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Why urban setting matters in shaping tourist attitudes towards interaction with residents: Causation or selection in three urban settings

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question why tourist attitude towards the interactions with residents are more positive in some urban settings than others, by comparing three different urban settings within Hong Kong: the city centre (Central), a suburban shopping/entertainment centre (Sha Tin) and a new urban tourism area (Mong Kok). Two competing hypotheses can explain the variation in tourist attitudes. The first is causation; some settings provide more intensive and better interactions which lead to more positive attitudes. The second is selection; some settings attract different types of tourists with different attitudes. Mediation analysis provides weak support for causation and strong support for selection. Sha Tin attracts more repeat tourists, holidaymakers and shopping tourists, which have more positive attitudes. Managing growth of tourism is more effective if sub-centres are developed as product-market combinations that distract these tourists from the overcrowded city-centre.

1. Introduction

Urban destinations generate most of the tourists worldwide, and, at the same time, they receive a substantial proportion of all tourists (Ashworth & Page, 2011). For tourists, interaction with residents is an important part of travel experiences (Uriely, Israeli, & Reichel, 2003). As indicated by Cook (1962), different interactions were found to result in differences in attitudes or even attitude change. Tourists seem to differ in their attitudes towards interactions with residents due to tourist-resident interactions. Tourist attitude towards these interactions may further influence their post-travel satisfaction, revisit intention and willingness to re-interact with local residents in the future. It is crucial to construct positive attitudes towards such interactions that is beneficial for tourists (Su, Long, Wall, & Jin, 2016). If the attitude towards the interactions is positive, it can improve intergroup relations (e.g. Crisp & Turner, 2009; Eusébio, Vieira, & Lima, 2018), whereas negative attitude may preclude favourable relationship between tourists and residents. Lissitsa and Kushnirovich (2020) indicated that positive attitude towards interaction has been the research focus, whereas negative and neutral attitudes have received less attention and been largely unexplored. In these limited studies, scholars reported that positive interactions were more effective in changing intergroup relations compared to neutral interactions (e.g. Voci & Hewstone, 2003). Therefore, more studies are needed to explore the three-category (positive, neutral, negative) attitude towards interactions and which variables are important in shifting negative or neutral to positive attitudes towards interactions.

Moreover, tourists interact with residents in various urban areas within the city. However, little attention has been paid to the effect of the heterogeneity of spatial contexts on tourist evaluation of interactions. Many tourists concentrate in the city centre, leading to overcrowding in many destinations. On the supply side, cities have responded by creating alternatives in more suburban settings. On the demand side, some tourists shun the overcrowded beaten track areas and engage in new urban tourism settings, seeking for a deeper and more authentic local experience. As a result, different types of urban settings have formed in urban destinations, including city centre, entertainment/shopping centres in the suburban areas of the city and new urban tourism areas. It can be hypothesized that these urban settings, will attract different types of tourists and will offer different interaction experiences to tourists, further influencing tourist attitude towards interactions with residents.

Previous studies suggest two competing hypotheses explaining the potential relationship between urban setting and tourist attitude towards interactions with residents. The first hypothesis is that diverse urban settings provide different intensities and qualities of tourist-

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resident interactions, as demonstrated by several studies (e.g. Kotus, Rzeszewski, & Ewertowski, 2015; Luo, Brown, & Huang, 2015; Su et al., 2016). The intensity and quality of the interactions may further influence tourist attitude towards interactions with residents, a matter of causation. The second hypothesis is that diverse urban settings attract different types of tourists with particular characteristics, such as travel purpose (e.g. Zhang, Ryan, & Cave, 2016) and visit times such as first-time tourist vs repeater (e.g. Caldeira & Kastenholz, 2018). The tourists visiting different urban settings may hold different attitudes towards interactions with residents, a matter of selection.

The aim of the paper is to test both hypotheses – causation and selection. The dependent variable is tourist attitude towards interactions with residents measured in three urban settings, i.e. the city centre, a suburban setting and a new urban tourism setting. Under the first hypothesis, the effect of the urban setting on the tourist attitude is mediated by tourist-resident interaction in the destination. Under the second hypothesis, the effect is mediated by individual characteristics of the tourist that defines their attitudes. Using path regression allows us to statistically test the hypotheses and determine which mediating effects cause the variation in tourist attitudes among the three urban settings.

The mainland Chinese tourists in Hong Kong were selected for this study. Since its return to China in 1997, Hong Kong has drawn a large volume of tourists from mainland China. This tourist flow has spread to different urban areas within Hong Kong due to its variety of urban settings with spatially dispersed tourist attractions. This variety provides the opportunity to answer the question whether and why urban settings matter in shaping the attitudes of mainland Chinese tourists towards interactions with residents in Hong Kong. This study will contribute to the existing knowledge of tourism studies in two ways by testing and comparing the two competing hypotheses across three different urban settings of a city in one study. The first contribution is to study whether urban settings shape tourist attitude towards interactions with residents, considering the effect of spatial heterogeneity. The second one is to distinguish selection or causation effect by comparing tourist attitude across different urban settings. Most previous studies have focused on one case or a certain place, so that they assume that it is causation effect because selection effect is invisible. However, it may depend on selection effect instead of causation effect without noticing that. This study is helpful for tourism marketing and management in developing better strategies for managed growth of tourism in cities.

