

TOURISM IN CHINA: REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

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Abstract

The evolution of national tourism policies in China has exacerbated regional disparity as reflected in the indicators of supply and demand of inbound tourism, which favour coastal at the expense of inland regions.

Resumen

La evolución de las políticas nacionales del turismo en China ha exacerbado las disparidades regionales, tal y como queda reflejado en los indicadores de oferta y demanda del turismo receptor, quienes favorecen las regiones costeras frente a las interiores.

JEL classification: C5, O53, L80

Keywords: China, Regions, Tourism

1. Population and tourism arrivals at regional level in China

In this study, we will follow approximately Wen and Tisdell (2001) in the partition of China's thirty one regions among coastal and inland, namely we will regard China's twelve coastal localities as being the following: Liaoning, Hebei, Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan. The origins of this spatial division into coastal and inland areas, used by the Chinese government in its five-year plans, date back to 1950 when China was for the first time divided into coastal and inland areas, according to the degree of industrial productivity.

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In the middle of the 1980s, the country was administratively split into three regions comprising of the East coast—which roughly coincides with what we regard here as coastal area—Middle Inland and West.

The Chinese coastal area is rich in human resources and technological capability; this coupled with its high productivity has turned the region into a producer in the secondary sector of economy whereas the hinterland is still a primary producer.

In the early 1960s, politics had in fact counterpoised this incipient economic gap between inland and littoral because the coastal area was neglected on the grounds of its geographical proximity to the then enemies of China, namely the US and the USSR. Indeed, under the Maoist fiscal system, known as “control over revenue and spending”, Shanghai and Liaoning (coastal localities) kept only 10% and 18% of their respective revenues in 1972 whereas Yunnan, Guizhou, Anhui, Xinjian, Gansu and Tibet (inland provinces) retained all their revenues and subsidies (Tisdell and Wen 1991).

With Deng Xiaoping’s 1978 reform, the policy of investing in inland China so as to build up “the third frontier” and resist the US and USSR shifted to the opening to the outside world and “the ladder step” doctrine, favouring allocation of investment to the regions which enjoyed comparative advantage of capital productivity and externalities, in other words, to the East coast. The prospect was for the benefits to trickle down to the central and western regions. Indeed, the coastal metropolises of Guangdong and Shanghai started to exhibit high rates of capital accumulation partly because these cities have always constituted the pole of attraction of overseas Chinese, who gradually became the most important source of foreign direct investment. The creation of the majority of township and village enterprises on the coast as well as of the four Special Economic Zones (the latter as “experiments to capitalism”), the opening, in 1984-85, of 14 coastal cities and three river deltas (Yangtze, Pearl and Minnan) and led to the coastal regions receiving

over 90% of the foreign direct investment in China from 1979 to 1990 as opposed to 10% the inland regions. (Wen and Tisdell, 1996a,b) Consequently, there was rise in disparity between coast and interior. Chen and Fleisher (1996) argued that in the period 1978-1993 there was convergence of per capita income within the inland and non-inland groups but not between them, predicting that China's overall regional inequality is likely to modestly decline but that the income differential between coastal and non-coastal regions is likely to increase. On the contrary, the World Bank showed the disparity within rural China as gradually declining between 1978 and 1982 but ascending steadily thereafter.

Presently, the littoral area as was defined hosts 41.3% of China's population and produces 54% of its national income while occupies 13.6% of the nation's land area.

We examine the foreign tourist receipts in the year 2000, which generates the following classification of the top eight localities, all coastal regions: Guangdong, Beijing, Shanghai, Fujian, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Liaoning, Yunnan. Only the eighth province is an inland one, while all the coastal provinces together account for 84.8% of the nation's total. The situation had however improved compared to 1995, when out of the 13 localities with foreign tourist receipts of over US\$100, only 3 were in the interior, namely Yunnan, Shaanxi and Sichuan (only Yunnan among the top eight), whereas in 2000, on top of Yunnan, Shaanxi and Sichuan, also Hunan, Heilongjiang, Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Henan and Chongqing managed to overcome the barrier of \$100 in terms of foreign exchange receipts.

