (McKercher & du Cros, 2003). Hence, the association between cultural distance and tourists' perceptions of authenticity is recommended for future studies.

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