

# URBAN TOURISM RESEARCH METHODOLOGY —A Case Study of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Area

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper tries to apply a new and more comprehensive method to urban tourism research in an expanded field instead of only partially, unilaterally and separately focusing on the city itself. Taking the urban tourism of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao as an example, it aims at presenting a new spatial system of urban tourism research and pointing out the new orientation of urban tourism research in combination of macro level and micro level, from description to explanation. The meanings of the spatial framework construction for urban tourism study are to make clear how urban tourism studies vary with the changes of dimensions of time and space. This is a meaningful discussion because it will bring great changes to the using of literatures, the opening of research perspectives on urban tourism and the upgrading of theories, so as to create a new stage for urban tourism study.

**KEY WORDS:** urban tourism; region; research method; Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao area

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Urban tourism is a broad concept including all kinds of recreational activities that take place in cities. With the development of post-industrialization, comprehensive strength of cities has been enhanced, and the improvement of urban environment and the perfection of all kinds of service facilities are all great attractions to tourists, which includes convenient transportation, flourishing economy, superior business and shopping environment, developed technology and information, advanced service and entertainment, modern urban landscape, abundant urban culture and so on. Then more and more people choose cities as tourism destination. The tourism becomes "urbanization". Cities are becoming the combination of destination and origin, and thus they are not only the regional economic, cultural and political centers but also the regional tourism centers (ZOU and TIAN, 2002).

Europe is the origin place of urban tourism. According to the comparative research on urban tourism and urban policy of eight European cities, which was made by European Institute for Comparative Urban Research (EURICUR), it is suggested that, due to the lack of the tradition of tourism, most of the cities are still on a primary stage of the tourism development.

Likewise, the study on urban tourism in China is also on its primary stage nowadays, main of which concerns are the economic theory of urban tourism (demand and supply) (GRAEFE and VASKE, 1987; MYRIAM, 1986), the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of urban tourism (BARRY, 1997; BERTRAM, 1998; NINA and MARAT, 1996), the planning and management of urban tourism (CHEN, 1996; LI, 1996), the marketing of urban tourism (BILL and SHFFIELD, 1996), the spatial distribution of urban tourism facilities (STEPHEN, 1985), urban heritage tourism (KEVIN, 1996), the typology of urban tourists (STUART and ERLET, 1998), the statistic system of urban tourism (KARL, 2000), and the theory research of urban tourism etc. (DOUGLAS, 2001). Many subjects, such as economy, geography, tourism, ecology, sociology, architecture and planning, psychology and behavior analysis and so on, have involved in urban tourism research, which makes the urban studies diverse. In conclusion, almost all the present achievements on urban tourism studies focus on the city itself, most of which are operational discussion and description argumentation other than the outstanding studies on theory. Most of the studies are separated, isolated and random because of lack of a united theory system.

The development of urban tourism will affect not

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only the industrial structure and economy development of the city itself, but also the whole region that the urban tourism depends on. The relationship between urban tourism and site, district, city, region, nation includes many factors, such as demand, supply, development, marketing, planning, organization, operation and impacts evaluation and so on, as suggested by DOUGLAS (2001). So this paper tries to apply a new and more comprehensive method to urban tourism research in an expanded field instead of only partially, unilaterally and separately focusing on the city itself.

## 2 URBAN TOURISM RESEARCH: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Region is one of the key concepts in geography. On one hand, it is an objectively existing geographic unit, which has a defined place and common natural and cultural characteristics. As EDGAR(1990) said: "According to description, analysis, management, planning or making policies, region is deemed as a useful regional unity". On the other hand, region is a subjective construction, as LEWIS(1963) suggested: "Geographic region is the base part of reality and the transformation of the complexity of the observed facts". So the complete concept of geographic region is the combination of objective environment and subjective construction.

