Hotel location also exerted a significant influence on how the tourists engaged with a destination. For example, the Kowloon-based participants who took shuttle buses to the Star Ferry Pier from Tsim Sha Tsui spent little time in the area, whereas those who were staying near Nathan Road had “a much higher tendency to travel by foot up and down the length of Nathan Road and its adjacent street markets”. This discrepancy should be of interest to the area’s businesses, but of equal concern should be the fact that the tourists staying on Hong Kong Island generally showed “a strong aversion to Kowloon”, according to the researchers.

**Time Patterns**

The time of day that tourists were most likely to visit specific attractions varied according to location. Those staying on Hong Kong Island, for example, were more likely to visit the Peak earlier in the day, and those on Kowloon side were more likely to visit it in the mid to late afternoon. Essentially, the nearer an attraction to the hotel, the earlier in the day that it was likely to be visited.

The researchers were also interested in the relationship between the amount of time that the tourists spent in any one location and that location’s distance from the hotel. The extent to which time spent at a location decreases the further it is from a point of origin is known as “distance decay” and is usually considered on a macro scale, such as in observations of international travel. The researchers show that distance decay also occurs at a micro level.

In Kowloon, there was a typical distance decay effect, with demand peaks in the immediate environs of the hotel in the Nathan Road area, as the researchers expected. On Hong Kong Island, about 40% of the time that guests spent away from the five-star hotel in Central was restricted to a two-kilometre radius. The Causeway Bay guests also spent considerable time in proximity to their hotel.

**Implications for Tourism Decisions**

The researchers conclude that no understanding of urban tourist behaviour can be complete without considering the “spatially concentrated activity around the hotel; places tourists are likely or unlikely to visit; volume of visitors at all but icon attractions; and diurnal visitation patterns”. If they were to gather GPS data, tourism stakeholders such as hotels and destination marketing organisations would be able to “gain a more comprehensive understanding of tourist movements through an entire destination region”.

Also available would be “insights into which, if any, attractions tourists visit that may not be the focus of marketing activities, and which places they do not visit that are promoted”, note the researchers. Ultimately, stakeholders will benefit from knowledge that will allow them “to manoeuvre tourists in a more rational way”.

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**Film Can Induce Heritage Site Conservation**

Film has a strong influence on the creation of tourist locations according to a recently published research article by SHTM Assistant Professor Steve Pan and co-author. In a case study of how the Hong Kong media covered *Echoes of the Rainbow*, the researchers show that film, through the influence of the mass media, can induce community action and policy initiatives to promote the conservation of potential tourism-friendly cultural assets.

There was, they show, considerable difference in the way the media framed the public debate surrounding the conservation of Wing Lee Street in Hong Kong’s Sheung Wan before and after the film won the Crystal Bear at the 2010 Berlin Film Festival. The researchers note that there is a pressing need for Hong Kong to establish “consistent standards for conserving heritage sites rather than relying on a film to be a ‘saviour’”.

**Films and Heritage Tourism**

The power of films to attract tourists is well recognised, with a considerable body of research devoted to the area of “film tourism”. Less investigated is film-induced conservation, even though the researchers note that “films can induce or reinforce a conservation movement” and “be transformed into new heritage tourism products”. As it affects “local historical memory”, such conservation plays a particularly important role in Hong Kong because of the space constraints on the development of new physical tourism sites. However, as the researchers makes clear, the objects “that represent local historical memory must be preserved first before tourism can be induced and developed”.

The task for tourism strategists is to find a way to enhance the symbiosis between tourism and conservation, which the space constraints of the urban areas of Hong Kong render particularly complex. Key to the success of a sustainable urban tourism programme is thus an understanding of “the dynamics between brokers, locals and other key stakeholders”, the researchers explain.

Wing Lee Street in Sheung Wan, one of the earliest settled areas of Hong Kong, constituted an ideal setting in which to identify the media-brokered changes that took place in the public debate surrounding and shifts in government policy towards the conservation “of old buildings to which heritage and nostalgia attributes were imputed” by a critically acclaimed film. Part of an area targeted for urban renewal in 1997, the street’s twelve 1950s-era Chinese tenement buildings provided the setting for and were central to Director Alex Law’s story of a 1960s shoemaker’s family as told through the eyes of his young son. In *Echoes of the Rainbow*, Law arouses nostalgia for the past “to provide a solution to the issues of everyday life” in the present and “to encourage society to aspire to a positive future”, the researchers argue.

**The Changing Conservation Debate**

There are two points to consider when determining the extent to which a film has enabled heritage to be conserved: whether an area actually has been conserved and whether the film in question can be shown to have had “a catalytic effect”. The researchers set out to examine how the media shaped the agenda over conserving Wing Lee Street as a heritage site, identify the most salient media frames and the changes in those frames over twelve years, and assess the implications for future tourism planning and development.

Analysing 451 relevant news reports, including 378 in Chinese and 73 in English, the researchers focused on three key periods. The first ran from January 1998, when a development project involving Wing Lee Street was first announced, to January 2007, when a lawsuit brought by the private developer was settled. A second period, from January 2007 to 21 February 2010 covered the lead up to *Echoes of the Rainbow* winning the Berlin Film Festival award. The final period covered the subsequent 33 days, culminating in the Urban Renewal Authority announcing its support in principle for the street’s total conservation.

The stakeholders of interest were the public sector (the Urban Renewal Authority and other government authorities), the private sector (property owners and tenants) and conservation groups. The researchers consider the media as the “broker” in the debate.

