



Research Article

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Tourists' Perception of Dark Tourism and its Impact on their Emotional Experience and Geopolitical Knowledge: A Comparative Study of Local and Non-local Tourist

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the causal relationships between tourists' perception of dark tourism and its impact on their emotional experience and geopolitical knowledge. This study conducts questionnaire survey at two war museums on Kinmen Island and was able to collect 413 usable responses. The result indicates that tourists who visited a dark tourism site are capable to develop positive emotions and strong geopolitical disposition. They are also more likely to develop empathy. Dark tourism is therefore a wonderful tool for education.

Keywords

Dark tourism; Emotional experience; Geopolitical knowledge; Kinmen (or Quemoy)

Introduction

Rojek [1] is probably the earliest scholar that coined the term "dark tourism or thanatourism", which describes any form of tourism activities revolving around a destination that involves notable death. For example, Foley and Lennon [2] published an article explicating how the spot of American President John F. Kennedy's assassination became a touristic site. Dann and Seaton [3] offered a broader definition of dark tourism to include visits to destinations associated with catastrophe, violence, tragedy, and punishment. The term dark tourism or thanatourism is first mentioned in academic field but before this MacCannell [4] proposed similar concept of negative sightseeing that describes visitation to sites with negative past. Blom [5], on the other hand, mentioned the term "morbid tourism" referring to tourism activity prompted by an abnormal and unhealthy interest to visit place with disturbing and unpleasant theme, especially death and disease. Black tourism and grief tourism were also used to describe similar touristic phenomena.

Dark tourism can serve a few purposes including political reasons, for reminiscence purposes, educational purposes, economic development,

to provide entertainment, [6], or as a reminder of our own fragility and mortality (Stone 2012). It is also believed that through dark tourism experience, tourists can appreciate life more and feel empathy with victims [7]. Dark tourism is a complex phenomenon that has its own merits.

Battlefield tourism is another form of dark tourism involving visiting places associated with battlefield and/or participating in war enactment activities [8]. Battlefield is a place of convergence of collective traumatic memory [9,10]. War museum uses language to present past conflicts to tourists and helps to trigger emotional responses from individuals who haven't been through the war personally [4,11,12]. People are often mesmerized by "death" and "disaster" because of the emotional upheaval after the experience [13], and curiosity to the unknown [14].

Kinmen or Quemoy became a battlefield after the Gunningtou battle in 1947. It is the continuation of civil war between the China's Nationalist army and Communist forces. A series of artillery bombardment soon followed including the famous August 23rd artillery war in 1958. Due to America's intervention, a strange ceasefire agreement formed between the communist and nationalist - that it would only fire on odd-numbered days. The 150 kilometer square of Kinmen's land has suffered over 970,000 shells. In 1978, the bombardment gradually faded, but the military presence and imposition of martial law still haunt Kinmen until 7th of November, 1992. During the war, the militarization of the island is very extensive including the construction of forts, anti-parachute spikes, beachhead spikes, garrisons, underground bunkers, underground tunnels and underground canal. These military constructions became a unique feature of Kinmen and the fuel establishment of various war museums and memorial parks. The rich war history combined with Kinmen's unique geopolitical location made the perfect specimen for the study of dark tourism.

Materials and Method

Dark tourism

As previously noted, the term dark tourism is synonymous to black tourism, grief tourism [2], thanatourism [3], negative sightseeing [4], and morbid tourism [5]. It serves a variety of purposes, such as entertainment, education, and remembrance [6,14]. Dark tourism involves visiting a site with notable death or tragic event [3]. There have been many studies related to this subject. Lennon and Foley [15] investigated how dark event impacts on visitors' perception of their trip to a dark destination. Seaton [9] tried to determine the innate desire, motivation, and benefit sought of visitors of destination associated with death. Blom [5] categorized two types of morbid tourism. One is when people attracted by event with sudden and violent death, such as the September 11 terrorist attacks (Stone 2006). The other type is prompted by human's curiosity and visit places with haunted history [16]. Any form of dark event continues to possess emotional impact on people and may include social and political aftermath [17].

