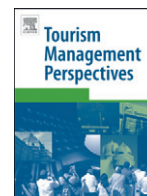




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China hotel research: A systematic review of the English language academic literature

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of a systematic review performed on 115 academic papers published over a 26-year period from 1984 to 2009 and provides a content analysis of research themes and trends in China hotel research. The findings reveal that *hotel management and performance* is the theme most frequently examined by researchers, followed by *hotel development strategies*, and *hotel business environment analysis*. The analysis also indicates shifts in research methods, trends of publication, journal outlets and authorship information.

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1. Introduction

While commercial forms of Chinese hospitality have existed since ancient times, the contemporary form of China's hotel industry has been shaped by two main timeframes. The first is 1949, when the establishment of the People's Republic and the advent of communist rule introduced an insular society focused on internal political struggle, resulting in the country's international isolation. This isolation was most notably evidenced through lack of participation in the transnational travel environment, and was an era characterised by suppressed tourism and limited hotel development (Pine & Qi, 2003, Chapter 13). The second is 1978, which saw the initiation of a programme of ongoing "Open Door" economic and social reforms. These reforms have progressively engaged China with the world, inviting foreign direct investment (FDI) and tourists, since facilitating a rapid expansion of the country's tourism industry (Guangrui, 2003, Chapter 2; Zhang, Pine, & Lam, 2005).

China's hotel industry development has been within the context of a transition from a planned economy to a socialist market economy. During the transition, China endeavours to integrate the challenges of globalisation with national culture and values (Huang, 2008). The hotel trade was among the first industries to act on the opportunities offered by China's opening to FDI. Consequently, foreign multinational hospitality firms have benefitted from first mover status as the pioneers of

inbound FDI in the early 1980s (Pine & Qi, 2003, Chapter 13). The Chinese hotel industry has grown rapidly since the first international hotel joint venture in 1982 (Stross, 1990). In 2008, 18 of the largest hotel companies in the world were headquartered in China, half of which were in Hong Kong and half in the Mainland (Gale, 2009).

Research studies on China's fast developing hotel industry have increased in recent years, tracking the key role that the hotel industry has played in the development of China's tourism industry. As China's hotel industry continues to grow, it is important to develop an understanding of how the academic research in this area evolves. The purpose of this paper is to systematically review and analyse the English language academic literature related to hotel research in China.

A modest body of review literature has been developed chronicling various streams of tourism and hospitality research issues in relation to China. This review literature is wide-ranging and diverse in coverage of disciplines, geography, and topics, but is united in the attempt to give us a big picture and synthesis of the relevant research topics/fields to date. It also reflects the trend that in the international academic community China attracts increasing attention from researchers (Fetscherin, Voss, & Gugler, 2010). Two key studies that adopt research synthesis approaches to China tourism and hospitality are particularly relevant to the present study.

The first study, by Kong and Cheung (2009), reviewed 66 papers drawn from three online academic databases on hotel development in China published in refereed English language academic journals between 1984 and 2007. "China hotel" was used as the keywords to search the databases. Four research themes were identified from this review study. They were (1) strategy and development, (2) marketing, (3) service quality, and (4) human resource management. The authors also provided a summary list of the 66 publications, albeit with limited analysis and discussion. This review study found that research on China's hotel

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industry has grown rapidly with the fast development of China's hotel industry; the predominant theme emerging from the review was *strategy and development*, accounting for 43% of the papers reviewed.

The second study was conducted by Tsang and Hsu (2011). The study examined 119 articles in relation to China tourism and hospitality published in the 30 years between 1978 and 2008 in six leading English language academic journals: *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management*, and *Journal of Travel Research*. A diverse nature of the research themes was found in this study. Furthermore, it was also noted that the pace of publications generated from Asian universities overtook that from Western institutions. Other trends identified in this study include increasing multi-author collaboration and use of more sophisticated statistical methods.

The aggregate knowledge from the China research synthesis studies above demonstrates the broad scope that has been adopted by researchers examining the research themes in the Chinese hotel industry. The studies also provide a variety of approaches to synthesis in the context of China hospitality research, as analysed in the *Method* section below. Table 1 summarises the two key China hospitality review studies.

We differentiate our present study in a number of aspects, as described in detail in the following *Method* section. Among the key studies cited above, only that of Kong and Cheung (2009) directly focuses on the hotel sector. By comparison, the present study contains papers from wider sources. Starting from papers identified by Kong and Cheung (2009), we also searched *Hospitality and Tourism Complete* and *Science Direct* for more relevant research publication. The total number of papers included in our study was 115, almost twice the number of the papers collected in the Kong and Cheung (2009) study. Wider coverage allows for a more comprehensive understanding of research focus. Additionally, the present study addresses how research focus on the hotel sector has changed over time.

2. Method

Synthesis approaches, commonly found with growing bodies of knowledge, have become a characteristic feature of the tourism and hospitality literature. Weed (2006) identified three typical synthesis approaches: systematic review, meta-analysis, and meta-interpretation. A systematic review consists of a comprehensive search for relevant studies on a specific topic, followed by appraisal and synthesis of those studies according to a predetermined method. Meta-analysis is an appraisal of studies where findings among the studies are directly comparable with each other. Meta-analysis may also apply quantitative methods that compensate for methodological variations among the studies in order to render the findings metrically equivalent. Meta-interpretation takes an interpretivist approach to the synthesis of multiple studies on a topic that have used disparate methods, typically using qualitative techniques for analysis (Weed, 2006). Table 2 summarises the features of each approach:

The intention of review studies is to present a state-of-the-art overview of the research in a given field at a point in time; and identifying themes of continuity and change is commonly reflected in such type of research work (Hall & Page, 2009). It is also common to see review papers include words like “review”, “meta-review”, and “progress” in their titles. Such variability of interpretation is to be expected among methods for which a single, definitive framework is yet to be determined. Shelby and Vaske (2008) provide a useful analysis of the methodological definitional dilemmas in review studies, identifying the main areas of confusion as (1) total methodology vs. an analysis technique, (2) the use of effect sizes, (3) the unit of analysis, and (4) meta-analysis vs. comparative analysis.

