



## Progress in Chinese hotel research: A review of SSCI-listed journals



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### ABSTRACT

As China becomes a major market in the global hotel industry, a growing number of research studies related to Chinese hotel have recently been published in leading journals. Based on the existing reviews, this study aims to review Chinese hotel research from a different perspective. This is the first study to review publications on Chinese hotel studies which were published in the listed journals of Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). A systematic approach was used to analyze 93 articles, and a large increase in Chinese hotel research was observed in the most recent five years (2009–2013). The findings of the most popular publication channels, as well as those of the most active scholars and institutions in this field, are presented to provide valuable information for academic stakeholders. On the basis of the research foci analysis, the gaps between research and industry were identified, which indicated trends and future research priorities.

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### 1. Background

Despite a modest slowdown of China's economic growth in recent years, Chinese hotel industry is still forging ahead at a rapid pace of development. Hotel operators both in the country and abroad are trying to seek for opportunities in this densely populated nation. Such a trend is largely due to the consideration of proliferation of middle class in China, and the government policy to boost domestic consumption and the emergence of China as a world popular tourism destination. At present, China has become one of the largest markets for different international hotel groups. For instance, Wyndham Hotel Group has approximately 64,800 rooms in the development pipeline in China, and Hilton has more than 90 hotels in its China pipeline, and intends to expand the number during next five years ([www.hotelnewsnow.com](http://www.hotelnewsnow.com)). As China's hotel industry continues to grow and becomes increasingly global, a growing body of research studies related to Chinese hotels emerged from different perspectives (Chen and Kim, 2010; Ye et al., 2011; Hsu et al., 2012a,b). Although the published academic articles reflect the state of Chinese hotel development in various aspects, a systematic review that can provide a more

comprehensive understanding of Chinese hotel research and the recent trends in the industry is necessary for policy makers, hotel managers, and researchers.

Literature synthesis studies on Chinese hotels are, however, few, and the most recent reviews are limited to articles published until 2009 (Kong and Cheung, 2009; Gross et al., 2013). This status suggests that Chinese hotel research development in the past five years (2009–2013) remains unclear, and a holistic and up-to-date overview is thus necessary. After successfully hosting international mega events, such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, and the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, China has captured the world's attention and attracted an increasing number of visitors. In 2012, visitor arrivals in China reached 132 million, and the average length of stay was 7.5 days (China National Tourism Administration, 2013). The number of star-rated hotels in China reached 11,367, with 1.5 million guest rooms, by the end of 2012 (China National Tourism Administration, 2013). Along with the significant development opportunities in recent years, a series of problems and challenges, such as achieving a balance between state-owned systems that remain dominant in China and dynamic free markets to promote international competitiveness, as well as challenges for expatriate hotel managers to enhance their adaptability to the Chinese cultural environment, emerged in China's hotel industry (Gross and Huang, 2011; Miao et al., 2011). These circumstances provided a wider stage for scholars and industry management practitioners to explore. Thus, to fill in the research void of the recent five years, an important objective of the current study is to provide an up-to-date and comprehensive review of Chinese hotel research.

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Prior reviews on Chinese hotel research usually collected papers from major online academic databases using the keywords “China hotel” (Kong and Cheung, 2009; Gross et al., 2013). Kong and Cheung (2009) developed a profile of existing English language studies obtained from ProQuest Basic Search, EBSCO Host Web, and Emerald Management Review, while Gross et al. (2013) further searched the Hospitality and Tourism Complete as well as Science Direct databases. Although these databases contain a number of academic journals from various disciplines, being included in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) list is increasingly considered by scholars and research institutions because of its quality standard (Law and Chon, 2007). The SSCI is by now the most commonly used source worldwide for comparative bibliometric analysis of disciplines and faculties in the field of economics and social sciences (Verbeek et al., 2002). Furthermore, in recent years, SSCI inclusion is considered as an essential indicator of researchers’ academic quality in different academic institutions and universities. According to a result of a survey conducted to economics department chairs in American universities, SSCI citation counts usually come up in promotion cases, and the trend of putting greater weight on citation counts will likely be extended in the next 10 years (Klein and Chiang, 2004). Hence, another purpose of this study is to review Chinese hotel research from a different and valuable perspective. We focused on studies related to Chinese hotels in the SSCI database, in an attempt to identify the research trend from leading journals, which should be of use to readers of the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