2. Theoretical framework

Allport's (1954) social contact theory first proposes a framework for intergroup relations. Afterwards, Cook (1962) identified three relevant variables in social contact, namely types of contact situations, types of individuals, and the attitudes. Contact situation and individual characteristics can be further categorized into several components. For example, contact opportunities and quality of contact were part of contact situations (e.g. equal or unequal status, intimate vs superficial contact), while personality and previous contacts of the individual were classified as individual characteristics (Amir, 1994). More importantly, both contact situation and the individual characteristics may influence the attitudes (Amir, 1994; Cook, 1962). In tourism contexts, interaction between tourists and residents is a specific type of social contacts, namely tourist-resident interaction. Following Cook's (1962) and Amir's (1994) work, different types of tourists and tourist-resident interactions, may have a decisive effect on tourist attitude, from tourist perspective. However, tourist-resident interaction is likely to differ from daily contacts among individuals and groups. At the same time, the tourist characteristics may also differ from individual characteristics in general social contacts. In general, tourist-resident interaction and tourist characteristics are assumed to influence tourist attitude towards interactions with residents.

Tourist-resident interaction and tourist attitude. Tourists' interactions with residents could affect their attitudes towards such interactions, either positive or negative. The presence of residents in the destination creates many opportunities for tourists to experience the interactions with local residents, which would influence tourists' attitudes, behaviors and future destination decisions (Oppermann, 1999; Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000; Su & Wall, 2010). Several studies (e.g. Carneiro, Eusébio, & Caldeira, 2019; Fan, Zhang, Jenkins, & Tavitiyaman, 2017) suggest that the intensity and quality of the tourist-resident interaction determines tourists' attitudes. In particular, some suggest that a higher intensity of tourist-resident interaction leads to positive attitude (e.g. Choo & Petrick, 2014; Pizam et al., 2000). Others (Carneiro et al., 2019) indicate that it is the quality of tourists' interaction with residents that is related to increasing positive outcomes or decreasing negative outcomes. Fan (2020) suggest that a better quality of tourist-resident interaction is necessary for the positive attitude towards interactions.

Tourist characteristics and tourist attitude. Tourists of such places are often heterogeneous in their travel purpose, visit status, length of stay and travel companion (e.g. Otoo, Kim, & Choi, 2020; Schofield, Coromina, Camprubi, & Kim, 2020; Su, Cheng, & Swanson, 2020), leading to different attitudes toward tourist-resident interactions. First, tourists' travel purpose has a direct effect on attitude towards visiting the destination (e.g. Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010; Lam & Hsu, 2004; 2006), similarly, the travel purpose also affects tourist attitude towards such travel experience as interactions with residents. Lam and Hsu (2006) found that travel purposes such as sight-seeing and shopping are positively related to tourists' attitudes. Hsu et al. (2010) also suggest that relaxation and shopping positively influence tourist attitude. Second, the visit status (first-time vs repeater) would have an impact on tourist attitude towards interactions due to the difference with prior experiences in the destination. Repeaters are usually more satisfied with their trips in the destination than first-time tourists, as demonstrated in several studies (e.g. Jang & Feng, 2007; Petrick & Backman, 2002), so they may be more positive about interacting with residents than first-time tourists. Moreover, the longer tourists stay in the destination, they become more positive and satisfied towards the visits, especially when the destination can provide consistent high-quality tourism services (Vena-Oya, Castañeda-García, Rodríguez-Molina, & Frías-Jamilena, 2021). Additionally, travel companion can also affect tourists' attitudes, emotions, experiences and activities (Huang & Wang, 2014; Su, Spierings, & Hooimeijer, 2020; Wenzel & Benkenstein, 2018). Tourists in organized tours seems to hold more positive attitudes than others, perhaps because they meet residents that work in the tourism industry in particular (Cohen, 1972).

Many urban destinations try to spread tourists to other urban areas beyond the traditional beaten track areas through dispersal strategies, and an effective strategy is to brand different urban settings offering a variety of interactions targeting at different types of tourists (Su, Spierings, & Hooimeijer, 2020). The city centre as the traditional beaten track area has a very high density of tourist activities because the most popular tourism attractions concentrate in this area (Popp, 2012). However, some tourists may choose settings outside the city centre after a cost-benefit evaluation (Russo, 2002). Suburban area with natural scenery and easy access from the nearby cities often attract tourists who can save travel time and costs (Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006). Compared to the city centre, suburban setting contains less tourism highlights, but often with attractive entertainment and outdoor facilities. Additionally, new urban tourism areas have developed, which represent the authentic everyday life of locals, creating new experiences for tourists by offering a mix of cultural difference and consumption opportunities (Maitland, 2010). As indicated by Maitland and Newman (2004), the new urban tourism area is usually close to the city centre, connected to post-industrial transitional local neighbourhoods (Füller & Michel, 2014). In general, the various urban settings attract particular types of tourists and also offer different intensities and qualities of the interactions between tourists and residents (Su, Spierings, & Hooimeijer, 2020).

Urban setting and tourist-resident interaction. Due to the differences in size, location, function, and to the distinctive spatial distributions of

tourism attractions (Shaw & Williams, 2004), urban settings tend to offer different interaction opportunities between tourists and residents. Therefore, different urban settings may affect tourist-resident interactions. This has been supported by the existing literature (e.g. Ashworth & Page, 2011; Su, Spierings, & Hooimeijer, 2020). Specifically, the city centre provides intensive tourist-resident interactions (Kotus et al., 2015) as a result of the high density of tourists' visiting activities and residents' daily activities in this area. Moreover, most tourism highlights, facilities and services are concentrated in the city centre, as indicated by Lau and McKercher (2006). Thus, the frequent, intensive and various interactions may take place in the city centre.