As the body of research on China hospitality and tourism has grown, so has interest in synthesising such research. Weed (2006) nominated meta-analysis as the most widespread synthesis method

Table 1
Summary of two key China hospitality review studies.

Study	Review period	Number of articles	Source/s of articles	Topic of review	Data themes	Key findings
Kong and Cheung (2009) Hotel development in China: a review of the English language literature	1984–2007	66	3 academic online databases	Hotel development in China	(1) Strategy and development, (2) marketing, (3) service quality, and (4) human resource management	Research on China's hotel industry has grown rapidly with the rise of China's hotel industry, and that the predominant theme emerging was strategy and development, accounting for 43% of the papers reviewed
Tsang and Hsu (2011) Thirty years of research on tourism and hospitality management in China: a review and analysis of journal publications	1978–2008	119	6 tourism & hospitality journals	Profile content, scholars, and institutions of China tourism & hospitality research, identify trends	(1) Tourism development (2) Consumer behaviour (3) Hotel development (4) Education and training (5) Business management (6) Ecotourism (7) Service quality (8) Tourism policy (9) Destination image (10) Hotel rating system (11) Human resources (12) Website (13) Others	Noted the diverse nature of the research themes; the pace of publications generated from Asian universities overtook the pace from Western institutions; found trends of increasing multi-author collaboration, as well as use of statistical methods that went beyond description

Table 2

Features of approaches to research synthesis.
Source: Weed (2006).

Systematic review	Meta-analysis	Meta-interpretation
Systematic literature search	Quantitative statistical procedure	Qualitative method
Strict exclusion criteria	Aggregate data	Interprets interpretations
Aims for comprehensive sampling	Aims for comprehensive sampling	Iterative approach to sampling and exclusions

in tourism research; however the same cannot be observed in the synthesis research on China tourism and hospitality. Table 3 shows extant China tourism and hospitality literature synthesis studies, all of which use systematic review via content analysis to produce diverse findings. Common content analysis approaches found in review studies include attempts at categorising research themes, settings, and methods. Electronic databases are the preferred sources for data, which are mostly searched by keywords. Some authors place the bodies of literature within their political, economic, geographical, social and cultural contexts. There are also attempts to identify contested perspectives and modes of thought, and to forecast and recommend the directions for future research.

The present study adopted the systematic review approach, characterised by a comprehensive search for relevant studies on China hotel research, which were then evaluated and synthesised according to the content analysis method. The systematic review approach provides a rigorous and transparent compilation that serves to map an area containing dispersed and diverse knowledge (Weed, 2006).

The research for the present study was conducted in two stages. Data were collected in the first stage in March 2010. One hundred fifteen papers were collected through an initial reference list available from Kong and Cheung (2009) and further searching the *Hospitality and Tourism Complete* and the *Science Direct* databases using the keywords “China” and “hotel”. *Hospitality and Tourism Complete* collects full text research articles, abstracts and industry news relating to all areas of hospitality and tourism after 1965 and covers a large range of major hospitality and tourism research journals. *Science Direct* is recognised as a major database for scientific research covering disciplines of both social and physical sciences. We believe the combination of using the two databases would provide a most cost-effective way to locate English language academic literature in relation to China hotel research. The pool of 115 papers selected met the criteria

Table 3

Extant China tourism and hospitality literature synthesis studies.

Literature synthesis study	Method
Cai, Li, and Knutson (2007) Research on China outbound market: a meta-review	Content analysis of 30 studies categorised by 3 themes
Huang and Hsu (2008) Recent tourism and hospitality research in China	Content analysis of 500 studies categorised by 32 themes
Keating and Kriz (2008) Outbound tourism from China: literature review and research agenda	Content analysis of 22 studies categorised by 6 themes
Kong and Cheung (2009) Hotel development in China: a review of the English language literature	Content analysis of 66 studies categorised by 4 themes
Andreu, Claver, and Quer (2010) Tourism in China: a review of research in leading journals	Content analysis of 95 studies categorised by 6 themes
Yang and Cheung (2010) A review of English literature on ecotourism research in China	Content analysis of 19 studies categorised by 5 themes
Tsang and Hsu (2011) Thirty years of research on tourism and hospitality management in China: a review and analysis of journal publications	Content analysis of 119 studies categorised by 13 themes

of English language refereed academic journal papers. In-press papers, book chapters and book reviews were excluded.

In the second stage, the collected papers were categorised by key information such as author/s, paper title, keywords, publication year and journal title. A content analysis was conducted to identify research themes and trends. Main findings include research themes, research methods, trends of publication, journal outlets, and authorship information. Simple cross-tabulation was adopted to identify the trends of research development. Absolute counting was used to determine research productivity of individuals and institutions as suggested by prior studies (e.g., Law & Cheung, 2008). If more than one author appeared in one paper, each co-author was given the same credit as a sole author. Although some papers adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods, papers were coded as following either a predominately qualitative or a quantitative approach (Huang & Hsu, 2008). The same principle was also applied to research themes. Each paper was classified into one main theme category even though the paper may be related to a different theme to a lesser extent.