Table 1. Geographical and demographic ratios and Foreign tourist arrivals and income

Locality	Area (1000km ²)	Population (million)	Tour. Arrivals (10000)	Rank	Tour. Income (10000 US\$)	Rank
Beijing	16.8	13.82	237.96	1	276 800	2
Tianjin	11.3	10.1	32.14	16	23 176	12
Hebei	190	64.84	35.9	14	14 190	16
Shanxi	156	31.09	11.66	26	4 991	29
In. Mongolia	1183	23.07	38.74	13	12 645	18
Liaoning	145.7	41.16	50.05	10	38 248	7
Jilin	187	26.1	19.19	20	5 804	26
Heilongjiang	469	37.28	50.47	9	18 905	14
Shanghai	6.185	13.58	143.9	3	161 267	3
Jiangsu	102.6	71.1	98.15	4	72 384	5
Zhejiang	101.8	43.43	64.75	6	51 397	6
Anhui	139	60.7	16.79	22	8 621	23
Fujian	120	32.61	49.75	11	89 382	4
Jiangxi	166.6	41.05	5.54	29	6 234	24
Shandong	153	90.79	48.01	12	31 513	9
Henan	167	92.56	18.21	21	12 390	19
Hubei	187.4	58.25	35.74	15	14 572	15
Hunan	210	64.28	15.79	23	22 078	13
Guangdong	186	69.61	212.85	2	411 221	1
Guangxi	236.3	45.89	50.8	8	30 661	10
Hainan	34	7.34	9.37	27	10 883	21
Chongqing	82	30.9	19.29	19	13 840	17
Sichuan	488	84.28	19.97	18	12 187	20
Guizh.	176.1	36.576	7.12	28	6 092	25
Yunnan	394	40.42	66.59	5	33 902	8
Tibet	1220	2.62	13.58	25	5 226	28
Shaanxi	205	35.43	58.48	7	28 025	11
Gansu	450	24.67	14.34	24	5 463	27
Qinghai	720	4.88	1.46	30	720	30
Ningxia	66.4	5.31	0.58	31	272	31
Xinjiang	1600	16.89	20.84	17	9 494	22

Source of data: I.M.F. (2003) and China National Tourist Office 2002a.

Note that arrivals do not necessarily refer to actual number of people

travelling. One person visiting the same country several times during the year is counted each time as a new arrival. Also, receipts and expenditure for the cost of the international transport itself are excluded.

In terms of foreign arrivals, the top eight provinces are Beijing, Guangdong, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Yunnan, Zhejiang, Shaanxi and Guangxi. Note the two exceptions of inland provinces, Yunnan and Shaanxi, which occupy the fifth and seventh position respectively in the ranking. Yunnan is famous for its minority cultures; Xishuangbanna, a tropical mountain in the southwest of the province, whose original tribes are related to ethnic groups in Burma and northern Thailand, represents an exotic landscape for many foreigners, Oakes (1998). Shaanxi is renowned for its army of terracotta warriors, in its capital, Xi'an, which constitutes the starting point of the Silk Road. Furthermore, its Stele Forest is the largest stone stele collection in the world, housing over 2,300 tablets and inscriptions from many Chinese dynasties, Ma (1996).

Among the total number of inbound tourists (rather than just foreign tourists which we saw before) for each locality for the year 2000, Guangdong province enjoys the largest number of tourist arrivals. However, comparing this with the number of foreign tourist arrivals, we realise that it is Beijing which attracts more foreign tourists than Guangdong; therefore we conclude that it is the number of Chinese compatriots which places Guangdong in the first place. Indeed, consulting the relevant statistics for the year 1999, for which the breakdown is available, we note that Guangdong attracted 1.487.716 foreign tourists against a total of 7.025.420 from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, Zhongguo Lüyou Nianjian (2000).