Based on past studies, we can categorize seven types of dark tourism including battlefield tourism [8,12], Holocaust tourism [18],

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cemetery tourism [19], prison tourism [20], slavery-heritage tourism [3], monument tourism [21], and black spot tourism [1]. From the categorization, one can see that the term dark tourism encompasses many different aspects of activities and destinations. This also implies that tourists' behavior is going to be rather different from one type to the other. It is therefore important to understand that the tourists' motivation is important in order to better predict their behaviors and needs. For example, Seaton [22] discovered that tourists attracted to sites associated with World War I are motivated by their knowledge of history of that period and desire to seek the truth. Lennon and Foley [14] studied a case of museum of massacre and found that tourists' need to understand the truth of the event and condemn the atrocity. In a study of prison tourism, Preece and Price [23] found that tourists are motivated by educational opportunity, learning history, and curiosity to visit the prison. In the study of museum tourism in Lithuania, Wight and Lennon [24] discovered that tourists are interested in knowing the country. It is evident that educational and memorial purposes comprised the majority of dark tourism motivation [13].

Based on these literatures, this study can conclude that the dark tourism is a complex phenomenon. Individuals engaged in dark tourism for different purposes, but mainly for education and remembrance purposes. Through dark tourism experiences, tourists are able to evoke emotional responses that satisfied their inherent needs. Dark tourism is also able to provide economic meaning to old places, such as battlefield, which makes its preservation worthwhile.

Emotional experience

Emotion is a subject to the influence of environmental factors and physical conditions [25]. It is possible that seeing a place can trigger emotional responses of an individual. Russell and Snodgrass [26] proposed the concept of environmental psychology and categorized emotion into long term emotional disposition and short term emotional events or states. Emotional state can further be divided into affective appraisals, mood, and emotional fragment. Emotional state is likely to be triggered by an external source and can have positive or negative effect on an individual.

Plutchik [27] analyzed emotion and categorized them into four pairs of positive and negative emotions that can be depicted in the emotional wheel. The four pairs are: joy vs. sadness, trust vs. disgust, fear vs. anger, and surprise vs. anticipation. These eight basic emotions can be mingled to form more complex emotions. For example, anticipation and joy combined to form a pair of positive and negative emotions namely optimism and disappointment respectively. The eight basic emotions are also subject to gradations. For example, higher intensity of joy is ecstasy while lower intensity makes serenity. Parrott [28] offered similar construct of emotions where primary emotions can mix with secondary emotions to form tertiary emotions.

Emotion is subjective perception, thus makes its measurement difficult. There are two ways to measure emotion. One is through medical equipment to measure individual's physical responses (e.g., heart rate) or observe one's behaviors (e.g., body language, facial expression) in order to infer their emotional state. The other way is through individual's self-assessment. Using a well-designed questionnaire, one can measure individual's emotional intensity [29]. Most studies are limited by resources and research funding, consequently tend to favor the latter method. Well-designed questionnaire is capable of accurately assess one's emotional state [29].

The role of emotion in dark tourism is paramount and worthy of investigation [30]. As previously mentioned, there are many different types of dark tourism [17]. This means that emotional response to each type is likely to be different. For example, Tarlow [17] asserted that psychocentric travelers are likely to develop nostalgic feeling while visiting a dark tourism destination. This is evidence that not all dark tourists are excitement and thrill seekers. It has also been noted that not all dark tourism leads to negative emotional outcome [31]. This study adopts the emotion typology proposed by Plutchik [27] to investigate visitors to Kinmen's battlefield tourism destinations.

Geopolitics

Geopolitics evolved from political geography [32]. It is initially a military concept that defines a country's territories and strategic deployment of resources and forces to ensure its safety [33]. It is a study of the effects of geography on international politics, international relations and interactions [34]. It is also an important subject for diplomats for its ability to predict international dynamics. During the World War II, the China's civil war involves more than just the communist and nationalist, but also two of the world's most powerful nations at the time—Russia and America behind the two factions respectively. The development of the Cross-Straight situation is partly the result of political competition and compromise between the two nations. Kinmen, a small island, suddenly became the focal point of struggle between the nations and forces. Kinmen consequently bears the scar of war quite extensively. It is interesting to know if tourists visit this place can develop a deeper understanding of the geopolitical situation and awareness.