By contrast, the settings outside the city centre usually create more personal opportunities for tourists to interact with residents (e.g. Prentice, Witt, & Wydenbach, 1994; Su et al., 2016). Suburban areas seem to offer the relatively small amount and variety of interactions due to a limited number of tourists visiting this area. In this context, tourists are more likely to achieve less intensive but more satisfactory interactions. Besides, new urban tourism areas in particular, are frequented by both tourists and residents and interactions often take place in several public spaces such as restaurants, local markets, cafes or bars (Bock, 2015). Therefore, this kind of urban setting offers more opportunities for tourists to interact with residents in their daily lives. In their active quest for local experiences in new urban tourism area, tourists assess the quality of interactions with residents as higher than in the city centre (Bock, 2015; Su, Spierings, & Hooimeijer, 2020).

Urban setting and tourist characteristics. The urban setting may attract tourists with different purposes. The city centre, especially in some European cities such as Venice and Barcelona offer heritage experiences. Areas outside the city centre usually attracts those tourists with less high social or cultural expectations (Su & Wall, 2010). Tourists can visit suburban areas with easy access providing tourism facilities and services but saving travel time and costs. New urban tourism area tends to attract those tourists seeking for encounters with mundane lives and urban experience with locals, places and identities and interested in the presence and activities of locals (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2015; Zhang et al., 2016). Regarding the length of stay, the city centre and new urban tourism area seem to attract those tourists with longer stay compared to the suburban area in which tourists usually visit for less time-budget (Prentice et al., 1994; Zhang et al., 2006).

Compared to first-time tourists, repeat tourists further explore the destination (e.g. Gitelson & Crompton, 1984; Lau & McKercher, 2006). Lau and McKercher (2006) found that first-time tourists travelled mainly in the city centre whereas repeat tourists travelled widely throughout Hong Kong. Repeat tourists tend to visit more distant and peripheral attractions (Caldeira & Kastenholz, 2018). However, Caldeira and Kastenholz (2018) also indicated that some repeaters focus on specific types of activities and places. Lehto, O'Leary, and Morrison (2004) also found that tourists with more experiences tend to specialize and narrow their activities in visiting places. Therefore, the city centre is more likely to attract first-time tourists, while the suburban and new urban tourism areas tend to attract repeaters. Regarding the travel companion, Cohen (1972) proposed a typology of tourists: organized mass tourists, the individual mass tourist, the explorer and the drifter. The city centre is popular in mass tourism (Matoga & Pawłowska, 2016), so organized tours are more likely to appear in the city centre. In contrast, tourists visiting new urban tourism areas and suburban areas tend to avoid the "tourist bubble" of mass tourists (Luo et al., 2015). However, this does not mean that they are restricted to off-the-beaten-track areas; these tourists also visit traditional and long-established urban areas such as downtown area, but they prefer to encounter non-touristic activities and experiences in heterogeneous urban space (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2015; Füller & Michel, 2014; Matoga & Pawłowska, 2016).

Based on the above discussion, two competing hypotheses are proposed in our conceptual model to explain why urban settings matter in shaping tourist attitude towards interactions (Fig. 1). The first hypothesis is causation; diverse urban settings provide different tourist-resident interactions, further influencing tourist attitude towards interactions. The second hypothesis is selection; diverse urban settings select different types of tourists with more positive attitudes towards interactions.

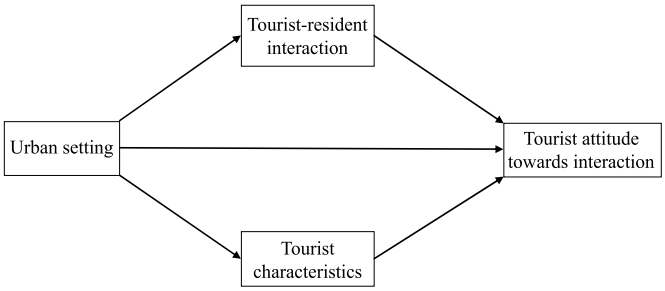

Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

Specifically, the causation hypothesis can be formulated as follows: Compared to the city centre, the suburban area provides less intensive but better interactions whereas the new urban tourism area provides more intensive and better interactions. More intensive and better interactions lead to more positive tourist attitudes towards interactions with residents. The selection hypothesis can be formulated as follows: The city centre, the suburban area and the new urban tourism area attract particular tourists with different travel purposes, visitation status (first-time tourists vs repeaters) and travel companion (e.g. organized tour). Tourists with leisure travel purposes, repeat tourists and tourists in organized tours are more likely to hold positive attitudes.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Study site

Hong Kong's unique urban settings mainly include Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories (connected to Shenzhen city in mainland China). Three different urban settings of Hong Kong were selected with different characteristics (Fig. 2). Specifically, Central (on Hong Kong Island) was selected as the city centre area; Sha Tin (in New Territories) was selected as the suburban area; Mong Kok (in Kowloon Peninsula) was selected as the new urban tourism area.