The so-called regional perspective is to study the development of urban tourism from a regional sense in short. The region here is not merely the geographic, administrative or economic area but the comprehensive regional space that urban tourism depends on. Urban tourism is not separated, so it must depend on the support of region in essential. Taking a defined area as an example, city is the residential area that is well developed with concentrated economic and cultural activities and all kinds of harmoniously developed industries. According to the research of tourists' behavior, tourists always travel in a node and circularity route and make "the minimum of play time to all travel time" (CHEN and BAO, 1988). This requires all the cities in the region connect and cooperate together so as to form a complete system with an integrated property. For example, the Changjiang (Yangtze) River delta, the Zhujiang (Pearl) River Delta and the Bohai Sea rim area are the top three industrial areas with dense population, well-developed economy and a lot of cities. Tourism has experienced fast development in these three areas so as to provide good economic and cultural backgrounds for

developing urban tourism. Region and urban tourism are very close related, which makes the broad and far-reaching background for urban tourism research from a regional perspective. Meanwhile, for a defined city, the region that it depends on is its most direct tourists origin hinterland. Based on the research of tourists' behavior, tourist market decreases as the distance increases following the "attenuation by distance" rule. This requires the city in the region to have a definite consciousness of the region, understand the regional market and provide corresponding urban tourism products.

Compared with the previous research methods, the regional perspective of urban tourism research views urban tourism in a broader regional context other than the city itself. In the spatial aspect, this will change the traditional way of research to regard city as the main object, and give proper attention to the space that urban tourism depends on. Considering the factors relevant to urban tourism, regional perspective checks the relation between supply and demand, development approaches, promotion strategies, planning concepts, structure of organizations, control of operation, and evaluation of impacts and so on according to the changing patterns of regions themselves. This will replace the traditional simple analysis concerning only a single unit by a spatially dynamic development concept that views the regional urban tourism development as a continuously changing process. In conclusion, the major concern of the regional perspective is the geographic spaces, which have common economic and cultural characteristics, as well as the growing and developing background of urban tourism. In another word, it is a broader dimension.

## 3 CASE STUDY

### 3.1 Location of Study Area

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao (Yue-Gang-Ao) area mentioned in this paper means "the Broad Zhujiang River Delta" that includes Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions as well as the Zhujiang River Delta area. As illuminated in Fig. 1, we can take the English letter "A" to describe the spatial relationship among these cities in the "the Broad Zhujiang River Delta" as following: the peak is the broad Guangzhou<sup>①</sup> that is on the north edge of the Zhujiang River Delta, the point on the left is Macao, which is located to the west of the Zhujiang River entrance in the southern China, the point on the right is Hong Kong that is located on the shore of the South China Sea and to the east of

① Broad Guangzhou includes Guangzhou and surrounding cities such as Zhaoqing, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan etc., and these surrounding cities have close relationship with Guangzhou in many ways as policy, economy and culture.

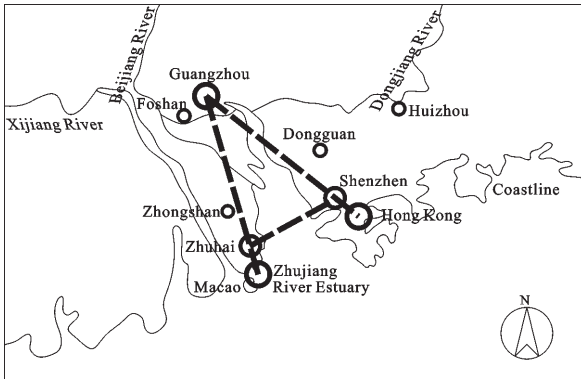


Fig. 1 Sketch of region structure of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao

the entrance of the Zhujiang River, the right point of the horizontal line is Shenzhen, and the left one is Zhuhai (HUANG, 2003).

### 3.2 Present Situation of Tourism Development

The tourism industry in Yue-Gang-Ao area has experienced a very fast development due to the abundant tourism resources, superior location and transportation conditions, outstanding tourism images (Table 1) and good cooperation history (Table 2). According to statistics, Guangdong port received  $55.63 \times 10^6$  tourists from Hong Kong at an increasing rate of 8.7% compared with last year, and received  $18.04 \times 10^6$  tourists from Macao at a increasing rate of 18% compared with last year. In 2002, there were  $3.124 \times 10^6$  tourists from Chinese mainland to Hong Kong and  $2.347 \times 10^6$  tourists to Macao through the Guangdong port. Chinese mainland has been the main tourists origin for Hong Kong and Macao. So Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao are very closely related as they have been tourists' origins and destinations each other.