Sampling method

This study uses convenient sampling method in two of Kinmen's most famous war museums – Guningtou Battle Museum and August 23rd Artillery War Museum. Questionnaires were distributed around week days and weekends to survey visitors of the museums. A total of 430 questionnaires were distributed and collected, account for 100% of return rate. However, 17 of them were discarded because they are incomplete making it 96% success rate of the 413 useable responses, 54.5% of them were male. Majority of them (35.1%) are around 21-30 years old, which is probably why 59.1% of them are single. They are highly educated with most of them are holding college degree (64.9%). There are about 24% of students, so monthly disposable income is relatively low. There are around 66% of respondents setting up residences in Kinmen. But considering 24% of them are student, only 42% are original Kinmen residents. There are 50.8% of first time visitors, 33.7% respondents visit the museum by scooter, 41.6% respondents visit the island for 3 days, 39.7% respondents went with friends, 57.4% respondents visit other battlefield tourism spot. The sample comprised of 103 Kinmen residents, 276 Taiwanese, and 34 Chinese.

Factor analysis

The study uses factor analysis to categorize the constructs of emotional experience and geopolitical knowledge. Principal axis factoring was used as an extraction method with promax rotation method. Using Eigenvalue greater than 1 as cutoff point, this study is able to classify emotional experience and geopolitical knowledge further into two factors each. The items of each factor later go into reliability test. As indicated in Table 1, an emotional experience can be classified into positive and negative emotions. The two factors explain 52.48% of the original variances. The Cronbach's α of the factors are .794 and .786 respectively, indicating sufficient reliability [35].

Table 1: Factor analysis of emotional experience.

What is the intensity of the following emotions when you visit the museum	Negative	Positive
2.Anger	0.946	0.006
1.Fear	0.685	-0.017
4.Disguse	0.679	0.023
3.Sadness	0.527	-0.160
7.Anticipation	-0.020	0.867
6.Surprise	-0.009	0.790
8.Agreeable	-0.050	0.726
5.Joy	-0.057	0.402
Eigenvalue	2.110	2.093
Explained variance (%)	52.484	

Table 2: Factor analysis of geopolitical knowledge.

What did you gain after the visit to the museum	Historical knowledge	Battlefield experience
1.History about the civil war	0.813	0.384
2.History about the famous battles	0.812	0.342
6.I want to learn more after the visit	0.764	0.566
5.I think these events needs to be remembered	0.755	0.464
4.Commemorate the soldiers	0.721	0.518
3.I am curious about the battlefield	0.692	0.388
9.It is excited to visit the battlefield	0.415	0.770
8.I learn how the garrisons functioned	0.546	0.755
10. I visit the cemetery of the soldiers.	0.333	0.664
Eigenvalue	4.428	3.164
Explained variance (%)	56.426	

As for the factor analysis of the construct geopolitical knowledge, the result is illustrated in Table 2. The two factors explain 56.43% of the original variances. The Cronbach's α of the factors are .890 and .770. Based on the items in each factor, they were named as historical knowledge and battlefield experience. However, many items display factor loading higher than 0.4 in both factors, indicating the communality of the items.

Result

This study is first interest to understand whether there are any behavioral and perceptual differences to the dark tourism destination between the people of three different places–Kinmen, Taiwan, and China. Using ANOVA to calculate the F values of the three constructs namely perception of dark tourism, emotional experience, and geopolitical knowledge yield statistically significant differences between respondents from three different places. The F values were 1.002($p>0.05$), 2.755($p>0.05$), 6.980($p<0.001$), 3.109($p<0.05$), and 2.627($p>0.05$). Therefore, this study is able to conclude that people from different places do respond differently to the experiences offered by Kinmen as a battlefield tourism destination.

This study also conducts correlation analysis between the factors. The result is summarized Table 3. As indicated, tourists' perception of dark tourism positively correlated with positive aspect of emotional experience and both types of geopolitical knowledge. Negative aspect of emotional experience correlated negative to most of other constructs, albeit not significant.

Regression analysis

This study uses regression analysis to examine the causal relationships between perception of dark tourism, emotional experience, and geopolitical knowledge. This study is also interest to

Table 3: Correlation analysis of the constructs.