Central is located in the downtown core and concentrates many tourism attractions including Lan Kwai Fong, the Mid-Level Escalator and Victoria Peak. This area is packed with a large number of mainland Chinese tourists as it provides a variety of mature tourism-related facilities and services. Central also has a forest of skyscrapers, including commercial and office buildings, as well as many shopping malls targeting high-end shoppers for luxury shopping, relaxation and entertainment. Sha Tin has rapidly developed into a well-planned new town outside the city centre and contains several clusters of residential quarters, cultural, recreational and outdoor sports facilities, as well as shopping centres. Sha Tin provides basic goods and services for daily needs and products from international brands in a medium price range, but increasingly shifting towards luxury shopping services catering for tourists. Mong Kok is one of the oldest and most diverse parts of Hong Kong, with some historic buildings, night markets and themed streets including Goldfish market on Tung Choi Street and Bird Garden on Yuen Po Street. It may represent the 'true identity' of Hong Kong as it is loud, crowded and sometimes chaotic but always providing exciting experiences for tourists.

3.2. Survey instrument

A questionnaire was designed with three sets of questions. The first set was to measure tourist characteristics, including visit status, travel companion and travel purpose. The second set included tourist-resident interaction and tourist attitude towards interaction with residents. The

Fig. 2. Hong Kong's administrative map and locations of the studied three urban settings (Central, Sha Tin and Mong Kok).

third set was respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education level and monthly income. Among them, the items measuring tourist-resident interaction were adopted from literature (Fan et al., 2017; Huang & Hsu, 2010; Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Reisinger & Turner, 1998) and on-site observation in June of 2017. Tourists were asked to indicate how frequent (on a 7-point scale of never to very frequently) they interacted with residents in a checklist of interaction activities (16 items) and quality of interaction on a 7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (7 items). Tourist attitude towards interaction with residents was measured with a three-point ranking scale, with 0 representing "negative", 1 for "neutral" and 2 for "positive". The measurement item of tourist attitude towards tourist-resident interaction were adopted from Su et al. (2016). Specifically, respondent was asked the question: "What is your general attitude about interactions with Hong Kong residents?"

3.3. Data collection, sampling and sample profile

The survey was conducted in June 2017. It targeted at tourists from mainland China visiting three urban settings in Hong Kong: Central, Sha Tin and Mong Kok. A stratified sampling approach was used to categorize tourists into three groups. Because of the extremely high rejection rate in an on-site survey for mainland Chinese tourists in Hong Kong, we switched to an online survey, conducted by the largest online survey company (wjx.cn) in mainland China. This was conducted on the basis of whether the tourist recently visited the three urban areas under scrutiny. The survey was randomly sent to mainland Chinese with different age, gender, education, job status and origin. The first question selected the respondents that had visited one of the three areas in Hong Kong. Each respondent was requested to select only one of the three sites and fill out only one questionnaire. The IP address was used to confirm the reliability of the online questionnaires collected. The acceptance rate of online survey was around 70 %, and 416 valid questionnaires were obtained. The final sample consists of 130 individuals in Central, 121 individuals in Sha Tin and 165 individuals in Mong Kok.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are provided in Table 1. The majority of tourists are female (60.8 %) and the largest proportion falls in the age range of 30–39 (48.1 %). Most are relatively well educated with more than 80 % holding at least a bachelor's degree. A large proportion (56.5 %) have a monthly income between 8.001 and 16.000 RMB. Regarding tourist characteristics (visit status, travel companion, length of stay and travel purpose), the majority are repeaters (69.7 %). Most respondents are traveling with their family members or relatives or friends (53.6 %), followed by traveling in organized groups (25.0 %) and traveling alone (19.7 %). Most tourists visiting Hong Kong in this survey was overnight visitors in terms of length of stay (87.0 %). In terms of travel purpose (multiple choices), tourists visit Hong Kong for sight-seeing (79.3 %), holiday (61.3 %) and shopping (36.1 %).

3.4. Data analysis

Prior to data analysis, missing values in the final sample were replaced through single imputation (Rubin, 1976). Single imputation method is used to preserve the sample size by replacing the missing values by a new value randomly chosen from the same source. Single imputation is easily applied in handling the missing values when a low percentage of the total data (less than 5 %) is missing (Eekhout et al., 2013). According to our results, the missing values in the questionnaire are less than 5 %, so we chose single imputation to address missing values. Next, factor analysis was used to identify the dimensional

Table 1
Descriptive summary of sample.

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage (%)			Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	163	39.2	**Visit status**	First-time	126	30.3
	Female	253	60.8		Repeater	290	69.7
Age	18–29	177	42.5	**Travel companion**	Alone	82	19.7
	30–39	236	48.1		Family/relatives/friends	223	53.6
	40–49	30	7.2		Organized groups	104	25.0
	50–59	6	1.5		Others	7	1.7
	60 plus	3	0.7				
Education	Below Bachelor	59	14.2	**Travel purpose***	Sight-seeing	330	79.3
	Bachelor's degree	225	54.1		Business/Conference	59	14.2
	Master or above	132	31.7		Holiday	255	61.3
Monthly income	Less than 8.000 RMB	130	31.3		Visiting relatives/friends	41	9.9
	8001-16000 RMB	235	56.5		Shopping	150	36.1
	More than 16.000 RMB	51	12.3		Others	28	6.7
Urban setting	Central	130	31.2	**Length of stay**	Day tripper	54	13.0
	Sha Tin	121	29.1		Overnight visitor	362	87.0
	Mong Kok	165	39.7				

Note: *Travel purpose are multiple choices that tourists may have more than one option.

structure of tourist-resident interaction. Then, mediation analysis was applied to test the two hypotheses. Mediation analysis is testing hypothetical mechanisms through which an independent variable, urban setting, might elicit a dependent variable, tourist attitude towards interaction with residents, indirectly through the mediating variable, tourist-resident interaction (causation) or tourist characteristics (selection).