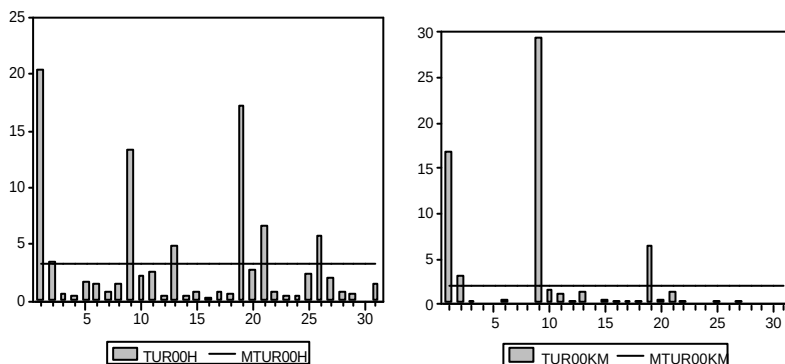
The history of emigration from the Pearl River Delta dates back some 1000 years, Guangdong province being the hometown of 10 million Chinese descendants abroad. Furthermore, the percentage of tourists from Taiwan, which provides a major source of international arrivals, exhibit heavy concentration on Zhejiang, Fujian and Shandong where in the year 1999 they reached 9.3%, 15.2% and 11.5% respectively in the level of tourist arrivals to each province as a whole (Guojia Lüyouju 2001) and, according to our

own calculations, 6.5%, 10.7% and 2% in the level of major cities of the respective provinces, Zhongguo Lüyou Nianjian (2000).

The regions which go over the mean are Beijing, Shanghai, Fujian, Jiangsu, Guangxi, and Zhejiang all of which are coastal regions and the only inland province near the mean is once more Yunnan.

There is some change in the situation once we consider total tourist arrivals divided in the first instance by the population and then by the area of each region. In per capita terms, the capital, Beijing, leaves Guangdong at the second place, and then follow Shanghai and Hainan (the island being below the medium in absolute terms). Recently separated from Guangdong Hainan has developed its seaside tourism but suffers from lack of transportation infrastructure.

Graph 1. Tourists by locality (2000) in per capita and density terms



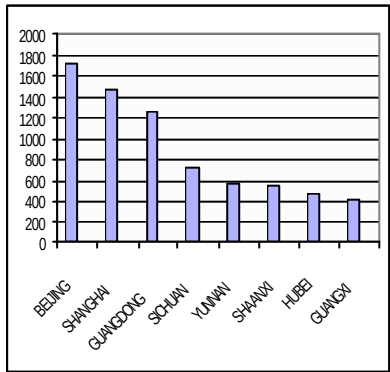
Source: Zhongguo Lüyou Nianjian 2000.

Also, in per capita terms, the inland province of Tibet exceeds the medium. Tibet used to represent a rather special case not having been listed in the Yearbook probably on the grounds of the political turmoil but this is no longer so; the hotels of the capital Lhasa account for China's highest percentage of foreign visitors. (93% in 1991 according to Gormsen 1995) and the province stands

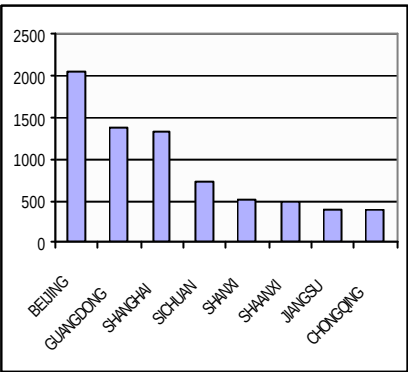
out in terms of continuation of a product-oriented supply for inbound travel, which is restricted to package tours, a specific choice of flights plus a designated accommodation place, so-called “contact hotel”. This last constraint is often bypassed by the travellers, who upon arrival switch to less expensive hotels, Gormsen (1995).

