



## Residents' Attitude towards Tourists in Lanzhou, China

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Received 02/10/2021, Revised 03/02/2022, Accepted 09/05/2022

DOI: 10.14456/jpv.2022.12

### Abstract

Tourists have taken the most essential role in the development of the tourism industry in Lanzhou. However, the arrival of tourists has some positive and negative impacts on local people's life. As the characteristic of residents, they are in the position to either offer support or avoid the future development of the tourism industry. So, it is necessary to conduct a study for measuring the attitudes of Lanzhou residents toward tourists and figure out influenced factors to provide advice for the development of the Chinese market. This study adopted individual in-depth interviews which is one of the qualitative approaches to collecting residents' attitudes towards tourists in Lanzhou. And the results of the the interviews were entered into NVivo 11 system for content analysis. All 22 residents were interviewed in this study to describe their thoughts and opinions toward tourists.

In conclusion, the majority of respondents in this study were inclined to support tourists to visit Lanzhou, holding positive attitudes toward tourists. The findings of the study showed that there are 6 factors that influenced residents' attitudes toward tourists: physical distance, the length of residence, economic dependency, seasonality, age, and income. And the findings can provide references for the improvement of the tourism industry of Lanzhou.

**Keywords:** 1. Resident's attitude, 2. tourist, 3. Lanzhou residents

### 1. Introduction



Lanzhou is one of the most important cities in Northwest China. Lanzhou is a business card on the Silk Road. Due to its geographical location, the precious cultural heritage has been widely regarded as one of the popular tourist destinations. In order to provide a better tourism experience and attract more tourists to Lanzhou, the government has been committed to finding diversified methods, aiming to make Lanzhou a tourism product destination for sustainable tourists. On the one hand, the government is committed to strengthening its functions to build a tourism and leisure center and upgrading related infrastructure. On the other hand, relying on the historical and cultural foundation of Lanzhou, the government further explores and expands the innovative connotation of tourism and leisure, and enhances the attractiveness of tourism to tourists. With the joint efforts of the government and social organizations, Lanzhou, as a tourism and leisure destination, has developed more coping capabilities to effectively cope with challenges and changes in the world. Tourists have played the most important role in the development of tourism in Lanzhou. Tourists bring eye-catching business opportunities and economic benefits. The government is also aware of the importance of the tourism market and is committed to enriching the image of Lanzhou and increasing its tourist attraction to attract more tourists. In fact, although attracting more tourists is conducive to promoting the development of tourism in Lanzhou, as the number of tourists increases, certain changes have positive and negative impacts on the local people.

Residents have permanent status in the community where they live and are involved in the development of society. Especially in the place where tourism activities take place, residents are in the position to either offer support or avoid the future development of the tourism industry. Therefore, it is important to figure out residents' attitudes towards tourism and the impact caused by tourism, in order to help developers to plan and implement policies in the future. For the past four decades, many researchers have included residents' attitude in researches of tourism and examined residents' attitude towards impacts and development of tourism. Lepp (2007) pointed out that residents' attitude towards tourism indicated whether they enjoyed living in the tourist destination and represented the level of tourism's appropriateness. And residents' attitudes towards tourism are based on individual attributes and social background, influenced by intrinsic (e.g. the length of residency, physical distance, and economic dependency), extrinsic (e.g. the type of tourists, and seasonality), and demographic (e.g.



age, gender, and education level) factors (Draper, Woosnam, & Norman, 2011; Pavlić, I., Portolan, A., & Puh, B. (2020).; Chiang and Yeh, 2011).

When residents take a positive attitude towards tourism, they are more likely to be supportive of the development of tourism industry and be willing to engage in decision-making of tourism. On the contrary, if residents consider tourism in a negative way, planners and developers of tourism industry will encounter obstacles in the establishment and the operation (Ambroz, 2008). In addition, holding a positive attitude towards tourism, which means that residents are optimistic about the development of tourism, can minimize the potential frictions between residents and tourists (Candrea, 2011).