Item	Mean	Std. D.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perception of DT	3.34	0.53	(0.61)				
2. EE-negative	3.41	0.86	-0.006	(0.79)			
3. EE-positive	3.02	0.78	0.337***	-0.031	(0.79)		
4. GK-historical knowledge	3.96	0.59	0.396***	0.025	0.321***	(0.89)	
5. GK-battlefield experience	3.63	0.67	0.256***	-0.059	0.164***	0.595***	(0.79)

P.S.: N=413; *** $p<0.001$; (no.): Cronbach's α value; DT: dark tourism; EE: emotional experience; GK: geopolitical knowledge

learn how people of different socio-demographic background react to the dark tourism content. Therefore, socio-demographic variables are used as control variables. This study has made the following settings: (1) male=1 and female=0; (2) age above 31=1 and age 30 or below=0; (3) single=1 and married=0; (4) college degree=1 and high school or lower=0; (5) employed=1 and unemployed=0; (6) average monthly income lower than or equal to NT\$40k=1 and higher than NT\$40K=0; and (7) have visit other dark tourism site=1 and have not visit=0. This will allow the study to test the moderating effect of socio-demographic variables to the causal chains. The result is presented in Table 4. This study is able to note five facts:

A. Perception of dark tourism bears no significant causal effect on negative aspect of emotional experience ($F=1.755$, $p=0.084$, $R^2=0.034$, Adj $R^2=0.014$, $t=-0.274$ with $p=0.784$).

B. Perception of dark tourism bears significant causal effect on positive aspect of emotional experience ($F=9.127$, $p<0.001$, $R^2=0.153$, Adj $R^2=0.136$, $t=7.781$ with $p<0.001$).

C. Perception of dark tourism bears significant causal effect on historical knowledge aspect of geopolitical knowledge ($F=9.939$, $p<0.001$, $R^2=0.164$, Adj $R^2=0.148$, $t=8.390$ with $p<0.001$).

D. Perception of dark tourism bears significant causal effect on battlefield experience aspect of geopolitical knowledge ($F=3.490$, $p<0.001$, $R^2=0.065$, Adj $R^2=0.064$, $t=4.534$ with $p<0.001$).

E. This study is able to conclude that tourists' perception of dark tourism affects certain aspects of emotional experience and both aspects of geopolitical knowledge.

When this study factor in the socio-demographic variables as control factor, the result indicate the following facts:

- Gender has no moderating effect on all the causal links.
- Age has no moderating effect on all the causal links.
- Marital status has no moderating effect on all the causal links.
- Education has moderating effect on both types of emotional experience. Individual with higher level of education is more likely to have negative emotional experience when high in dark tourism perception ($\beta=0.116$, $t=2.223^*$). Individual with lower level of education is more likely to have positive emotional experience when high in dark tourism perception ($\beta=0.116$, $t=2.227^*$).

e) Employment has moderating effect on both types of emotional experience. Unemployed respondents are more likely to exhibit negative causal relationship between dark tourism perception and negative emotional experience ($\beta=-0.13$, $t=-2.321^*$). Employed respondents are more likely to exhibit negative causal relationship between dark tourism perception and positive emotional experience ($\beta=-0.119$, $t=-2.285^*$).

Table 4: Regression analysis.

	Negative				Positive				Historical knowledge				Battlefield experience			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t
Control																
Gender	-0.043	-0.874	0.009	0.177	-0.009	-0.202	-0.043	-0.858	-0.007	0.14	-0.026	-0.574	0.040	0.808	0.029	0.597
Age	0.063	0.928	-0.093	-1.365	-0.093	-1.46	0.063	0.927	0.097	1.423	0.097	1.542	0.013	0.196	0.013	0.202
Marital	0.091	1.435	-0.032	-0.503	-0.012	-0.201	0.09	1.421	0.032	0.503	0.054	0.907	-0.06	-0.936	-0.048	-0.761
Education	0.116	2.223*	-0.023	-0.436	-0.032	-0.655	0.116	2.227*	0.035	0.662	0.025	0.512	-0.062	-1.172	-0.067	-1.310
Employment	0.015	0.261	-0.13	-2.321*	-0.119	-2.285*	0.014	0.254	-0.057	-1.023	-0.046	-0.891	-0.008	-0.146	-0.002	-0.033
Salary	0.066	1.161	-0.105	-1.833	-0.055	-1.026	0.064	1.119	-0.016	-0.285	0.037	0.688	-0.017	-0.294	0.014	0.239
Visit other	0.086	1.754	-0.046	-0.927	-0.131	-2.758**	0.089	1.768	0.117	2.361*	0.026	0.553	0.066	1.329	0.014	0.280
Independent Perception of DT			-0.014	-0.274			0.371	7.781***			0.397	8.390***			0.227	4.534***
F	1.999		1.755		1.553		9.127***		1.112		9.939***		1.003		3.490***	
R²	0.033		0.034		0.026		0.153		0.019		0.164		0.017		0.065	
Adj R²	0.017		0.014		0.009		0.136		0.002		0.148		0.000		0.046	

P.S.: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; *** p<0.001; DT: dark tourism.