Viewing from the tourism industries of the broad Zhujiang River Delta, the comprehensive cooperation of tourism industries of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao has played a particular great role on the economic growth and amalgamation of these three areas. They have achieved the cooperation of the whole area in tourists' origin, market and tourism resources. They have reasonable industry structure, the comprehensive industry layout up and down and detailed market segmentation. It is because of the advantage of geography and culture that Guangdong has been the province that receives the most of inbound tourists (especially tourists from Hong Kong and Macao) for years, also there are millions of tourists from Chinese mainland to Hong Kong and Macao, which activate the tourism and economic development of these two areas. Meanwhile, as international tourist cities, Hong Kong and Macao transfer quite a number of international tourists to Guangdong Province, especially the cities in the Zhujiang River Delta and even the farther hinterland (YANG, 2003).

As gaining great economic advantage, the tourism development of Yue-Gang-Ao area also shows another fact that with the strengthening of opening of home tourism market and international cooperation after joining WTO, foreign capital tourism industries, which have powerful financing and complete marketing networks, have gradually entered home markets and showed great competitive advantages on business tourism and outbound tourism, therefore brought new pressures and challenges on tourism industry of Yue-Gang-Ao area.

#### 3.2.1 Weakening of comparative geography advantages

Geographic factors have been the greatest advantages for Yue-Gang-Ao tourism area for a long time. Thanks

Table 1 Present situation of the tourism development of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao area

Region or city	Life cycle of tourism development	Advantage	Problem
Hong Kong	Maturity	International tourism center as well as the most popular tourism destination in Asia with intersection of oriental and western culture, developed urban services, fast development, and the honors of "moving city", "shopping paradise" and "city of dainty food"	Straitness of space, shortage of natural resources, weakness of central position in financing
Macao	Maturity	Resort for leisure and vacation as well as international tourism gambling city, with the intersection of Chinese traditional culture and Portuguese culture, and European characteristic construction, and quiet and comfort, beautiful landscape	Resort for leisure and vacation as well as international tourism gambling city, with the intersection of Chinese traditional culture and Portuguese culture, and European characteristic construction, and quiet and comfort, beautiful landscape
Zhujiang River Delta	Growing	Vast territory and beautiful mountains and rivers, lots of places of interests, resorts and historic sites, and abundant tourism resources, and unique architectures, cultures and arts, customs, dainty foods as well as special local products	Requiring to extend international market and international tourism, and change the situation of the resources stagnation, and improve the urban service industry

Table 2 Inbound tourist and revenue in 2001

No.	City	International tourism revenue (×10 <sup>6</sup> US\$)	Increasing rate (%)	Inbound tourist (×10 <sup>6</sup> )	Increasing rate (%)
1	Hong Kong	7808.00	9.4	14.0750	7.8
2	Macao	2160.00	9.5	11.5300	12.2
3	Guangzhou	1651.68	9.7	4.4237	5.1
4	Shenzhen	1510.56	6.6	4.2387	6.6
5	Zhuhai	433.80	10.1	1.0991	12.8

to the advantage of geographic location, the Zhujiang River Delta attracts numbers of tourists from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, even the Southeast Asia and Europe and America. And Hong Kong and Macao, as international cities, cater for a number of international business tourists. But with the foreign capital manufacture's moving northward and the formation of new manufacture belt at Jiangsu and the Changjiang (Yangtze) River Delta, Hong Kong's position as the financing center decreases and the number of international business tourists has been decreasing year by year. Instead, family visitors have been the main tourists of these three areas. The weakening of geographic advantages results in the lack of regional competitiveness.