The relationship between tourists and residents has become the most complex problem during the process of tourism development (Ambroz, 2008). In previous studies, tourists and residents are described as the opposites in tourism, for example, residents work at productive processes within the destination while tourists enjoy those products (Cronauer, 2012). Actually, on the one hand, most of residents affirm that tourists can bring multi-benefits to the destination and make contribution to the economic growth (Bhujell, el, 2021). And residents' passion for tourists is related to how many economic benefits they derive from the tourists, the more economic benefits residents get, the more positive attitudes they have (Woosnam, 2012). Besides, interacting with tourists is also recognized as the best perceived positive impact of tourism in some places, which can help residents to communicate with exotic tourists and learn more knowledge (Candrea, 2012). On the other hand, residents are concerned about the negative impacts brought by tourists on the environment and society, such as traffic congestion, crowdedness, and air pollution (Hong, 2008; Vong, 2008; Choe, 2015). And there existed a dispute between the residents and tourists in allocating spaces and using recourses, residents thought that tourists occupying a lot of natural and social resources which belong to them will influence the quality of normal living (Lankford & Howard, 1993; Li, 2015). Summarizing the findings of former studies, the opinions and feelings of residents about tourism are affected by the behavior and action of tourists, and residents' attitude towards tourists also reflects their intention to support tourism or not. Andriotis and Vanughan (2003) stated that resident acceptance of tourists has a significant influence on tourism development, and a friendly attitude held by residents could attract more tourists.



## 2. Research Objectives

The major objectives of this study are to:

1. Measure the Lanzhou residents' attitude towards tourists.
2. Identify the factors which influence residents' attitude towards tourists.
3. Summary research findings and provide implication for future tourism development in Lanzhou.

## 3. Literature Review

According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the number of domestic tourists in 2019 was 6.01 billion, an increase of 8.4% over the previous year. China's national tourism revenue was 5,725.1 billion yuan, an increase of 11.7% over the previous year. The number of inbound tourists was 145.31 million, an increase of 2.9% over the previous year (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Therefore, China is the world's largest tourism market, and China also has the world's largest tourist group.

Residents in tourist destinations, as an important interest group in tourism development, play a decisive role in the development of tourism (Long Hui, 2013). In order to promote the sustainable development of tourist destinations, the local government needs to fully consider the residents' perception while driving its functions, and listen to more residents' suggestions on tourism development.

### Attitude

Ambroz (2008) found that because of the difference of cultural background and habits, cultural interaction between hosts and guests influenced locals' attitude towards tourists to a certain extent. When residents regard tourists as troublemakers and invaders of the community, it is hard for them to treat tourists with respect. Wang et al. (2009) pointed out that although most of residents, who worked in tourism-related companies or received economic benefits from the tourism industry, usually are supportive to the development of tourism, and their attitudes are affected by bad impacts because directed contact with tourists at work. Woosnam (2012) built a structural model of emotional solidarity based on Durkheim's theory and put forward three hypothesizes to explored existing relationship between tourists and residents. The results showed that shared



beliefs, shared behavior and interaction are related to emotional solidarity which can influence people's attitude. Woosnam (2012) further proved that resident's passion for tourists depends on how much economic benefits they derive from the tourism industry, and the degree of emotional closeness could predict resident's attitude towards tourists. Locals who feel close to tourists are more likely to recognize contribution made by tourism, thereby holding positive attitude towards the arrival of tourists.

### Conceptual framework

Socio-demographic factors include age, gender, education and income. Extrinsic factors consist of tourism development state, type of tourists and seasonality. And intrinsic factors comprise physical distance, economic dependence and length of residents. All of those factors are incorporated into a framework to illuminate the interrelationships between the variables. The details of the factors are listed in the figure below.

### 4. Methodology

Given the nature of this study, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate methodology to collect and assess residents' attitudes toward tourists in Lanzhou. The aim of this study is to gain a complete, rich, and in-depth description of residents' attitude, thereby obtaining corresponding analysis results, rather than predicting or identifying causal relationship. As Savenye and Robinson (1996), qualitative research usually was conducted in a natural setting, and typically included highly detailed rich descriptions of human behaviors and opinions. And Lepp (2007) indicated that "the qualitative methods can produce a more detailed assessment compared to quantitative methods". Therefore, qualitative methodology, which sufficiently captures multiple realities of resident's attitude as well as attain nuanced analysis results, can properly be used in this study and achieve the basic object of the research (Proyrungrol, 2015). And individual in-depth interviews were adopted in this study to collect Lanzhou residents' feelings and opinions of tourists. The in-depth interview is an effective tool in order to obtain a rich understanding of residents' feelings and to answer the question why residents adopt positive or negative attitudes towards tourists (Tieman, 2011; Paraskevaidis and Andriotis, 2017). Besides, all interviews were undertaken face-to-face without prior practice, which can help to bring the interviewer into contact with interviewees and be beneficial for attaining direct description from residents.



Semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was considered suitable for understanding residents' attitude towards tourists in Lanzhou. Because, as reported by Paraskevaidis and Andriotis (2016), it allowed residents to freely express their opinions on broader extent and ensured first-hand description of residents' attitudes toward tourists. As indicated in literature review, residents' attitudes mainly are affected by three kinds of factors, respectively socio-demographic factors (age, gender, education, income), intrinsic factors (physical distance, economic dependence, length of residents), and extrinsic factors (the stage of tourism development, type of tourists, seasonality). Thus, in the first section of the interview, questions center on individual socio-demographic attributes of residents, including gender, age, education and income. And the second section focuses on asking residents' actual attitude towards tourists, and aims at figuring out the correlation between influenced factors and attitudes. At first, residents were questioned about their overall attitudes toward tourists. Subsequent questions then addressed specific factors to ask residents for more details. And all of questions are prepared in bilingual (Chinese and English) in advance of the interview, which can make sure the interview goes smoothly according to the procedures.

### Data Analysis

The results of interviews were translated into text and entered into the NVivo 11 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia) system for content analysis. NVivo is a frequently- used computer software to assist in the management and analysis of qualitative data (Biley, 2008). This software can help researchers to reduce a great number of manual tasks to obtain more intuitive analysis results, giving them more time to discover tendencies and derive multiple conclusions. And also it can avoid the loss of the data information and effectively organize the original source context needed in the study (Koerber, 2011). In the study, the information of interviews was pre-coded and initially entered into nodes within the NVivo program. According to the design of interview, each influenced factor then becomes a node. The nodes were fleshed out as data were extracted from each interview referring to the same factor. Thus sorted data will be further analyzed in order to achieve the purpose of the study.



## 5. Finding and Discussion

According to interview results of 22 residents, this study examined factors that influence residents' attitudes towards tourists, including socio-demographic factors (age, gender, education, income), intrinsic factors (physical distance, economic dependence, length of residents), and extrinsic factors (the stage of tourism development, type of tourists, seasonality). In general, 91% of the residents who were interviewed in this study held positive attitudes toward tourists and were willing to welcome tourists to Lanzhou, even though there were some negative influences.

95% of interviewees agreed that tourists brought substantial economic profits and made a great economic contribution to Lanzhou. It also indicated that because of those positive economic benefits, most of the interviewees were willing to hold a positive attitude towards tourists. However, some negative economic impacts which affected local people's lives were mentioned in this study, such as inflation of prices and unconventional marketing approaches.

This study also found that seasonal variation was negatively correlated with respondents' attitudes toward tourists and tourism. During the period of the high season, the great influx of tourists had greatly negative impacts on local people's lives, including severe traffic congestion, overcrowding and increased workload.

The majority of interviewees in this study had high agreement on welcoming tourists to visit Lanzhou, and the findings only revealed that respondents with lower income were more sensitive with price fluctuation which caused by tourists than high-income respondents. On the basis of the findings of this study, some factors did not have significant relationship with Lanzhou residents' attitude towards tourists. Educational level and gender are not the factors which influencing Lanzhou residents' attitude towards tourists in this study. As the pillar industry of Lanzhou's economy, tourism industry is closely related to local people's lives. As a result, the attitudes of respondents with different level of education or gender make no difference toward tourists.