- f) Salary has no moderating effect on all the causal links.
- g) Visiting other dark tourism destination has moderating effect on positive aspect of emotional experience ($\beta=-0.131$, $t=-2.758^{***}$) and historical knowledge aspect of geopolitical knowledge ($\beta=0.117$, $t=2.361^{*}$).

Discussion

This study achieves two findings. First, tourists' perception of dark tourism affects their positive aspect of emotional experience and both types of geopolitical knowledge. Second, socio-demographics of the tourists show some moderating effect on certain causal relationships. What does these all mean? Tourists who are aware of Kinmen's past history as a battlefield is more likely to have positive emotional experience than those who are not aware of the fact. For individual who does not perceive Kinmen as battlefield tourism spot, this island is just a small peaceful play with very little modern facilities to entertain them. For people who see Kinmen as battlefield tourism spot, this place offers them a chance to seek the truth of what happened in the past, which is an important need of dark tourist [27].

The result also indicates some moderating effect of socio-demographic variables. For example, respondents who have visited other dark tourism site are less likely to have positive emotional experience even if they are aware of Kinmen's characteristic as battlefield. This may suggest that individual with a lot of dark tourism experiences is more difficult to impress. They may compare the place with some of their past visitations. If they have visited other places with darker history, they may rate Kinmen less exciting. Education is also an important moderating factor. Individual with higher level of education is more likely to have positive emotional experience when visits Kinmen as battlefield tourism spot. Educated individual is more inquisitive and more likely to wants to seek out the truth, which again is a major motivation of dark tourist.

Through visiting a place with dark history, people's emotional state is aroused which makes them see the place differently. Due to the conflict across the Straight, people who visit Kinmene is more likely to identified themselves as the victim of war. The geopolitical knowledge thus formed in the mind of visitor of Kinmen. As Sparke [36] suggested, finding out the truth about a dark event can lead to

emotional responses and change one's attitude regarding certain individual or matter.

Conclusion

Tourists' perception of dark tourism does not affect negative aspect of emotional experience, but can affect the positive one. This implies that people who view Kinmen as dark tourism spot is more likely to develop positive emotional experience. It however, does not affect negative aspect of an emotional experience. It is not uncommon that people who visit dark site wind up with positive feelings. Seaton and Lennon [37] argued that dark tourist often exhibit certain emotional state akin to pilgrim. Therefore, visiting the site can be a fulfilling experience for them. It is also likely for dark tourists to develop empathic responses after visiting a dark site [38]. When one develop an empathy, they are more likely to be able to relate and understand others, and more capable of forgiveness [39]. It is therefore accurate to say that dark site has the ability to stop dark event from happening again by serving as a reminder of the tragedy. Positive thing does yield from the dark site.

Tourists' perception of dark tourism affects both aspects of geopolitical knowledge. It allows respondents to form a sense of territory and frontier border [33]. The result also indicates that respondents have the desire to understand the past history of conflicts. It is not just for an excitement, but also to get a sense of thankfulness. By visiting the dark site, one is able to celebrate their own life and be grateful for the sacrifice of the others. Using dark tourism as a mean to educate people not to commit same atrocity is a very effect way.

Limitation and Recommendation to Future Research

Due to the time and resources constraint, this study is only able to survey two museums. But the simple fact is that the entire Kinmen is a battlefield and there are many forts and military facilities can be explored. Future study can expand the survey sites to include other types of destinations, such as trenches [8], underground tunnels and cannels. This will allow a study to get a more comprehensive understanding of Kinmen as battlefield tourism destination.

Furthermore, this study uses quantitative research method that relied on questionnaire survey. In order to gain a deeper

understanding of tourist's behaviors, qualitative research method can be added to complete the picture. Using mix method in tourism research can offer better insight to a phenomenon [40]. Finally, this study focuses solely on dark tourism. It is possible to introduce other research themes that are related to dark tourism, such as nostalgia [17].

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