### 3.2.2 Vicious cycle of incompact inner structure

Since the 1980s, the economic cooperation of Yue-Gang-Ao area is founded on spontaneous interactive base at a low level. The stagnation, malfunction and misgovernment of information result in the vicious cycles in many aspects, such as reconstruction of resources, unfavorable cycle of funds and so on. So a common problem facing all cities of Yue-Gang-Ao area is how to change the present situation to attain the collective effect of tourism development in Yue-Gang-Ao area and increase the comprehensive attractiveness of the whole area and achieve the goal of sustainable development of tourism.

## 3.3 Regional Perspective of Tourism Development

As the earliest and most mature tourism area of China, Yue-Gang-Ao area has mature tourism cooperation and high extent of attracting and utilizing foreign capital. Therefore, there is still great potential for tourism cooperation in Yue-Gang-Ao area.

### 3.3.1 Strengthening attractiveness of symbol resources

The opening of Disney World in Hong Kong in 2005, the planning of "Oriental Monte Carlo" gambling city in Macao and the development of cities cluster in the Zhujiang River Delta will constitute the new symbol resources of Yue-Gang-Ao area. The Disney World of Hong Kong is the main project of urban tourism image construction of Hong Kong as "Moving City" in the future, which is to use Disney's familiar and friendly im-

ages to attract family vacation and recreation tourists. With the opening policy of tourism in Guangdong Province and the building of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge in the future, Hong Kong will attract more and more tourists from the Zhujiang River Delta, especially the white-collars of Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Macao is famous for its gambling industry and is one of the top four gambling cities in the world. Since opening of gambling right, introducing into the competition system and building up the new image of gambling city, Macao develops comprehensive tourism by opening tourism that mainly faces to family's short time recreation or taking a holiday. No land resources restriction in Guangdong and abundant resources in the Zhujiang River Delta as well as the newly burgeoning cities belt, make the supplement of tourism resources of Hong Kong and Macao and constitute the symbol resources of the Zhujiang River Delta together—the new image of "family holiday" recreation area.

### 3.3.2 Great potential of tourists markets

The Zhujiang River Delta owns great potential of population resources. There are 38.477 × 10<sup>6</sup> citizens in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Huizhou, Dongguan and Zhongshan together. Meanwhile, the eight cities make up the cluster of cities possessing the most developed economy and the highest living level, adding Hong Kong and Macao in, all these cities lead to the blooming tourism consumption of this area. With the subscription of *Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement between Chinese Mainland and Hong Kong* (CEPA), the people of Chinese mainland were permitted to go to Hong Kong for tourism. At the same time the implement of 24-hour opening of the customs increases the inbound and outbound effectiveness of the tourists from Chinese mainland. The subscription of CEPA predicates a new historical development stage of tourism corporation of Yue-Gang-Ao area. The tourist origin exchange, cooperation and the recurrent development of Yue-Gang-Ao area will also play a greater part in activating the economy of these three areas. Therefore, Yue-Gang-Ao area will keep its superiority as long as they innovate new production and maintain the whole attractiveness of the region.

### 3.3.3 Superiority of collecting and dispersing tourists and materials

There is a developed transportation networks among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. They have the best transportation conditions in landway as well as waterway in China. Recently the tourism transport of the western part of Guangdong Province has been also improved. There are several excellent deep-water harbors, highway networks and five large international airports, which make up the superiority of collecting and dispersing tourists and materials of the three cities. Especially Guangzhou and Hong Kong, which work as the gateways and hubs of this area, play great part in organizing domestic and international tourists and materials.

## 4 ESTABLISHMENT OF URBAN TOURISM RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In conclusion, we present a spatial researching framework for urban tourism as Fig. 2. The horizontal axis means all kinds of exterior relationships of urban tourism study, in other words, the evolvement relationship from macro to micro dimension; the vertical axis means all kinds of interior relationships within urban tourism research, in other words, the study of all kinds of definite impact factors (supply and demand, development route, promoting strategy, planning concepts, organizing models, operating and controlling, impacts evaluation and so on), related to definite urban theme parks, urban recreation business district, large sports and exposition and so on). The "region-city" horizontal axis and the "theme-factor" vertical axis separate the research system into four different quadrants. They are city-factor research system, region-factor research system, region-theme research system and city-theme research system. They are different from each other in key research points. City-factor (I) and city-theme (IV) take the city as the basic study cell, and do research about the impacts factors and their developing forms within the city, which are popular research methods among present studies. Region-factor (II) and region-theme (III) do research about the impacts factors and their developing forms in a region background, which is also the point we present to study urban tourism from a regional perspective. As a whole, the system III focuses on macro research and description research. Most urban tourism studies in geography belong to this kind of research. But analyzing from the developing trends, the combination of system III and system I will be the newest trend of urban tourism studies. In other words, the new orientation of urban tourism research is in com-

