income, and sought to determine the tourism-related economic effect of the opening of the high-speed line.

Unbalanced Effect of the Railway

The researchers report that there were significantly higher domestic tourism receipts in Guangdong and Hunan than in Hubei after the Wuhan-Guangzhou section of the high-speed railway commenced operations. Indeed, receipts in Hubei shifted very little. On a more positive note, they suggest that if the respective characteristics of Guangdong and Hubei are taken into account, the railway’s economic effects are “more widespread and pronounced” than would at first seem obvious, with the relatively less-developed inland province of Hubei experiencing greater growth than its more developed coastal counterpart.

Also of interest are the railway’s “spillover effects”, the researchers note, citing reports indicating that even nearby destinations not on its route have benefited, with some achieving 100% growth since the line opened. They take this as evidence that “transport can contribute to the optimization of tourism product structure and enhance the overall attractiveness of the broader region”. Their findings also indicate “new opportunities for inter-destination cooperation and integration”, as Guangdong has traditionally been the major tourist source market for Hubei.

The railway has also had considerable “knock-on effects”, according to the researchers. These have included competition-induced reductions in airfares, greater flexibility in flight schedules and a major boost for short-haul weekend tours. The end result, they argue, is “a wider range of choices for the tourist”, which has influenced “many aspects of their ‘travel career’ beyond the overall attractiveness of the broader region”. Their findings also indicate “new opportunities for inter-destination cooperation and integration”, as Guangdong has traditionally been the major tourist source market for Hubei.

Overcoming Disparities

Given that Hubei province seems to have missed out on the railway’s benefits, the researchers cautiously suggest that “high-speed rail should not be treated as a panacea for tourism”, with no attention paid to the existing tourism infrastructure and attractions in a given destination. They emphasise, however, that they focused on a period soon after the railway commenced operations, and “positive impacts may be manifest in the longer term” for Hubei.

In addition, the researchers measured the railway’s economic effects in the form of tourism receipts and, with the exception of its capital Wuhan, Hubei features few attractions other than the natural landscape. Hence, without the development of more attractions, the railway can offer little economic benefit to the tourism industry and may even be detrimental to the hotel and hospitality sector by reducing the need for overnight stays.

The continued popularity of the Wuhan-Guangzhou high-speed railway despite its relatively high ticket price – RMB450 one-way versus RMB330 for a normal-speed train – indicates that “it has become a tourist attraction in its own right”, the researchers believe. The way forward, they note, is more “regional cooperation, enrichment of tourism products and integration of the broader tourist transport infrastructure”. This could be complemented by marketing campaigns that emphasise the benefits of high-speed rail travel, and travel packages and itineraries that incorporate rail components and “experience optimisation”.

Clear Economic Benefit to Tourism

Despite finding few short-term economic benefits for Hubei province, the researchers believe that they have provided “solid evidence for the positive effects of the high-speed railway on the development of an industry that is assuming rising significance in the Chinese economy”. This, they hope, will spur the tourism sector towards more creative ways of capitalising on the railway to achieve further growth. Most importantly, their findings should provide the very important service of helping to dispel criticisms of the high-speed railway’s economic value for the country as a whole.

Points to Note

- Transport is critical to tourism development.
- The Wuhan-Guangzhou high-speed railway in China has boosted tourism receipts in Guangdong and Hunan but not in Hubei.
- Yet, the railway has had spillover and knock-on effects on other destinations and sectors.
- More should be done to enhance regional cooperation to broaden the railway’s economic benefits.


Highly Popular Drama Influences Perceptions of Korea

V
iewers of the immensely popular television drama Daenggangeum (Jewel in the Palace) are keen to try Korean food and have a positive image of the country, according to the SHTM’s Dr Samuel Seongseop Kim, Dean and Chair Professor Kaye Chon and a co-researcher. In a recently published study of customers at Korean restaurants in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand, the researchers find that the drama’s portrayal of Korea and its national cuisine provides a strong impetus for people to visit the destination.