3. Findings

The following sections detail and analyse the findings of the present study, which are placed into the five categories of research themes, research methods, journal outlets, trends of publication, and authorship information.

3.1. Research themes

Three major research themes were found: hotel management and performance, hotel development strategies, and hotel business environment analyses.

3.1.1. Hotel management and performance

Hotel management and performance was one of the most frequent themes in the papers. 92 papers investigated management and performance issues. Among them, human resource management issues were studied by the greatest number of papers, which accounted for 42.39% of all papers in this category (Table 4). *human resource* was followed by *hotel operations and performance*, representing 27.17% of the papers. *Marketing* (23.91%) had received substantial research attention as well. Six papers discussed issues regarding *finance* (6.52%).

3.1.1.1. Human resource management (HRM). In 1975 there was not a single course offered in hospitality and tourism at any Chinese higher education institution (Zhao, 1991). With the rapid growth of the tourism and hospitality industry, the shortage of qualified staff became a severe problem. Cullen (1988) and Zhao (1991) looked into this problem and analysed the development of Chinese hospitality education and the existing problems. Huyton and Ingold (1999) evaluated the effectiveness of current hospitality education among hotel employees and found that there was still a great need for better and effective hospitality education.

Employee behaviour was a major researching area in human resource management (e.g., Kong & Baum, 2006; Magnini & Ford, 2004; Zhang, Cai, & Liu, 2002). This is probably due to the importance of employees in the successful management of a hotel. For studies under

Table 4

Number of papers under different themes.

Theme	Number of papers	Percentage%
Human resource management (HRM)	39	42.39
Hotel operation and performance	25	27.17
Marketing	22	23.91
Finance	6	6.52
Total	92	100

this theme, the effectiveness of an employee training programme was evaluated (Zhang et al., 2002) and recommendations for a joint-forced training programme were raised by Yam (1987) to improve the level of on-job training. Kong and Baum (2006) explored skills and career moves of front office staff, concluding that professional development and further training was necessary in order to improve the skills of staff. Magnini and Ford (2004) suggested that adjustments were necessary for service failure recovery training programmes for Western-based hotel corporations to gain customer satisfaction and loyalty.

High turnover rate is common in the hospitality industry (Tian & Pu, 2008). Employee satisfaction is believed to be an important factor to maintain employee loyalty. Tian and Pu (2008) examined factors influencing employee satisfaction, while Leung, Smith, Wang, and Sun (1996) and Wu and Wang (2008) explored the relationship between job satisfaction and organisational justice.

Besides satisfaction, employee's attitude towards a job could also be an important factor influencing their performance. A comparison study of U.S. and Chinese employees by Fisher and Yuan (1998) found that good wages were the most important motivation, followed by good working conditions and personal loyalty from the boss and organisation. Huyton and Sutton (1996) analysed employee job perceptions and the disparity between perception and satisfaction. Leung, Wang, and Smith (2001) discussed the relationship between perception of job attitudes and organisational justice of local employee in joint venture hotels. A study on employees' behavioural intentions of adopting new information technologies in hotels was conducted by Lam, Cho, and Qu (2007), suggesting that support and motivation should be provided to employees to adopt new information technologies in hotels. Burke, Koyuncu, Wang, and Fiksenbaum (2009) examined potential antecedents and consequences of work engagement in hotel managers. Li, Tse, and Xie (2007) investigated general managers' demographic characteristics and career paths. Employee empowerment is not widely applied in China, but positive attitude towards high-level employees especially in some international hotels was evident in some studies (e.g., Dewald & Sutton, 2000; Littrell, 2007).

Some human resource challenges facing China's hotel and tourism industry were identified (Gu, Kavanaugh, Yu, & Torres, 2006; Zhang & Lam, 2004; Zhang & Wu, 2004). Chan (1993) discussed distinct managerial roles of hotel pre-opening managing teams in China; Peng, Dai, and Yue (2006) examined a competency model for middle and senior hotel managers to better understand and communicate with guests; Sun, Aryee, and Law (2007) revealed high-performance human resource practices in relation to the organisational performance indicators of turnover and productivity, demonstrating the generalisability of the organisational performance effects of high-performance human resource practices in the service sector. Yan, Child, and Chong (2007) addressed the development requirements in terms of the application of firm-specific assets and human resource management needed for the implementation of vertical integration decisions in an international firm. By examining customer and employee perceptions of green hotels, Heung, Fei, and Hu (2006) suggested that government and industry should cooperate to promote the green culture to the public.

The boom of the tourism industry in China and the influence of globalisation created a challenge for hotels, especially international hotels to manage the cultural impact on tourism. Research on how to integrate corporate culture into national culture showed the necessity to manage cultural conflict for international companies (Mwaura, Sutton, & Roberts, 1998; Pang, Roberts, & Sutton, 1998). A case study of the New Chinese Hotel project in China showed the impact of cross cultural management on international construction in China (Pheng & Leong, 2000). Otis (2008) focused on management in terms of combining foreign organisational template and service protocols with local regional and ethnic identities to discipline the workforce. Cai and Ninemeier (1993) revealed cultural conflict on food service styles and how Chinese hoteliers cope with the situation. Another cultural conflict management study conducted by Smith, Wang, and Leung

(1997) showed large differences between Chinese and non-Chinese operators in daily management routines. Hu, Cai, and Kavanaugh (2001) examined the impact of cultural differences on employee behaviours in China and UK hotels. Littrell (2002) compared desirable and actual leadership traits exhibited by managers and supervisors and found that leadership traits outside task and person orientation appear to be highly culture-specific.