In this study, first of all, Kruskal-Wallis tests and cross tabulations were used to analyse the correlation among urban setting, tourist-resident interaction, tourist characteristics and tourist attitude towards interactions. The Kruskal-Wallis test is a non-parametric test, which usually uses ranked data instead of actual values in terms of the data with outliers. All the data are ranked from 1 for the smallest value to N for the largest value. The mean rank is the average of the ranks for the data. The value of mean rank reflects on the extent to which the scores of a group tend to be higher than that of other groups. More importantly, if one or more of these correlations are non-significant, the mediation is not possible.

Second, mediation model is a mechanism that an independent variable X is assumed to cause a dependent variable Y, indirectly through the mediator M (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, 2008). In this paper, the mediation analysis is testing the mechanism that urban settings may affect tourist-resident interaction or tourist characteristics, which in turn may affect tourist attitude towards interactions. If the urban setting is no longer significant when tourist-resident interaction or tourist characteristics is controlled, the finding supports full mediation; if the urban setting is still significant, the finding supports partial mediation. Logistic regression is applied when the dependent variable is categorical (Iacobucci, 2012). Moreover, ordinal logistic regression is a type of logistic regression that testing the relationship between predictors and the propensity to be in a higher category. Several ordinal logistic regressions were applied to analyse tourists' attitudes towards interactions with residents (dependent variable) in three urban settings (independent variable), and whether mediated by tourist-resident interaction or tourist characteristics. Several assumption tests were applied. According to our results, there is no multicollinearity as all the values of tolerance in independent variables are greater than 0.10 and VIF values are less than 10 (Ott & Longnecker, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The test of parallel lines indicates that we are not violating the proportional odds assumption.

4. Results

The analysis proceeds in a number of steps: first the items on tourist-resident interaction are reduced to three dimensions that represent the intensity and the quality of interaction (Table 2). Next for the causation and selection mechanism, the correlation between urban setting, tourist-resident interaction and tourist attitude towards interactions with residents are measured using Kruskal-Wallis test; the differences in the composition of tourist characteristics in three urban settings and in tourist attitude towards interactions with residents are measured using cross tabulation. In the final step, the relation between the urban setting and tourist attitude towards interactions with residents, and the causation or selection mechanism are tested in mediation models (see Table 3).

4.1. Dimensions of tourist-resident interaction

As shown in Table 2, items associated to tourist-resident interaction are extracted into three dimensions, all with factor loadings more than 0.4 (Choo & Petrick, 2014). Two dimensions associated with frequency and activity coincide with Goffman's (1967) two levels of social contact – i.e. co-presence (low level of contact) and focused interaction (high level of contact), thus the two dimensions are labelled as co-presence and focused interaction. Another dimension is consistent with quality of contact in previous studies (e.g. Huang & Hsu, 2010; Islam & Hewstone, 1993), labelled as quality of interaction. The three-factor structure is accounting for 65.933 % of the variance in the data. High values of KMO (0.906) and Cronbach's alpha (0.829) suggest the high validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

Tourists have more co-presence than focused interaction with higher mean scores in a multi-category ordinal scale. The quality of interaction for tourists is favourable with all mean scores higher than 4 in a multi-category ordinal scale. Besides, the skewness values of all items associated to the interaction are between −1 and −0.5 or between 0.5 and 1, indicating the data is moderately skewed. The kurtosis values are less than 3, indicating the data has few outliers.

4.2. The correlation among urban setting, tourist-resident interaction, tourist characteristics and tourist attitude towards interaction

To find out the correlation between urban setting and tourist-resident interaction, a Kruskal-Wallis test is conducted to see whether the three dimensions underlying tourist-resident interaction differ among three types of urban settings. The results show that co-presence, focused interaction and quality are all significantly different in three urban settings (Table 3). Specifically, Sha Tin offers more co-presence with a mean rank of 250.36, followed by Mong Kok with a mean rank of 225.95 and Central with a mean rank of 147.38. Central offers more focused interaction with a mean rank of 227.18, followed by Sha Tin

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for interactions with residents perceived by mainland Chinese tourists (N = 416).

Items associated to interaction	Factor loading	Tourist (N = 416)			
		Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Co-presence[a] (Independent variable in regression analysis)					
You sit beside residents.	.642	4.42	1.517	-.066	-.816
You are dining with residents in the same restaurant.	.815	4.83	1.707	-.557	-.667
You meet residents when walking on the roads.	.892	5.16	1.980	-.822	-.637
You meet residents when wandering in the area.	.900	5.07	1.865	-.790	-.495
You meet residents on public transport, such as bus or subway.	.853	5.17	1.868	-.849	-.459
You meet residents when you are shopping.	.843	4.85	1.892	-.583	-.848
Focused interaction[a] (Independent variable in regression analysis)					
You chat with residents casually.	.748	3.63	1.710	.155	-.925
You have your photos taken by residents.	.733	3.62	1.881	.128	−1.128
Residents ask you to help them take photos.	.778	2.84	2.029	.777	-.751
You bargain with residents.	.571	3.77	1.759	.043	−1.020
You make friends with residents.	.834	3.00	1.992	.663	-.828
You are invited to resident's home.	.813	2.76	2.038	.902	-.549
Quality[b] (Independent variable in regression analysis)					
You interacted with residents harmoniously.	.896	5.03	1.487	-.756	.024
You felt friendly when interacting with residents.	.904	5.06	1.547	-.713	-.206
You felt interesting when interacting with residents.	.879	4.94	1.479	-.641	-.075
You felt your status was equal with residents when interacting with them.	.881	4.88	1.569	-.639	-.316
Your interaction with residents happened in a cooperative way.	.802	4.75	1.508	-.497	-.322
You felt close to residents when interacting with them.	.888	4.82	1.644	-.630	-.388
You felt profound when interacting with residents.	.864	4.91	1.521	-.655	-.173
Cronbach's alpha = .829 Cumulative variance explained (%) = 71.452					