Jewel in the Palace

In today’s media-dominated world, films and television programmes can have an “enormous” influence on the locations they portray, the researchers suggest. Many tourists are interested in “film destinations or film story-related destinations” and want to visit the places portrayed in them. At the same time, food has become “an important attraction for a tourism destination”, given that it can strongly affect a potential visitor’s expectations about that locality. When translated into an actual visit, this helps to generate “economic benefits to the tourist-receiving community”, note the researchers.

Although infrequently considered in this light, when film and food converge in perceptions of a destination, they are likely to form “a very effective contributor to attract tourists”, in the researchers’ words. Fitting well into this scenario, the Korean television drama series Daenggangeum features a “cooking maid’s experience amid political conspiracies and faction fighting” in a king’s palace, highlighting “the use of Korean traditional cuisine and medicine”.

This highly popular series comprising 70 episodes was first aired in Korea in 2003 and has since been shown in 53 other countries. It is particularly popular in Asia, and the researchers note that it has been “connected to the enhancement of the national image of Korea” and an increase in tourism to the country. In particular, the drama’s use of Korean food storylines is believed to have had a positive effect on tourists’ images of and intention to visit Korea.

However, given the scant evidence available to support this belief, the researchers set out to determine the precise effects of Daenggangeum on tourists’ perceptions of Korea’s national image and food, and whether it increased their intention to visit the country for “food tourism”.

Korean Restaurant Customers Surveyed

The researchers conducted their study in three Asian countries to determine whether the drama had different effects on people from different cultures. In all three places, Daenggangeum had been “extremely popular”. Hong Kong SAR, China, was chosen because the series was the most watched in its broadcasting history, with an average audience of 37%. Daenggangeum was equally successful in Taiwan, the second country considered, and following its airing in Thailand, the third country selected, the researchers were able to find demand for Korean restaurants, language courses and holidays.

Customers at five Korean restaurants in each country were surveyed. In Hong Kong, four of the restaurants were located on Hong Kong Island and one in Tsim Sha Tsui. Of the Taiwanese restaurants, three were located in Taipei and two in Kaoshiung. In Thailand, all five were located in Sukhumvit Plaza in the part of Bangkok known as “Little Korean Town”.

Offered a brief questionnaire to complete while waiting to eat, the customers indicated their reasons for preferring Korean food, such as because it was healthy and low in calories or it allowed them to experience another culture. They were also asked whether they were influenced by Daenggangeum, posters of which often appear in Korean restaurants overseas, whether eating Korean food had changed their image of Korea and whether it had increased their intention to visit the country.

The majority of the customers were in their 20s and 30s and they generally had a high level of education, with more than 70% having a college degree or higher. More than half of those surveyed in Hong Kong had visited Korea, while just over 40% of those from Thailand and 21% from Taiwan had visited.

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**Influence of Daeganggeum**

For customers in all three places, the researchers found that television and radio were the most influential sources of information in making them want to try Korean cuisine, followed by newspapers and magazines. Their experience of Korean food gave many customers, especially those from Hong Kong, a more positive image of the country, confirming that “food may be an influential medium in changing the national image of Korea”, note the researchers.

Around half of the customers indicated that they had become interested in eating Korean food through watching Daeganggeum. This, suggest the researchers, reflects the “strong effects this TV drama has had on these countries”. Furthermore, many of the customers agreed that watching the programme had made them keen to visit Korea to experience the food.

**Different Preferences Revealed**

There were, however, some differences in the elements of Korean dining and the drama that influenced customers in the three places. For instance, those in Hong Kong and Thailand were particularly taken by the “variety and harmony” of Korean food. A practical implication for Korean restaurants in these places, the researchers suggest, is to make their menus “more visually appealing” with the use of “diverse decorations” to “influence the national image of Korea” formed by Hong Kong and Thai customers.

The Hong Kong customers were also attracted by the healthy aspects of Korean food. The researchers propose that Korean restaurants in the city take advantage of this, providing menus with “natural and health-conscious ingredients rather than a large amount of meats or instant foods”.