Since the implementation of open-door and reform policy, the hotel sector has grown enormously in China. However, due to the lack of qualified staff and management expertise, hotels with foreign investment opted to be managed by foreigners or jointly managed by both Chinese and foreign managers. Expatriates in China face challenges with a different culture. Five papers examined different aspects of expatriate management, including expatriate job and life satisfaction (Li, 1996), factors that might influence the level of cultural shock (Kaye & Taylor, 1997), selection criteria and specific skills of expatriate hotel managers (Feng & Pearson, 1999), value of cross cultural training for expatriate managers (Dewald & Self, 2008), and perceptions of six management difficulty factors by the expatriate hotel professionals (Yu & Huat, 1995).

3.1.1.2. Hotel operation and performance. The strong growth in China hotels began to slow down from 1995, and occupancy rates dropped below 60% (Zhang et al., 2005). Problems associated with the fast growth included lack of coordination in hotel administration owing to the complicated bureaucratic and financial structure (Zhao, 1989), inexperienced workforce (Zhao, 1991), and inadequate and unreliable information for marketing and planning (Liu & Liu, 1993). Hotel managers and operators started to pay more attention to the administration and operation of hotels, and adopted a more strategic management style to achieve better hotel performance.

In the early stage, state-ownership was dominant in China's hotel sector. With increasing international investment, a diversified ownership structure emerged. At the same time, state-owned hotel firms faced unprecedented challenges. Tang, Xi, Chen, and Wang (2006) investigated issues of ownership, corporate governance, and management in the state-owned hotels and concluded that further reforms were needed. Zhi, Wang, and Turban (1997) noted the deficiency in the management support systems of state-owned hotel enterprises. Qu, Ennew, and Sinclair (2005) examined determinants of market orientation (government regulation, ownership structure, and organisational factors) for the hotel sector. Outsourcing strategy as a way to reduce operating costs is a commonly adopted strategy in the hotel industry. Lam and Han (2005) analysed factors influencing the adoption of outsourcing and indicated that the outsourcing market was still immature in China.

Entry in 2001 into the World Trade Organization (WTO) marked a significant event for China. However, China's membership in WTO also meant less government control in the hotel industry and vulnerability of local industry to greater competition from foreign companies (Pine, 2002). The booming domestic demand, coupled with fierce competition from international markets, caused China hotels to emphasise strategy and performance. Pine and Phillips (2005) compared hotel performances in variation with ownership, size and star grade and indicated that better performance occurred in hotels either with a foreign ownership, bigger or with a higher star grade. Jogaratnam and Tse (2004, 2006) investigated the link between entrepreneurial organisation structure and hotel performance, and found that entrepreneurial strategic posture was positively associated with performance, while organic structures were negatively associated with performance. Organic structures were identified as those that allow less strict task differentiation, less clear hierarchy, and a relatively higher degree of autonomy.

In terms of strategic management, Kivela, Leung, and Chu (2005) evaluated factors which contributed to successful and equitable negotiations and their impacts on hotel businesses. Wong, Luk, and Li (2005) examined ownership–control relationships among China's international joint-venture hotels; they found that differences existed between

Sino–Asia joint-ventures and Sino–Western joint-ventures. Li, Tse, and Gu (2006) revealed significant positive correlations between entrepreneurial orientation and the key dimensions of strategic planning. Ma (2006) advised the application of balanced scorecard into strategic hotel management. Huang, Chu, and Wang (2007) investigated the influence of the balanced scorecard on the hospitality industry in China. Perceptions of stakeholders towards budget hotel segment critical success factors and the importance of such factors were examined by Hua, Chan, and Mao (2009).

Other management and performance issues covered a broad range. Researchers focused on the following areas: hotel rating system (Liu & Liu, 1993; Yu, 1992a), hotel productivity efficiency (Tsai, 2009; Zhou, Huang, & Hsu, 2008), environmental issues (Gu, Ryan, & Chon, 2009), health and safety issues (Dombey, 2004; Feng et al., 2004; Lee & Warner, 2006; Song et al., 2005) and information technology (IT) in hotel management (Lu & Law, 2006; Pine & Yu, 2001). For example, two papers examined the effects of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) on the tourism industry (Dombey, 2004) and its impact on human resources in the service sector (Lee & Warner, 2006). Feng et al. (2004) revealed carbonyl compound levels in hotel ballrooms in China and Song et al. (2005) revealed radon levels in hot spring hotels which may pose health risks for employees. Gu et al. (2009) brought forward managerial responsibility for environment protection for Chinese hotels. Given the wide use of Internet and IT in hotels, Lu and Law (2006) suggested that hotels should be prepared to cope with any IT failure. Pine and Yu (2001) studied the content and effectiveness of cross-training programmes as a tool for hotel technology transfer.

3.1.1.3. Marketing. In the field of marketing, Siu and Fung (1998) evaluated the performance of traditional print advertisement and gave some advice for enhancement. Cai, Zhang, Pearson, and Bai (2000) identified two critical problems in China hotels: pricing and marketing. Chuang (2000) explored marketing strategies of luxurious service apartments and Zhang, Cai, and Kavanaugh (2008) gave advice on branding experience for economy hotels (theme and activities, physical environment, and social interactions).