Notes: KMO = 0.906 Bartlett's test of sphericity = 6034.837 (sig. 0.000).
[a] Each item was asked on a 7-point scale where 1 = '*Never*' and 7 = '*Daily*'.
[b] Each item was asked on a 7-point scale where 1 = '*Strongly disagree*' and 7 = '*Strongly agree*'.

with a mean rank of 225.73 and Mong Kok with a mean rank of 181.15. Central offers lower quality of interaction with a mean rank of 191.09 than Sha Tin with a mean rank of 228.79 and Mong Kok with a mean rank of 207.34. The largest difference among the three urban settings is co-presence with the highest K–W test statistic of 51.734. By contrast, the difference in quality is the smallest with a K–W test statistic of 6.185.

Kruskal-Wallis test is also conducted to investigate the correlation between tourist-resident interaction and tourist attitude towards interaction (Table 4). The results show that focused interaction and quality are correlated with tourist attitude, but there is no correlation between co-presence and tourist attitude. The tourists who hold positive attitudes are those with more focused interaction with a mean rank of 229.70, followed by the tourists with negative attitude with a mean rank of 196.08 and neutral attitude with a mean rank of 175.56. The tourists with positive attitudes are those who perceive better quality of interaction with a mean rank of 266.00, followed by the tourists with neutral attitude with a mean rank of 133.61 and negative attitude with a mean rank of 85.75. Besides, the difference in quality among tourists holding different attitudes is the largest with a K–W test statistic of 138.225.

Table 3
K–W test statistic for urban setting and tourist-resident interaction (N = 416).

Tourist-resident interaction	Mean Rank			K–W test statistic	Sig.
	Central	Sha Tin	Mong Kok		
Co-presence	147.38	250.36	225.95	51.734	.000
Focused interaction	227.18	225.73	181.15	14.164	.001
Quality	191.09	228.79	207.34	6.185	.045

Note: Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The difference is significant at the 0.05 level. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

To investigate whether tourist characteristics differ between diverse urban settings, cross tabulations are applied to test the correlation between urban setting and tourist characteristics. The results show that visit status (first-time tourist vs repeater) and travel purpose such as holiday, shopping and visiting relatives/friends are significantly different across three urban settings (Table 5). There are no significant differences in travel companion, length of stay or other travel purposes such as sight-seeing and business/conference. Repeaters show up in all three urban settings, with the highest percentage (76.0 %) in Sha Tin and lowest percentage (61.2 %) in Mong Kok. The tourists with purpose of holiday hold a higher percentage in Sha Tin (71.1 %) and a lower percentage in Central (56.2 %). The tourists that are visiting relatives/friends show up more in Central (13.8 %) and less in Mong Kok (4.8 %). For shopping tourists, a higher percentage 48.8 % shows up in Sha Tin and a lower percentage 26.2 % in Central.

Cross tabulations are also applied to test the correlation between tourist characteristics and tourist attitude towards interaction (Table 6). There are significant differences in first-time tourists versus repeaters, day trippers versus overnight visitors, tourists traveling with different companions and tourists with different travel purposes such as sight-seeing, holiday and shopping. Particularly, the percentage of repeaters who hold positive attitude is 63.4 % and that of first-time tourists is 47.6 %. Most overnight visitors hold positive attitudes (62.2 %), whereas the majority of day trippers hold neutral attitudes (55.6 %). In other words, overnight visitors tend to be more positive towards interactions with residents than day trippers.

In general, the majority of tourists with different companions hold positive attitudes. Specifically, the tourists traveling in organized groups have a high percentage of positive attitudes, 70.2., followed by traveling

Table 4
K–W test statistic for tourist-resident interaction and tourist attitude towards interaction (N = 416).

Tourist-resident interaction	Mean Rank			K–W test statistic	Sig.
	Positive	Neutral	Negative		
Co-presence	213.93	205.03	174.63	2.527	.283
Focused interaction	229.70	175.56	196.08	18.951	.000
Quality	266.00	133.61	85.75	138.225	.000

Note: Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The difference is significant at the 0.05 level. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

Table 5
Cross tabulations of urban setting and tourist characteristics (N = 416).

Tourist Characteristics	Central (%)	Sha Tin (%)	Mong Kok (%)	Pearson Chi-Square	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
First-time	25.4	24.0	38.8	9.416	.009
Repeater	74.6	76.0	61.2		
Alone	23.8	17.4	18.2	5.473	.485
Family/ relatives/ friends	49.2	53.7	57.0		
Organized groups	23.8	27.3	24.2		
Others	3.1	1.7	0.6		
Day tripper	12.3	9.1	16.4	3.345	.188
Overnight visitor	87.7	90.9	83.6		
Sight-seeing	78.5	80.6	78.5	.273	.872
Non-sightseeing	21.5	19.4	21.5		
Business/ Conference	15.4	13.3	14.0	.254	.881
Non-business/ conference	84.6	86.7	86.0		
Holiday	56.2	71.1	58.2	7.000	.030
Non-holiday	43.8	28.9	41.8		
Visiting relatives/ friends	13.8	12.4	4.8	7.866	.020
Non-VRF	86.2	87.6	95.2		
Shopping	26.2	48.8	34.5	14.162	.001
Non-shopping	73.8	51.2	65.5		

Table 6
Cross tabulations of tourist characteristics and tourist attitude towards interaction (N = 416).