Among the Taiwanese and Thai customers, the “uniqueness of Korean food culture” as portrayed in Daeganggeum was important. This aspect, the researchers recommend, should be emphasised in restaurant decor through the use of “traditional wooden paper or curtains using natural dyed material” and the creation of “an interior ambience that uses natural acoustics such as the sounds of wind, rain or birds”.

**Winning Combination of Drama and Food**

Overall, the researchers confirm that Daeganggeum has increased the preference for Korean food among Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Thai customers. They conclude that combining the portrayal of food with a destination in a film or television programme can enhance the image of the country and may act as a “magnet” to visitors who want to experience the places and foods portrayed.

**Acculturation Determines Consumer Responses to Service Failures**

Chinese American consumers react differently to service failures depending on the extent to which they have integrated into American culture, suggest Dr Karin Weber and Professor Cathy Hsu of the SHTM and a co-author. In a recently published research paper, they report the results of a study that considered the reactions of Chinese Americans with different levels of acculturation to customer service failure. As measured by the need to maintain “face”, the extent of customer satisfaction with the service experience and repeat purchase intention, the respondents’ “acculturation status influenced their reaction to the service failure”, the researchers note.

**Multi-Ethnic Societies and Acculturation**

In increasingly multi-ethnic societies, it is particularly important for hospitality marketers and service providers to understand the perceptions and behaviours of people from different cultures. Consider the situation in the United States. Chinese Americans, the researchers note, are the largest ethnic group among Asian Americans, and their higher than average salaries “make them an attractive target segment for marketers”.

Yet presuming the homogeneity of any ethnic group can be problematic. The researchers suggest that the perceptions and behaviours of ethnic consumers who migrate to other countries may differ depending on the extent to which they maintain their original cultural identities or assimilate with the new cultures. They were thus interested in determining the “impact of different acculturation strategies” – integration, assimilation and maintenance of separation – on the reactions of Chinese Americans to service failure, which they describe as “an unfortunately common situation”.

**Service Failure Scenario**

The researchers conducted a survey among Chinese Americans who had lived in the United States for at least five years. The participants were asked to imagine themselves “as an aggrieved customer” at a luxury hotel who experiences “visible discrimination” while European guests are given “preferential treatment”. The scenario described a situation in which a member of staff failed to make an important dinner reservation for the guest, who then had to make alternative arrangements, with the hotel employee making no attempt to resolve the situation. The researchers presented four variants of the scenario based on differences in the ethnicity of the staff member involved – Western or Chinese – and “the hotel brand’s county of origin” – whether an Asian country or the United States.

Once they had read the scenario, the participants rated how satisfied they were with the hotel and how likely they were to return. They also answered questions designed to assess “loss of face”, which occurs, the researchers explain, when “service providers fail to recognise guests’ importance and do not accord them due respect”. They emphasise that the concept of face is particularly important in Chinese culture, and is linked to “a person’s status and position in society”.

To give an indication of the survey’s representativeness, those who completed the questionnaire were equally divided in terms of gender, and almost 60% were aged 26 to 55. Their level of education was relatively high – more than half had Bachelor degrees and a quarter had postgraduate degrees. Around 60% were born in the United States, 40% had arrived there in the 1990s and 30% had arrived since 2000.

**Acculturation Influences Satisfaction**

To explore how the participants reacted to the customer service scenario, the researchers first grouped them into three categories according to their degree of acculturation – the extent to which they retained their “identification with their culture of origin” and attempted to “conform to the host culture”. The assimilated participants did not seek to maintain their original Chinese culture and sought daily interactions with the local American culture. Their integrated counterparts attempted to maintain their Chinese culture but also sought daily interactions with the local American culture. The separated participants, in contrast, did not seek to maintain their original Chinese culture and sought daily interactions with the host culture”. The assimilated participants did not seek to maintain their original Chinese culture and sought daily interactions with the local American culture. The separated participants, in contrast, held onto their Chinese culture and did not attempt to interact with the local culture.

Considering differences in responses to the scenario, the researchers found that the culturally separated participants were most satisfied with the service described and were most likely to return to the hotel. At the same time, they were also more concerned than the other two...