Owing to the important function that research foci serve to reflect the trends in the areas covered by recent studies, many synthesis studies on hospitality research regarded these foci to be a crucial part of the research discussion. Current hospitality review articles notably show growing diversity in research foci. For instance, Park et al. (2011) covered 11 fields of hospitality studies in their framework, which was based on the study conducted by Baloglu and Assante (1999), while Law et al. (2012) updated their work by adding consumer behavior (CB) as a new focus in hospitality research. However, previous review articles on Chinese hotel research only identified a few research foci, namely, strategy and development, human resource management, service quality, marketing, hotel operation and performance, hotel business environment issues, and finance (Kong and Cheung, 2009; Gross et al., 2013). We determine whether this status could be attributed to the difference between international and Chinese hotel studies in terms of research foci or to the limited number of review years. More importantly, it is unknown whether the absence or/and the high concentration of some specific research themes truly reflects the industry development. Some scholars argue that the tourism industry does not pay much direct attention to research (Buckley, 2008) and topical trends in academic journals should therefore change to meet the industry practice (Yoo et al., 2011). In the past decade, hotel development in China has become a new type of asset for Chinese real-estate developers in light of local governments’ encouraging policy for mixed-use projects (residential, commercial, retail and hotel). However, the driving force behind hotel development in China is quite different from the West and the traditional hospitality management perspective. It would thus be valuable to examine if these China-specific items have gained attention from the academia. Additionally, it would be useful to find out whether the existing Chinese hotel research can meet the industry practice. Based on the existing synthesis studies on hotel research, this study also aims at identifying the gap between research efforts and industry practice as well as the unique feature of Chinese hotel research, thereby to suggest possible directions for future research. More specifically, we adopted the most recently modified framework of hospitality research foci proposed by Law et al. (2012),

and compared and contrasted the difference between Chinese and international hotel research foci. In addition, this study examines the cross-tabulations of research foci and sample source of different types of Chinese hotel.

## 2. Methodology

To provide a representative and comprehensive overview of the contemporary development of Chinese hotel research, this study adopted a systematic review approach to examine all articles related to Chinese hotels that were published in SSCI-listed journals. A systematic review is a useful approach in mapping out areas containing diverse knowledge by integrating and categorizing articles pertinent to a specific topic, according to a predetermined framework (Weed, 2006). On account of its exhaustive, objective, and transparent characteristics, the systematic review approach has been widely applied in various fields (Cook et al., 1997), including tourism and hospitality (Law et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2013), to provide a comprehensive summary of the literature.

The first step was a thorough search of relevant papers within the SSCI database in November 2013, using keywords “China” and “hotel”. All articles related to Chinese hotel research were obtained from the SSCI-listed journals, which can be accessed via the Web of Science. “Chinese hotel research”, it should be noted, refers to the research on all ownership types of hotels in China including state-owned, collective, private, alliance, stock, foreign-invested and Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan-invested hotels. SSCI is a significant and influential journal list compiled by the Institute for Scientific Information from leading social science journals across 50 disciplines. In view of its international recognition and representativeness for high-quality research, we selected SSCI-listed journals for synthesis, providing valuable academic references for scholars. Only full-length papers with novel contributions to Chinese hotel research development were included for further analysis. Book reviews, literature reviews, conference papers, research notes, and editor prefaces were excluded because of their limited contribution to knowledge development (Yoo et al., 2011; Law et al., 2012). All authors independently read through each article to select relevant papers to be included, and any disagreement on inclusion and classification was discussed until a consensus was reached. The first selected article was authored by Ma, Buhalis and Song in 2003 which discussed how information communication technology changed the hotel industry structure in China. At the end of the selecting process, a total of 93 articles related to Chinese hotels which were published between 2003 and 2013 were identified and included for analysis in this study.

The next step was to examine each article in terms of publication year and journal, methodology, authorship, and research foci by content analysis. To ensure objectivity and reliability, the grouping and classifying process was also conducted by individual authors, followed by a cross-comparison and further discussion until a consensus was reached. It is possible that personal bias may exist during such a classifying process. As such, when we encountered different grouping results, we compared and contrasted the findings among each other to determine the accuracy and objectivity. For the methodology review, each article was examined based on research approach (i.e. quantitative, qualitative, and mixed), data collection methods, sample, and major data analysis methods. With reference to authorship, institutional and regional contributions were measured, and the rankings in recent years were provided. One of the key features of the systematic review is the appraisal of relevant studies according to a pre-determined framework. Researchers conducting systematic reviews believe pre-determined exclusion and quality criteria can reduce the likelihood of bias from the authors during the selection



classification was based on the manifested focus. The succeeding section presents and analyzes the synthesized findings. In the subsequent section, the key findings of research foci and trend in Chinese hotel research are presented. The final two sections provide conclusions for this study, concrete managerial implications for hotel practitioners and possible directions for future research.