Tourist Characteristics	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)	Pearson Chi-Square	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
First-time	47.6	42.1	10.3	12.371	.002
Repeater	63.4	32.8	3.8		
Alone	47.6	46.3	6.1	14.684	.023
Family/ relatives/ friends	58.3	35.9	5.8		
Organized groups	70.2	24.0	5.8		
Others	28.6	71.4	0.0		
Day tripper	35.2	55.6	9.3	14.099	.001
Overnight visitor	62.2	32.6	5.2		
Sight-seeing	62.4	31.8	5.8	10.208	.006
Non-sightseeing	44.2	50.0	5.8		
Business/ Conference	55.9	37.3	6.8	.265	.876
Non-business/ conference	59.1	35.3	5.6		
Holiday	69.4	26.7	3.9	31.603	.000
Non-holiday	41.6	49.7	8.7		
Visiting relatives/ friends	63.4	36.6	0	2.813	.245
Non-VRF	58.1	35.5	6.4		
Shopping	74.0	23.3	2.7	23.218	.000
Non-shopping	50.0	42.5	7.5		

with family or relatives or friends (58.3 %) and traveling alone (47.6 %). Tourists traveling alone hold a neutral attitude (46.3 %). Besides, the tourists with purpose of sight-seeing mainly hold positive attitude (62.4 %). Most tourists with purpose of holiday hold positive attitude (69.4 %) and shopping tourists (74.0 %).

4.3. Mediated regression results for predicting tourist attitude towards interaction with residents

This study proposes that the urban setting has an effect on tourists' attitude towards interaction, which may be mediated by tourist-resident interaction (causation) or tourist characteristics (selection). In order to investigate the two hypotheses, several ordinal regression models are applied. The results are shown in Table 7. In the first model, only the urban setting is included as independent variable in the model. The reference category is Central. In the second model, tourist-resident interaction (co-presence, focused interaction and quality of interaction) is added to test the hypothesis of causation. In the third model, tourist characteristics (visit status and travel purpose) is added to test the hypothesis of selection. In the last model, both tourist-resident interaction and tourist characteristics are added as independent variables besides urban setting to test the overall mediation model.

Overall, the chi-square in these models indicates that all the models have statistically significant explanatory power. The Nagelkerke R-square indicates large differences in the model explanation of the variability in tourist attitude which varies from 0.019 to 0.398. In model 1, the results suggest that urban setting has an effect on tourist attitude towards interaction but only Sha Tin stands out with a positive parameter of 0.587, indicating that compared to tourists in Central, tourists in Sha Tin are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards interaction. However, there is no significant difference in tourist attitude between Central and Mong Kok.

In model 2, the causation model, starting with urban setting as independent variable, adding tourist-resident interaction, causes a minor change from 0.587 to 0.511 in the coefficient of Sha Tin (the significance drops due to a larger standard error). If this is mediation, it is very limited. Focused interaction and quality are positively associated to tourist attitude, with one unit increase in focused interaction or quality, the log of odds of holding a positive attitude among tourists will increase by 0.406 or 1.282. In model 3, the selection model, adding tourist characteristics causes a major drop in the coefficient of Sha Tin from

Table 7
Ordinal logistic regression models for attitude towards interacting with residents by mainland Chinese tourists in Hong Kong (coefficients reported with standard errors).

Tourist attitude (DV)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Attitude = 0 (negative)	−2.629*** (.251)	−3.396*** (.305)	−1.733*** (.302)	−2.709*** (.349)
Attitude = 1 (neutral)	-.165 (.173)	-.271 (.207)	.911** (.266)	.536 (.295)
Independent variables				
Urban setting				
ST (ref. Central)	.587*(.259)	.511 (.308)	.271 (.274)	.239 (.315)
MK (ref. Central)	.051 (.230)	.047 (.270)	.018 (.243)	-.039 (.276)
Tourist-resident interaction				
Co-presence		.050 (.122)		.453 (.244)
Focused interaction		.406*** (.114)		.654**(.232)
Quality		1.282*** (.127)		.657*(.259)
Tourist characteristics				
Repeater (ref. First-time)			.535*(.221)	.072 (.125)
Holiday (ref. non)			.914*** (.212)	.306**(.117)
Shopping (ref. non)			.796** (.232)	1.207*** (.128)
Model fitting information				
Chi-Square	6.454*	141.640***	53.572***	163.063***
Deviance	2.884	557.731	37.742	540.128
Pseudo R-Square (Nagelkerke)	.019	.354	.148	.398

Note: Significance levels: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

0.587 to 0.271and a loss of significance, suggesting there is a real impact of mediation. Repeat visiting, as opposed to a first-time visiting, is associated with a higher likelihood of holding a positive attitude. Holiday and shopping tourists are more likely to hold a positive attitude.