Wing Lee Street ‘Saved’

“Architecture provides the software and hardware for a film production”, the researchers argue, thereby inducing visitors to “relive the vicarious urban experience” featured. 
Wing Lee Street as “a time capsule” in which “memories of the 1960s are waiting to be experienced by future visitors”. It is, they claim, “an urban cultural tourism asset in reserve”. However, the unintended consequences of that status point to the need for Hong Kong to restore buildings in a way that is consistent with both heritage and tourism needs and those of the communities affected. After all, the researchers reflect, “a happy and satisfied local community arguably plays the role of hospitable host”.

Inclusive Approach to Preservation Need

Thanks to Echoes of the Rainbow and the coverage it gained in the Hong Kong media, the researchers can now describe Wing Lee Street as “untouchable”, these hopes were dashed. What is needed, the researchers conclude, is a more “participatory and consistent approach” to heritage preservation and promotion. The third period, which commenced after the film award was announced, saw a notable shift. Wing Lee Street itself was now in the limelight, conservationists no longer struggled to make their voices heard and the public increasingly supported “the preservation of the street and its role in the collective memory of the community”. Director Alex Law’s extensively covered call for the street’s preservation almost certainly facilitated “the retention of collective memory”, effectively counteracting the previous framing of the debate in terms of urban renewal, the researchers believe.

Effects on the Local Community

The upshot of the post-award media coverage was that Wing Lee Street became the “standard bearer of collective memory”, with the public gradually forming “the perception that they had a moral obligation to preserve the past”. The researchers also note that the Urban Renewal Authority made no attempt to reframe the debate. The street is now designated a conservation zone in its entirety, and Echoes of the Rainbow is hailed as a heritage tourism success story. Yet the story for the Wing Lee street tenants did not have such a happy ending. The media generally tend to position greedy private landowners as co-villains with the local community as the victim. In this case, the urban renewal authority itself was now in the limelight, conservationists no longer struggled to make their voices heard and the public increasingly supported “the perception of the street and its role in the collective memory of the community”. Director Alex Law’s extensively covered call for the street’s preservation almost certainly facilitated “the retention of collective memory”, effectively counteracting the previous framing of the debate in terms of urban renewal, the researchers believe.

Points to Note

- Films can attract tourists and induce heritage preservation.
- Media framing shapes the heritage conservation debate.
- Echoes of the Rainbow helped to ‘save’ Wing Lee Street from development.
- New and consistent conservation standards are needed for sustainable film-heritage tourism.

Strategic Planning Needed for Chinese Hotels

Hotellers in China are optimistic about the future of the Chinese hotel industry but there is still much to be done before China can become the world’s top tourist destination, according to the SHTM’s Kam Hung. In a recently published research article, Dr Hung identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the hotel industry from the perspective of Chinese hoteliers. Her findings will provide the government with a better understanding of the issues that need to be tackled so that a strategic plan can be developed to direct future activities and improve performance.

Rapid Growth of the Industry

China is an increasingly popular tourist destination. It is currently the third most visited country in the world, and the World Tourism Organization predicts it will become the most visited by 2020. Unparalleled demand has led to rapid growth in the number of hotels. In 1981, during the early years of economic reform, the country had only 296 hotels. With the emphasis on hotel development in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1981-1985), that number increased dramatically to 300,000 by 2009. Dr Hung acclaim’s these achievements as “worthy of celebration”, but notes that the industry still has a number of shortcomings to overcome.

To develop effectively in China, the hotel industry needs proper planning to “utilize its strengths and opportunities” and “alleviate weaknesses and threats”. With that purpose in mind, Dr Hung set out to “help policy makers better understand the hotel industry in China and strategically plan hotel development accordingly”. To gain the most compelling insights into how the industry operates she sought the views of not government officials but hoteliers.

The Hotelier Perspective

The first step in strategic planning is to understand the business environment. SWOT analysis is a simple analytic tool that can be used to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing an organisation. It is widely used to assess hotels in other parts of the world, but infrequently in China. Dr Hung formed focus groups with 47 hoteliers from 37 hotels in mainland China, asking them to brainstorm the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they had encountered or were aware of in the Chinese hotel industry.

Strengths and Opportunities

The hoteliers indicated that the industry’s main strength is the “establishment and gradual sophistication” of the Chinese hotel-rating scheme, which provides clear guidance on what hotels should provide for their customers. They also highlighted the increasing profit made by the industry, which is growing faster than the country’s gross domestic product in a strong indication of a promising future. Other encouraging signs are the increasing recognition and effort put into improving service quality in China’s hotels, and the increasing professionalism of hotel employees.

There are also a number of opportunities for the industry. The hoteliers suggested that demand from the domestic market is increasing, and “improved consumption power, living standards, and longer holidays” mean that Chinese people are travelling more both at home and abroad. The growing tourism industry has attracted “many international brands” to China. Although this has increased the competition for local hotels, some of the hoteliers view it as a positive development that would “benefit the overall Chinese hotel industry in the long term”. There are also a number of opportunities for the industry. The hoteliers suggested that demand from the domestic market is increasing, and “improved consumption power, living standards, and longer holidays” mean that Chinese people are travelling more both at home and abroad. The growing tourism industry has attracted “many international brands” to China. Although this has increased the competition for local hotels, some of the hoteliers view it as a positive development that would “benefit the overall Chinese hotel industry in the long term”.

Weaknesses and Threats

Despite these strengths and opportunities, the hotel industry still needs to address a number of weaknesses and threats. Although service quality has improved, many of the hoteliers expressed concern over the threat from international hotel brands, which are considered to be “more professional, have better management structures, and are more willing to invest in staff training”. They also mentioned that many hotels in China have “magnificent architecture” yet they still “lack quality services and commitment from hotel investors”. As Dr Hung notes, a