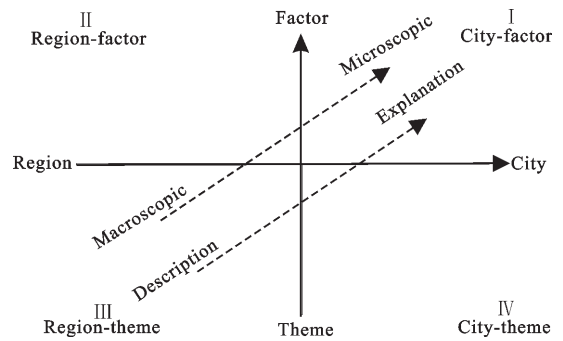


Fig. 2 Spatial system of study on urban tourism

bination of macro level and micro level, from description to explanation.

The meaning of construction of the spatial framework for urban tourism study is to make clear how urban tourism studies vary with the changes of dimensions of time and space. We confirm that this is a meaningful discussion because it will bring great changes to the using of literatures, the opening of research perspectives on urban tourism and the upgrading of theories, thus can create a new research stage for urban tourism study.

### 4.1 Combination of Macroscopic and Microscopic Researches

Besides the research on city itself, the relationship of the cities in a region and the connection between city and the region are two clues that cannot be ignored. Regionality is one of the basic characteristics of urban tourism. The urban tourism in its true meaning should be the amalgamation of the characteristics of each area from the macro regional perspective through recognizing, analyzing and concluding all the characteristics and learning from others' advantages to offset own disadvantages. Therefore, regional perspective is a reasonable and realistic way to carry out urban tourism studies.

It is the relationship between main body and multi-factors that regional perspective emphasizes. In other words, it takes more profound analysis and further affirmation on the basis of awareness of the common character of urban tourism developments. The three megapolises belts including the Changjiang River Delta megapolis belt, the Zhujiang River Delta megapolis belt and the megapolis belt around the Bohai Sea are growing bigger and bigger. The development of urban tourism of these three areas is getting more mature. All mentioned above make certain macro urban tourism regions objectively.

All these regions have their own characteristics and developing routes in tourism development, and distinguished each other. It is not hard to suppose that if we can study urban tourism in the typical regions in China according to the four systems mentioned above, and investigate their spatial structures and compare with each other as well, we will realize the development of urban tourism from a macro perspective. This will not only help us to understand the regional characteristics and diversities of urban tourism in China, and further to explain each region's individuality, but also deepen our comprehensive and concrete understanding of urban tourism development.

#### 4.2 Transformation from Description to Explanation

Because of the lack of independent principle framework, recently the study of urban tourism is fragmentary and scattered and stays on a descriptive stage, which results in the lack of united concepts, amphibolous characteristics, mass of researching objectives and diverse methods of urban tourism study. This reveals that we should turn the key point of urban tourism study to basic theories and pay much attention to the background of theories. Region is the common basis of many theories and practices. We can get rid of all kinds of exterior phenomena to search the basic theories of urban tourism directly from the regional perspective.

From a more macro regional perspective, we may get some new understanding about urban tourism, for example, how to maintain the characteristics of urban tourism, How to enhance the attractiveness of urban tourism. We may not need to be defined into the natural and cultural tourism resources of each city. As long as we do not separate with the matrix of region, we can inherit and develop the connotation of regional tourism under the new life style and new technology to construct a special atmosphere of urban tourism, in which urban tourism will experience a more comprehensive, much further and more macro development.

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