Online marketing as a new and effective approach drew considerable attention from researchers. Aspects such as impacts of online user reviews (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009), performance of the new distribution channel-websites (Hsu, Zhu, & Agrusa, 2004; Hui, Law, & Ye, 2009; Law & Liang, 2005), and impact of website quality (Bai, Law, & Wen, 2008) were also examined under this theme.

Customer satisfaction and service quality are important concepts to hotel practitioners as they are believed to be able to create competitive advantages and customer loyalty (Iacobucci, Ostrom, & Grayson, 1995). Han, Kwornik, and Wang's (2008) paper found that customer satisfaction, commitment, service fairness, service quality, trust, and commercial friendship are key loyalty determinants and they also revealed that employee-delivered service quality is a key to hotel guest satisfaction. Ho and Lo (1987) described existing service problems in China's hospitality industry. Three papers focused on service quality gaps between tourist perception and expectation (Qu & Tsang, 1998; Wang, Wang, & Zhao, 2007) and between tourists and hotel managers (Tsang & Qu, 2000). Researchers also revealed factors influencing customer satisfaction which include hotels' star rating (Ryan & Gu, 2007), personal service quality (Wang & Pearson, 2002), client information needs and online security for online users (Kim, Ma, & Kim, 2006), and external environment, reputation and bedroom cleanliness (Gu & Ryan, 2008).

In addition to the above topics discovered, researchers also examined customer perception (Wang, Vela, & Tyler, 2008; Zhou, Murray, & Zhang, 2001), service quality evaluation (Zhen & Zhu, 2006) and employee attitudes towards customers (Huyton & Ingold, 1997). Wang et al. (2008) disclosed that culture had a significant impact on customer perception and expectation. Country-of-origin stereotypes were shown to have an impact on Chinese customers' perceptions

of hotel chains' service (Zhou et al., 2001). Zhen and Zhu (2006) examined evaluation of service quality based on guest reviews available from third party hotel booking websites. Huyton and Ingold (1997) revealed attitudes of hotel workers towards visitors from different countries, with the results suggesting that hotel staff dislikes Japanese, local Chinese, and South East Asian, but welcome Westerners and other (compatriot) Chinese.

3.1.1.4. Finance. Six papers focused on various aspects of macro level financial management of the hotel industry. Issues under research in this sub-category included financial investment, risk analysis, financial performance and profitability. Hines (1984) and Tisdell and Wen (1991a) investigated the formation of investment for hotels. Tisdell and Wen (1991b) further analysed risks of dependence on foreign exchange earnings in developing tourism, and provided suggestions to improve international competitiveness for hotels. Gu (2003) discussed revenue efficiency and profitability in the Chinese lodging industry. Chen (2007) investigated factors that may affect hotel stock returns and noted that Chinese hotel stock returns were more sensitive to general macro economic variables. Chan and Wong (2007) provided informative details on the existing financial performance of the hotel industry and suggested a more comprehensive accounting framework to cover new business revenue/cost drivers.

3.1.2. Hotel development strategies

A total of 16 papers were found within the category of hotel development strategies. Most studies dealt with topics on hotel structures (Yu, 1998), some together with business expansion strategies (e.g., Lee, 2002). With the influence of globalisation and economic development, hotel managers tend to search for new approaches to expand their business. Brand affiliation (Cai, 2004), franchising (Heung, Zhang, & Jiang, 2008; Pine, Zhang, & Qi, 2000; Xiao, O'Neill, & Wang, 2008), and joint-venture (Kivela & Leung, 2005) were the most popular ways of hotel business expansion in China. Pine and Qi (2004) identified and discussed barriers in hotel chain development. Tibbitts (2003) analysed current expansion of the international chains in terms of key implications, brand building, challenges and opportunities, and important contributions and points of differentiation between the international chains and domestic hotels. Wu, Costa, and Teare (1998) examined the relationship between environmental scanning activities and business expansion strategies. Spatial distribution of hotels in China was discussed in Begin's (2000) and Shu and Dai's (2006) studies. Yu (1992b) noted the roles of various Chinese government agencies and foreign investors in the development of China hotels. Challenges facing other aspects of hotel development have been discussed as well. Cook (1989) analysed problems in the development of the hospitality industry and gave advice to foreign developers to collaborate in China. Mak (2008) revealed causes of problems facing state-owned hotels and future development. Chan and Yeung (2009) suggested that contingency planning is important for hotels in cases of crisis and changes.

3.1.3. Hotel business environment analyses

Business environment issues gained some attention as well. Seven papers were found in this category. Two papers (Wu, Zhu, & Xu, 2000; Zhang, Yan, & Ye, 2008) discussed the impacts of government policy changes on the development of the hotel sector in China. Economic conditions and Chinese business culture were also identified as important environmental factors for international hotel chains to enter the China market. Pine (2002), Yu and Gu (2005) analysed the hotel business environment and revealed both challenges and threats for hotel development in China. Qu and Ennew (2008) explored the external influence of market environment on the development of market orientation. Other less directly-related issues were also addressed by researchers, for instance, Jackson (2006) suggested to develop regional tourism clusters including hotels in order to foster competitive advantage in regional China; Chan et al. (2008) evaluated the performance of solar control

film in hotels and indicated that with more public awareness of sustainable development, environmental-friendly services will be more welcomed in hotels.