In density terms (i.e. dividing through the area of each region), the municipality of Shanghai ejects the national average high up displacing Beijing and Guangdong. So, Guangdong falls at the third place followed by Tianjin (which is below the medium in absolute terms). No other province goes beyond the average line.

Graph 2. Top origins of internal tourists



Graph 3. Top provinces by destination of internal tourists



Source of data Guojia Lüyouju 2001.

We subsequently focus on internal tourism, examining first the top localities senders of internal tourists which differ from the top regions of arrival of inbound tourists in that the big urban centres of Beijing and Shanghai, towards which tourists who have entered the country from another region are expected to head, precede Guangdong. After the latter, inland provinces follow before another coastal province (Guanxi) appears. Conversely, the right hand side graph depicts the number of internal tourist arrivals sorted by locality of origin and expectedly Guangdong regains the second place.

Given that travel on foot remains the main mode of access to China by international visitors (68% of pedestrian visitors entered the country in 1999, Mak (2003), we would have expected Guanxi to be in the lead of localities of origin for internal tourist arrivals, being the only coastal region which shares land frontiers with neighbouring countries; we would intuitively consider it as the major point of departure to the rest of the country of transiting travellers who have entered China on foot. However, out of the 72.3 million visitors who travelled to China in 1999, only 27 million (or 37%) were tourists, hence the vast majority of arrivals remain one-day excursionists, who count as visitors and not tourists and it has to be these non-overnight travellers who come and go on foot, crossing China's frontier on a day-return trip. That is why Guangxi falls to the eighth place.

2. Tourism supply at regional level

Historical review of hotel accommodation

Tourist supply is almost invariably associated with the availability of hotels. Some 25 years ago, most cities had only one or two hotels, built before World War II by Westerners or during the 1950s under Soviet influence; they had been especially designed for state leaders or foreign experts working in China. No wonder hotel infrastructure and service facilities were deficient when the country opened its doors to tourists in 1978. That year, there were only about 76 192 bed spaces in 203 hotels of which only 60% were suitable for accommodating overseas visitors. In the second reform year, 1979, the State Council invested 360 million Yuan to build 30 hotels, with a total of 17000 beds, as well as ten additional joint-venture hotels. The opening in 1982 of the first successful such hotel (a Sino-Soviet venture), triggered a boom in the total contracted amount of foreign investment in the sector. About one third of the total direct foreign investment in China, in the period 1979 to 1988, was destined to hotels. Consequently, by 1986, China came to own 500 tourist hotels graded as either "de luxe" (mostly joint ventures and some of State Guest Houses), first or second class with a total of 175000 beds. (Zhang 2003 and Zhang G. 1995) Since then, the initial dearth of

hotel establishments was soon replaced by an excess, which obliged the State Council to restrain the second wave of hotel expansion in China. Unavoidably, by the end of 1999, there were 7035 hotels with 889,430 rooms; the total number of hotel rooms had increased by over 57 times in the period 1978-1999.

Distribution of hotels over the Chinese territory

Table 2. Tourism supply-side indicators for the 12 coastal regions in China with comparison with the whole of China, 1999

Coastal Locality	Hotel Rooms %	Hotel Beds %	Hotels %	Travel agencies %	State-owned hotels%	Hotels with over 500 rooms %
Beijing	7.70	7.15	5.33	5.87	4.63	22.45
Tianjin	1.21	1.15	1.19	2.50	0.82	1.02
Hebei	2.49	2.62	2.43	4.31	3.72	3.06
Liaoning	4.01	3.95	3.97	5.05	3.41	5.10
Shanghai	5.50	5.04	4.07	5.39	3.81	15.31
Jiangsu	5.45	5.28	5.71	6.13	6.52	5.10
Zhejiang	5.56	5.39	5.76	6.96	4.19	2.04
Fujian	2.48	2.41	3.18	3.82	2.17	0.00
Shandong	4.57	4.62	5.46	4.08	6.49	2.04
Guangdong	22.34	22.97	16.96	6.36	13.16	25.51
Guangxi	3.18	3.24	16.96	3.49	3.35	1.02
Hainan	2.96	2.89	3.35	2.51	1.66	2.04
% Ratio of coastal to total area	67.47	66.72	74.37	56.48	53.95	84.70

Source: Personal elaboration based on Zhongguo Lüyou Nianjian 2000.