## 6. Conclusion

Over the past few decades, tourists have taken an important role in the development of tourism industry in Lanzhou. With the increasing number of tourists, some changes have positive and negative impacts on local people. As a result, understanding



local people's attitudes toward tourists is essential to sustain the development of tourism market in Lanzhou and is conducive to make recommendation for the future. This study interviewed 22 Lanzhou residents' attitudes toward mainland tourists and examined what factors have influence on these attitudes. In conclusion, the majority of respondents in this study were inclined to support tourists to visit Lanzhou, holding positive attitudes toward tourists. With regard to the findings of this study, there are 6 factors which have influence on Lanzhou residents' attitudes toward tourists, respectively physical distance, the length of residence, economic dependency, seasonality, age and income. And also 4 kinds of factors which were tested in this study are not related with residents' attitudes: the development stage of tourism, the type of tourists, gender and educational level.

This study gives insight into Lanzhou residents' authentic thoughts towards tourists and their perceived impacts. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, some practice implications were provided to the tourism development of Lanzhou in the future. First of all, implementing viable development planning is beneficial to achieve sustainable tourism development in Lanzhou. As a result, the government should consider current conditions of Lanzhou as well as potential benefits and costs, such as social carrying capacity, economic benefits and socio-cultural influences, when formulating planning of tourism market development. And also the Lanzhou government should pay more attention to strengthen the construction of infrastructure and improve the capability to protect local environment, in order to reduce barriers of tourism development. Secondly, residents' acceptance of tourists is crucial to sustain the development of tourism market, so the Lanzhou government should take residents' opinions or suggestions into consideration in the process of decision-making. Understanding residents' perceived positive and negative impact from tourists and encouraging local people to participate in decision-making should be considered by the government in the future. Besides, the government also should guarantee the basic rights and sustain the standard of living of local people, avoiding new social problems caused by tourism development. Thirdly, regarding some unconventional and illegal methods of business operation, related regulations should be introduced by the government to standardize the tourism market in Lanzhou. Improving the standardization of tourism industry is not only good for the healthy development of the industry, but also conducive to ensure legal rights and interests of mainland tourists. Additionally, the government should make efforts to



control the price fluctuation of some products so as to decrease the negative impacts on local people's lives. Fourthly, according to the responses of Lanzhou residents, the cultural difference is the main obstacle in the communication between tourists and local people. Therefore, in order to build a closer relationship between tourists and Lanzhou residents, the government is supposed to take corresponding measures. On one hand, the Lanzhou government should cooperate with tourism organizations, such as tourism departments and travel agencies, to strengthen civic education for tourists before they travel to Lanzhou. tourists need to know local custom and the civilization norms in Lanzhou to avoid conflict with local people in their trips. And public-service advertisings and posters made by publicity departments should be displayed in conspicuous places which can be noticed by tourists to remind them to behave in appropriate manners. On the other hand, the government should be dedicated to erase local people's negative impression towards tourists so as to improve understanding. Tourism planners are supposed to advertise positive impacts and economic contribution brought by tourists via social media and social networks. Finally, following the respondents' attitude that welcoming more tourists to Lanzhou, the government is required to take responsibility to promote the development of tourism industry, diversifying tourism forms and enhancing tourism attraction. tourism planners should develop a variety of tourism activities to highlight regional and cultural features. Moreover, tourism operators should conform to industry regulation and provide the high quality of service to tourists. High-standard tourism experience as well as interesting tourism projects can improve the image of Lanzhou tourism, thereby attracting more tourists to Lanzhou.

### Limitation and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. Firstly, this study only interviewed 22 Lanzhou residents to describe their attitudes toward tourists. The sample size is relatively small, although it is available in qualitative studies. Secondly, this study focused on only ten factors which have influence on residents' attitude towards tourists according to previous studies. Other factors, such as job dependency (Li & Wan, 2013) and decision involvement (Allen & Gibson, 1987) were not tested in this thesis. Thirdly, this thesis only used the qualitative approach as research methodology.



In the future, more related factors should be examined in the studies, which will help to get a comprehensive view of resident's attitude towards tourists. And future studies should increase the number of respondents, collecting more residents' attitude towards tourists. Besides, researchers can take other kinds of tourists as the investigation subjects of studies, finding out Lanzhou residents' attitude towards other tourists. It will contribute to enrich the research of Lanzhou tourism. Except for the qualitative approach, quantitative methodology also should be considered in future studies. Combining two kinds of research methods will be conducive to refine the research in this field.

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