3.2. Research methods

The purpose of analysing research methods is to understand the methodological applications for academic studies in the examined research field. For the 115 papers selected in this study, 82 of them used quantitative methods to gather primary data. Additionally, 33 papers adopted qualitative methods (Table 5). Among papers with qualitative methods, in-depth interview was used in 8 papers which made it more popular than other methods in this category. For quantitative papers, questionnaire surveys were dominant (43 papers) and archival data (26 papers) represented the second most frequent quantitative method arrangement in all the papers.

In terms of data analysis methods, 51 papers (44.35%) used descriptive discussion, 8 papers (6.96%) adopted content analysis, and 56 papers (48.70%) used statistical analyses. Table 6 indicates specific statistical techniques used in quantitative papers. Commonly adopted statistical methods/techniques in all the 115 papers included correlation test, regressions, ANOVA, *T*-test and factor analysis. A small number of papers used sophisticated statistical methods/techniques such as structural equation modelling (SEM). Some simple methods, such as frequencies, cross-tabs, chi-squares, and means were grouped under one category of basic techniques compared with other statistical techniques.

In relation to the research methods, paper types were also examined which are shown in Table 7. Empirical papers accounted for 71.3% of all the papers, conceptual papers made up of 21.73% and there were also eight case studies which comprised 6.95%. Although the number of empirical papers far outweighs that of the other two types, it is not suggested that empirical papers are better than conceptual papers and case studies. All three types of papers can address academic problems from different aspects if they are effectively designed and used.

3.3. Trends of publication

The 115 papers collected in the present study were published from 1984 to 2009. Fig. 1 shows a general upward trend of number of papers published during the 26-year period. Given the fact that earlier papers may not be available online, it still makes sense that hotel development in China has attracted increasing research attention from academics, especially after the year of 1997. In general, three reasons may have

Table 5
Types of research methods.

Type of research design (data collection) ^a	Number	Percentage%
Qualitative		
Focus group interviews	3	2.61
In-depth interviews	8	6.96
Semi-structured interviews	2	1.74
Observation	3	2.61
Others	17	14.78
Subtotal	33	28.70
Quantitative		
Mail survey	9	7.83
Personal survey(questionnaire)	43	37.39
Telephone survey	1	0.87
Field experiment	3	2.60
Archival data	26	22.61
Subtotal	82	71.30
Total	115	100.00

^a Some papers used more than one method for data collection (i.e., mail, personal, focus group), and were categorised according to the main design used. Personal survey also includes self-administered questionnaires.

Table 6
Data analysis techniques.

Statistical techniques ^a	Number of papers	Percentage%
Basic techniques	23	17.56
Correlation text	17	12.98
Regression analysis	16	12.21
Analysis of variance(ANOVA)	16	12.21
Factor analysis	14	10.69
<i>T</i> -test	11	8.40
Structural equation modelling (SEM)	6	4.58
Principal component analysis (PCA)	5	3.82
Multidimensional scaling	4	3.05
Cluster analysis	3	2.29
Data envelopment analysis (DEA)	2	1.53
Analysis of covariance(ANCOVA)	2	1.53
Discriminant analysis	2	1.53
Canonical correlation	1	0.76
Multivariate analysis of variance(MANOVA)	1	0.76
Log-linear analysis	1	0.76
Artificial neural network (ANN)	1	0.76
Correspondence analysis	1	0.76
Others	5	3.82
Total	131	100.00

^a Note: 1. Some articles used more than one statistical technique. For papers using both descriptive analysis and statistic techniques, only statistic techniques were counted. 2. Frequencies, cross-tabs, chi-squares, and means were grouped under the category of Basic techniques.

attributed to the continual growing publications. Firstly, China's economy continues growing and the hotel sector plays an important part in the national economy. The huge market in China attracts increasing foreign investment and cooperation between international firms and domestic firms has been strengthened. Secondly, the hospitality industry in China has also undergone gradual changes. Technological developments offer new revenues for hotel development. The unique Chinese culture also brings challenges for hotel operators. Thirdly, there is an increasing demand for tourism education and training. Education has been highly emphasised by the increasing amount of investment at different levels (Law & Cheung, 2008). Tourism has integrated into degree offering programmes in most universities. As a result, more research publications emerged to provide better understanding of the fast growing industry.

The number of publications appeared to be quite small during the period from 1984 to 1996. It is not difficult to understand if we take into account the economic development situation in China at this early stage. Before 1978, hotels in China were few in number and poor in quality. From 1978 to 1994, foreign investment was introduced and the industry experienced an unprecedented growth. In 1995 and 1996 the heated growth slowed down and the average hotel occupancy rate dropped below 60% (Zhang et al., 2005). In terms of management, until late 2001, overseas involvement in China's hotel industry, while encouraged and even supported by the state politically and financially, was still under government control (Zhang et al., 2005). In state-owned hotels, managers are often bureaucrats rather than business people. In such a historical context, it was not easy for scholars to collect research data for any purpose.

Research on China hotels flourished in the period between 2004 and 2009, during which the number of publications nearly doubled that of all previous ones. Events like the 1997 Asian economic crisis, the 1998 snow storm in China, the 9/11 terrorist attack in the U.S.

Table 7
Paper types.