Virtually three quarters of China's hotels are situated on the coast, a higher degree of concentration than in 1992 (then virtually 7/10, Wen and Tisdell (1996a). In addition, almost 17 in every 20 hotels with more than 500 beds are situated in non-inland regions (practically equal to the one in 1992). Approximately 2/3 of hotel rooms and hotel beds are gathered in the coast, which indicates a degree of concentration somewhat less heavy than in 1992 (then

approximately 7/10), probably compensating for the greater extent of congestion of hotel building in the area compared to 1992.

The degree of imbalance in localisation of tourist supply on the coast is less marked than in the case of demand; that is because, as mathematical treatment by means of indices of regional partition confirmed (refer to the original: Atherinos, 2003), supply side indices are less partial in favour of the coastal areas than general economic indicators which in turn, as we recall, have proven less skewed than typical demand parameters. That is probably due to the high productivity of the region: From a total of 98 hotels with more than 500 rooms in the year 2000, only 15 are located inland, Guojia Lüyouju (2000) while it is known that bigger hotels can more easily operate on economies of scale since according to econometric modelling in the domain, the correlation coefficient for the number of hotel rooms and hotel income is as high as 0.92 with the coefficient between tourist receipts and hotel income being almost unity, Wen and Tisdell (1996a); therefore, coastal areas obtain a larger fraction of tourist receipts compared to their input in hotel rooms and hotel staff and that translates into an extra profit margin i.e. higher outputs per unit of input of tourist supply.

The mere ranking of the first eight provinces in the number of hotels in 1999 is quite revealing in that respect as it shows the relatively more important role of inland provinces compared to demand side parameters: Guangdong, Yunnan, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shandong, Beijing, Hubei and Shanghai. Yunnan is the second province in the number of hotels for the whole of China, while it ranked sixth in total arrivals in the same year. More impressively, the inland province of Hubei takes up the seventh position, even ahead of Shanghai. This could be partially attributed to the Three Gorges on the Long River, an attraction which Hubei shares with Sichuan. Equally interestingly, Xinjiang province occupies a middle position in the classification, ahead of the classic coastal destinations of Hebei and Tianjin. This can be attributed to the increasing border trade and travel between Xinjiang and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Yu (1995). It is therefore evident that in order to

explain the economics of tourist supply, response to both manmade and natural resources must be considered.

3. Econometric models of tourism arrivals at regional level

The regional models we have elaborated for total tourism arrivals are OLS equations of an undated sample (exclusively containing data of the year 2000 or 1999), for 31 regions.

The variables included in the model are:

- TOUR= total arrivals of inbound tourists in the year 2000 for each one of the 31 localities.
- HOTEL= the total number of hotels per locality in the previous year (1999)

Model A: $\text{Ln}(\text{TOUR00}) = 0.08 * \text{Ln}(\text{HOTEL99}) + 0.93 * \text{Ln}(\text{TOUR99})$ (3.95) (32.8)	$R^2 = 0.98$
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We also include the number of tourist arrivals again of the previous year so as to account for the “word-of-mouth effect”, that is to say for the effect of tourists communicating their experience, overall positive, as travellers to China to citizens of their own country who, as a result, visit China in the following years. (Introducing the endogenous variable for longer lag periods had a small effect.)

The first regression was run in logarithmic terms as is typical in such models, Syriopoulos and Sinclair (1993).