The comparison of model 2 and 3 shows that the effect of the urban setting on the attitudes of tourists is hardly mediated by the intensity and quality of the interaction but strongly mediated by the self-selection of tourists. Sha Tin does not necessarily provide more and better interactions which could account for a more positive attitude but attracts tourists with a more positive attitude. This does not mean that interaction does not matter. The results of model 4 are in line with the existing literature in showing that both tourist-resident interaction and tourist characteristics contribute to explaining the attitude of tourists. Adding interaction to model 3, as has been done in model 4, affects the parameters of the tourist characteristics. Repeat tourists and holidaymakers to some extent have a more positive attitude because of the intensity and quality of the interaction. Overall, the result therefore show that the interaction is important for shaping tourist attitude but is not mediating the effect of urban setting on tourist attitude towards interaction.

5. Conclusion and discussion

In this article, we test the two hypotheses (i.e. causation and selection) about why urban setting matters in shaping tourist attitude towards interactions with residents. Mainland Chinese tourists' attitudes towards interactions with residents in Hong Kong are investigated across three diverse urban settings, i.e. city centre (Central), suburban setting (Sha Tin) and new urban tourism setting (Mong Kok). We assume that urban setting provides different tourist-resident interactions or attracts different tourists with particular characteristics, which in turn influence tourist attitude towards interactions with residents. As expected, urban settings (Central vs Sha Tin) matter in shaping mainland Chinese tourist attitude. We find that in general more intensive and better interactions are related to more positive attitudes of tourists. We also find that different urban settings attract different tourists with different attitudes towards interactions with residents. However, the findings of this study suggest weak evidence that the difference in attitudes across urban settings is caused by the intensity and quality of tourist-resident interaction and strong evidence that the difference in attitudes across urban settings is due to the self-selection of tourists into these areas.

Previous studies suggest that diverse urban settings offer different interaction opportunities for tourists, in particular with city centre offering most intensive interactions (Kotus et al., 2015), suburban settings offering more interactions with residents participating in tourism industry (Su et al., 2016) and new urban tourism settings offering more and better interactions (Dai, Wang, Xu, Wan, & Wu, 2017). These interactions will determine tourist attitude, higher intensity and quality of interaction lead to a positive attitude (Fan et al., 2017; Pizam et al., 2000). In line with previous studies, this paper supports these conclusions. However, when it comes to tourist attitude towards interactions across diverse urban settings, tourist-resident interaction is not the real factor that explains the difference between urban settings. The real factor is the self-selection of tourists with a positive attitude into the urban areas outside the city centre.

This paper finds that diverse urban settings actually attract tourists with different travel purposes and visit status (first-time tourists vs repeaters). In line with previous studies (e.g. Caldeira & Kastenholz, 2018), first-time tourists mainly visit the city centre, but repeaters travel more widely. The findings show that more repeaters show up in Sha Tin. Tourists traveling for shopping and holiday appear more in Sha Tin, followed by Mong Kok and Central. Sha Tin seems to cater for leisure activities, Mong Kok for experiencing local lives and Central for sight-seeing or business activities. The appeal of suburban setting is consistent with tourists' travel purpose. These tourist characteristics in different urban settings further determine attitude formation. Previous studies suggest that repeaters are more positive towards interactions with residents than first-time tourists (e.g. Jang & Feng, 2007), a finding supported by this study.

The theoretical implication of this study is that the selection effect stands out through a comparative approach on three different urban settings. Many previous studies were based on one case study or one place. These studies confirmed the role of places on the interactions (e.g. Bock, 2015; Kotus et al., 2015; Su, Spierings, & Hooimeijer, 2020), however, the reality is that the places attract different types of tourists. If the attitude towards interactions is attributed to a certain place, they would assume that it is causation effect because the selection effect cannot stand out. This comparison study contributes to tourism literature by distinguishing selection effect or causation effect of urban settings on tourist attitude.

These findings are pertinent to strategies of managed growth of tourism in cities. Many cities make dispersal strategies to spread tourists into various urban areas by branding these urban areas offering different interaction experiences, which could further change tourist attitudes or behaviors positively. However, this study suggests that a city with different urban settings like Hong Kong actually attract different types of tourists rather than facilitating different interaction experiences. Basically, suburban areas beyond the city centre provide better interactions. However, creating sub-centres for tourists will be more effective if these are developed as specific product-market combinations. As such, selection is a helpful strategy for growth of tourists with positive attitudes. Repeat tourists and holidaymakers hold more positive attitudes towards interacting with local residents and could therefore be welcomed in the sub-centres. For Hong Kong in particular, offering alternatives for the city centre to shopping-tourists, might be an effective strategy to relieve the pressure on the city centre and to provide better experiences to the tourists. It would also be helpful to create more intensive and favourable interactions between tourists and residents in several sub-centres, in order to manage tourist flows and counterbalancing overcrowding in the city centre.

However, there are still some limitations in this study. In the present study, the theoretical model with two competing hypotheses was proposed based on early studies drawing on social contact theory (Amir, 1969; Cook, 1962). However, urban setting matters in shaping tourist attitude could be explained by other mediators, which should be further explored, for example, prior travel experiences in the destination and tourists' inner traits or personalities. Moreover, currently tourist characteristics and tourist-resident interaction were regarded as two independent variables. The possible relationship between the two variables will be investigated in the next step. Regarding urban settings, three types of urban settings were compared in this study, which resonated the two main dispersal policies of urban destinations to decentralize tourist flows to other areas beyond the city centre. Future studies could select other or more types of urban settings to investigate tourist attitudes, tourist-resident interaction and tourist characteristics for a richer understanding of the importance of geographical/spatial contexts for destination marketing and management.

Credit author statement

Xing Su: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing – original draft, **Pieter Hooimeijer:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Writing – review & editing, **Bas Spierings:** Conceptualization, Supervision.

Declaration of competing interest

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