Paper type	Number of papers	Percentage (%)
Empirical papers	82	71.30
Conceptual papers	25	21.73
Case studies	8	6.95
Total	115	100.00

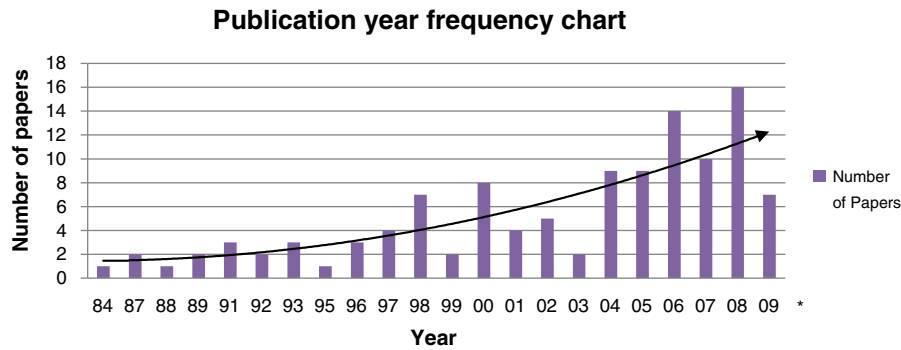


Fig. 1. Publication year frequency chart (1984–2009). *Note: Some 2009 papers were not available in the databases at the time of paper collection, resulting in the drop in paper numbers in 2009.

in 2001 and SARS in Asia in 2003, all influenced the hospitality industry. From 2001, China's entry into the World Trade Organization moderated government control over hotel ownership. International economic cooperation, new technology development and changing lifestyle accelerated China hotel development. Studies focusing on new trends and business environment appeared more frequently in this period.

3.4. Authorship information

The 115 papers contained 196 author names, with 37 author names appearing more than once. Table 9 provides an overview of author contributions from different places in the world. The location of the author's institution was counted rather than the nationality of the author. Hong Kong and Taiwan were counted separately from Mainland China, as they have different research systems (Law & Cheung, 2008). It is obvious that authors were affiliated with institutions in a broad geographic spectrum.

It is not surprising to find that more than half (55.15%) of all the authors were from mainland China and Hong Kong. USA ranked the third with 43 authors. This suggested that scholars in both China and the USA paid great attention to China's hospitality industry.

3.5. Journal outlets

The study found that the papers were published in 45 different journals, including eight of the top ten hospitality journals rated by

McKercher, Law, and Lam (2006): *Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *FIU Hospitality Review*, *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, and *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*. Seventeen (37.8%) non-tourism journals, for example, *American Behavioral Scientist*, *International Journal of Project Management*, *Business Horizons*, were found to contribute one paper each to the paper pool. The reason for this phenomenon might be, as suggested by Sheldon (1991), that many authors tended to publish their hospitality research in journals related to their individual fields.

As shown in Table 8, most papers were found to be published in *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *Journal of China Tourism Research* (China Tourism Research before 2008), *Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly* and *Tourism Management*.

Table 10 shows the institutions with which authors were affiliated when their papers were published. Clearly, two institutions in mainland China and three in Hong Kong were listed as the top five on the list. Three U.S. institutions were listed among the topic ten.

It is also apparent that more than half of the authors were one-time authors. This phenomenon could be attributed to the reason that a substantial number of authors were likely to be graduate students or short contract lecturers affiliated with the institutions at the time of publication; they might have stopped publishing or been transferred to other research fields (Jogaratham, McCleary, Mena, & Yoo, 2005; Law & Cheung, 2008).

Table 8
Distribution of papers by journal.

Rank	Journal name	Number of papers
1	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	17
2	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	16
3	<i>Journal of China Tourism Research (China Tourism Research before 2008)</i>	11
4	<i>Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly</i>	9
5	<i>Tourism Management</i>	6
6	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	4
7	<i>Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism</i>	4
8	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i>	3
9	<i>FIU Hospitality Review</i>	3
10	<i>International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration</i>	2
11	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing</i>	2
12	<i>Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism</i>	2
13	<i>Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing</i>	2
14	<i>Journal of Vacation Marketing</i>	2
15	<i>Service Industries Journal</i>	2
n/a	<i>Other journals publishing one paper each</i>	30
	Total	115

Table 9
Geographic location of authors.

Rank	Location	Number of authors ^a
1	Mainland China	58
2	Hong Kong	49
3	USA	43
4	UK	17
5	Canada	6
6	Australia	5
7	Singapore	4
8	Taiwan	4
9	Macau	2
10	NZ	2
11	Portugal	1
12	Spain	1
13	Turkey	1
14	Croatia	1
	Total number of authors	194

^a Note: Location information of two authors was unavailable.

Table 10
Contributions by authors at institutions.

Rank	Institutions	Number of authors	One-time authors	Authors producing multiple papers
1	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	31	21	10
2	Chinese Academy of Sciences	11	11	0
3	City University of Hong Kong	8	6	2
4	Chinese University of Hong Kong	7	6	1
5	Sun Yat-Sen University	7	6	1
6	Purdue University	6	4	2
7	Beijing International Studies University	4	3	1
8	Hunan University	4	4	0
9	Oklahoma State University	4	3	1
10	California State Polytechnic University	3	2	1
11	National University of Singapore	3	3	0
12	Peking University	3	3	0
13	University of Central Lancashire	3	2	1
14	University of Hawaii	3	3	0
15	Bond University	2	2	0
16	Chongqing University	2	2	0
17	Cornell University	2	2	0
18	George Washington University	2	0	2
19	Hong Kong Baptist University	2	2	0
20	Hainan University	2	1	1
21	Macau University of Science and Technology	2	2	0
22	National Taiwan University	2	2	0
23	Shandong University	2	2	0
24	University of Guelph	2	2	0
25	University of Louisiana	2	2	0
26	Xiamen University	2	2	0
27	York University	2	2	0