Model B: $\text{TOUR00KM} = 0.95 * \text{TOUR99KM} + 1.55 * \text{DEN} + 0.048 * \text{HOTEL99KM}$ (44.6) (16.0) (4.34)	$R^2 = 0.99$
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The second treats the same equation but in terms of density of arrivals (i.e. the absolute value of the variable is divided by the

area). A dummy variable (DEN) is introduced to represent the entry point factor of the three major airports, in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, all of which function as the major gateways to the country as we already commented. The coefficients of all independent variables are positive, as anticipated, both explanatory variables have a significant impact on the explained variable and the coefficient of determination is very close to 1 for both the first two models.

5. Conclusions

The Chinese coastal provinces have experienced spectacular economic progress for reasons such as the attraction of foreign direct investment and the evolution of Special Economic Zones fomented by the strong family connections with prosperous overseas Chinese and compatriots mainly in Guangdong and to a certain extent Fujian and Zhejiang. Metropolitan cities like Guangdong are inflated by the visits of compatriots while Chengdu, Guilin, Xi'an and Lhasa inland provinces are far less appealing to them, Gormsen (1990). By contradiction but while overseas Chinese exhibit a consumption level 70% higher than that of other foreign tourists, Chinese compatriots and overseas Chinese visiting China, spend less on average because they may subscribe to highly discounted package tours or stay with relatives, Lam and Mao (2001) and Tisdell and Wen (1991).

Presently, China's seaside zone hosts 41.3% of the population and produces about 54% of its national income while it occupies less than 14% (13.6%) of the nation's land area. The ratio of tourist arrivals in the coast with respect to the national total is 79.7% for the year 1999, almost double the percentage of the population living by the coast (41.3%) in the same year. The coastal region in 1999 supplied 84% of the total tourist receipts and 82% of the total hotel income (Zhongguo Lüyou Nianjian 2000) maintaining in the former case practically the same quota over the last five years, since it accounted for 86.5% in 1994, and somewhat reducing it in the latter case since it used to represent 87.2%. (Wen and Tisdell,

1997) Furthermore, tourist receipts in the coastal area per inhabitant are about twice those for China as a whole and that has remained practically the same over the five-year period 1995 to 1999 as we calculated it to be 2.2 for the year 1999 while Wen and Tisdell (1997) give it as 2.1 in 1994.

We thus appreciate how the development of tourism has accentuated the socioeconomic gap between the twelve coastal regions and the rest of the country. This is entirely true for demand side variables (tourist arrivals, tourist receipts) which are biased towards the coast to a much greater extent than the socioeconomic indicators. (GDP, population, area) As to supply side variables—typically the number of hotels—, although in general they conform to the same heterogeneity pattern, and the coast enjoys higher output per unit of tourist supply due to large scale economy, they appear to be less prejudiced against the interior. At the same time, during the seventh five-year plan (1985-1990), investment in tourism exceeded the objectives; excessive emphasis was put on the construction of first class hotels, resulting in overcapacity in expensive and shortage in low-priced accommodation, Wen and Tisdell (1991). Chinese investors overestimated the demand for luxury hotels on the preconception that high grade hotels are likely to be profitable acquisitions. And of course imbalanced geographical partition of hotels is preconditioning the crowding in the tourist poles of the coastal regions.

Sites for sightseeing are not at all scarce in the inland region as a whole; therefore it is not intrinsically disadvantaged in comparison with the hinterland. Indeed, the Chinese destinations included in the World Heritage are almost equally partitioned between coast and interior. The same is true for the eighty-four Scenic Wonders and Historical Sites Approved by China's State Council in 1982 and 1988 as well as the forty most favoured tourist attractions.²

² Only the seven "key tourist cities" which include only one inland city, Xi'an, are heavily biased at the expense of the interior (Xu 1999).

The econometric analysis confirms that the entry point factor, reflected in the exceeded capacities of the airports in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, is an essential cause of an unbalanced distribution of tourists. So, unlike natural attractions, the manmade ones distort the already biased distribution even more. Apart from the general trends there are region-specific tourist appeals. Guangdong and Fujian are major sources of immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan and short haul international visitors have favoured these places owing to genealogical reasons.

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