4. Discussion and conclusions

The papers analysed in the present study have a wide coverage. It is clear to see the gradual change of research trends given the long time span in Fig. 2. Papers examining issues in management started since 1984 and became more popular after 1990 but experienced a decline in the most recent 5 years. The number of papers focusing on development issues fluctuated during the past 26 years with an apparent increase in 2008. Papers investigating environmental issues

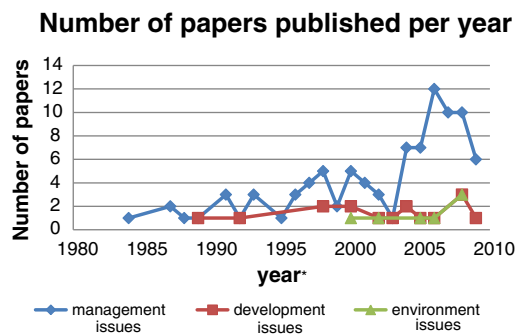


Fig. 2. Research theme publication trends (1984–2009). *Note: Some 2009 papers were not available in the databases at the time of paper collection, resulting in the drop in paper numbers in 2009.

only appeared after 2000, with the number increasing sharply from 2005 to 2008. Generally, with more researchers conducting studies in management issues, the number of papers in the management theme overwhelms that in development and environment themes.

There are a number of significant convergences as well as divergences of the present study findings with those of the extant review studies described in the Introduction section above. While we must be circumspect in comparing review studies without directly overlapping search criteria, we nevertheless see the relevance of comparison with other key review studies. Table 11 shows comparison of the most frequently reported research themes.

This study confirms with Kong and Cheung's (2009) study in that human resource management is one of the significant research themes within China hotel studies. However, by extending the literature search scope and including more relevant research papers, the present study also identified hotel operation and performance, marketing and finance as salient research themes under the general hotel management and performance category. In addition, hotel development strategies and business environment issues were identified as another two significant research themes which appear to be related to the general Chinese macro economic situation and addressing external issues to hotel operation. Interestingly, our present study found that business environment issues became a research concern only after the turn of the century. This may be due to China's further integration into the world economy marked by its entry into the World Trade Organisation in 2001. In Tsang and Hsu's (2011) study, out of a total of 119 papers, 13 were identified to fall into the theme of *hotel development*. As Tsang and Hsu's study covers the general literature of China tourism and hospitality research and their review scope appears to be much broader than that in our current study, little meaningful comparison can be drawn between our study findings and theirs. Our present study actually provided a much more focused 'zoom-in' view on China hotel research.

An overarching commonality found in review studies in relation to China tourism and hospitality is that research efforts and publications in this field are increasing over time, concurrent with the growing prominence of China as a tourism importer and exporter. As expected in the early stages of a developing literature, we find considerable diversity in the types of themes and their respective frequencies. An examination of the study designs employed in review studies suggests methodological variability in: (1) choice of time periods under study; (2) sources from which papers are drawn; (3) search keywords; (4) and factors for measurement. Types of analysis contribute further to diversity, as different groups of authors interpret the papers under study in different ways. Thus interpretation of findings must be done cautiously, and the most thorough understanding may be gained by considering the findings of such review studies in the aggregate level.

Table 11
Most frequent research themes.

Study	Most frequent research themes	Percentage
Kong and Cheung (2009)	Strategy and development	43
	Human resource management	35
	Service quality	12
	Marketing	9
Tsang and Hsu (2011)	Tourism development	38
	Consumer behaviour	18
	Hotel development	11
	Education and training	6
	Human resource management	34
Present study	Hotel operation and performance	22
	Marketing	19
	Hotel development strategies	14
	Hotel business environment issues	6
	Finance	5

The present study provides insights into China hotel research via a systematic review of research themes and trends. Through analysis of the publications under study, we have demonstrated the diverse and changing nature of how scholars have examined the issues around China hotel research. However, the present review also suggests that China hotel researchers do not share a unified agenda, and have multiple competing perspectives. This may be an organic and desirable way for the research discourse to grow. Indeed, it may be too soon to expect mature coalescences of contested perspectives in a literature only a few decades old, especially given the dynamic environment within which China pursues its socialist economic reforms (Huang, 2008).

At the same time as the body of research on China hospitality and tourism expands, opportunities will become available to extend the methods applied to research synthesis to meta-analysis and meta-interpretation (Weed, 2006). Since Lynn and Mullen (1997) observed the nascent and spare use of meta-level analyses published in hospitality journals, such methods remain underused in hospitality research generally (see Sainaghi, 2010). The aggregation and analysis of meta-types of synthesis will broaden our understanding of the shapes of hospitality research knowledge (Weed, 2006). The findings of the present study demonstrate that there will be a growing future need to provide increasingly synergistic insights into China hotel research.

4.1. Limitation

The present study is subject to similar limitations expressed in the works that we have reviewed. Defining the boundaries of a systematic review is an arbitrary process, and by definition excludes data that may be considered relevant to the review topic. For example, the present study considers the English language literature, however some of the authors who publish in English also publish in Chinese. Similarly, the present study's topic is also represented in mainstream journals, which provide wider context and perspective for the environment within which tourism and hospitality issues exist. We recommend future studies to aggregate, distinguish, and analyse publications in additional languages, particularly Chinese, and to include mainstream publications.

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