### 3. General empirical findings

#### 3.1. Publication periods and journal outlets

Among the 93 articles related to Chinese hotel research, 72 were published in the latest five years (i.e. 2009–2013), accounting for 3.4 times the number of articles published before 2009 (i.e. 2003–2008) in SSCI-listed journals, this clearly suggests a growing amount of research interest in Chinese hotel in recent years. Although the increase in publications may also be due to the growth of total number of the papers published in SSCI-listed journals, a general upward trend in research attention to Chinese hotel can still be found (see Table 1). Such an observation is based on the progressively increase in the number of journals which published articles related to Chinese hotel. As shown in Table 1, merely a couple of journals published Chinese hotel research in the initial years. However, the corresponding number has increased to nine journals in the recent three years. Additionally, taking into account the total number of publications in targeting journals, the results in percentage term suggest that the topic of Chinese hotels has attracted increasing attention from researchers and industry practitioners. Moreover, the indirect or direct influence of international mega-events on Chinese tourism and hospitality industry cannot be overlooked. Table 1 indicates that an increase of the publications was evident after China successfully hosted a series of mega-events (e.g. the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, and the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games). For the journals that continuously published related articles in recent years, Chinese hotel research comprised 6.56% in 2011, 3.85% in 2012, and 5.56% in 2013 of all publications in the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, up from 3.89% in 2008, 2.27% in 2009, and 4.17% in 2010. Besides, the annual proportion of Chinese hotel publications in *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* after 2010 is 3.17%, 4.65%, 6.38%, respectively. The rapid growth of China's tourism and hospitality industry and the increase in development opportunities in recent years may have caused a series of research questions that broadened the scope for scholars and industry management practitioners to investigate.

Regarding journal outlets, 64 articles were published in 10 tourism and hospitality journals, while 29 articles were published in 22 journals covering different subject areas, such as business, management, and sociology (see Table 2). Among all reviewed journals, the *International Journal of Hospitality Management* published the most number of articles (33, 35.5%), thus rendering the journal as number one in publishing Chinese hotel research among the tourism and hospitality journals included in the SSCI (33, 51.6%). *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* is the second most popular channel, publishing eight articles, followed by the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* with six articles. Among the non-tourism and hospitality journals, The *Service Industries Journal* contributed the most with four articles, followed by the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* and *Journal of Business Research* (both with three articles). Although the *International Journal of Hospitality Management* appears to be considerably ahead in publishing Chinese hotel research, the diversity of journal outlets, including the number of non-tourism and hospitality journals, implies that research on the Chinese hotel

**Table 2**  
Distribution of analyzed papers in SSCI journals.

Name of journal	Impact factor (2012)	Frequency
<b>Subject categories: hospitality, leisure, sports, and tourism (10)</b>		
<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	1.692	33
<i>Cornell Hospitality Quarterly</i>	1.892	8
<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	1.266	6
<i>Tourism Management</i>	2.571	4
<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i>	0.359	4
<i>Journal of Travel Research</i>	1.899	2
<i>Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing</i>	0.835	3
<i>Tourism Economics</i>	0.800	2
<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>	3.000	1
<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>	3.638	1
<b>Subject categories: business, management, and others (22)</b>		
<i>Service Industries Journal</i>	1.017	4
<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	0.792	3
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	1.484	3
<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	1.253	1
<i>International Journal of Information Management</i>	1.843	1
<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>	3.062	1
<i>Human Resource Management</i>	1.458	1
<i>International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology</i>	1.213	1
<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	5.906	1
<i>Chinese Management Studies</i>	0.327	1
<i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i>	0.940	1
<i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>	0.622	1
<i>American Sociological Review</i>	4.077	1
<i>Journal of Service Research</i>	2.714	1
<i>Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal</i>	0.882	1
<i>Energy</i>	3.651	1
<i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>	1.865	1
<i>Energy Policy</i>	2.629	1
<i>IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication</i>	0.638	1
<i>Energy and Buildings</i>	2.679	1
<i>Applied Thermal Engineering</i>	2.127	1
<i>Habitat International</i>	1.418	1

industry has a wide coverage through various publication channels.

#### 3.2. Authorship

The 93 articles reviewed in this study were contributed by 258 scholars and practitioners from 171 institutions worldwide. Among the 93 studies, 14 had sole authorship, while 79 had multiple authors. These findings echo that by Leung et al. (2013) who observed that multiple authors are the mainstream in tourism and hospitality research. In the recent five years, the most active authors involved in Chinese hotel research include Alice H.Y. Hon and Wilco W. Chan with eight articles, Hailin Qu and Hanqin Qiu Zhang with five articles, and Rob Law and Haiyan Kong with three articles. Understanding which authors have contributed the most to Chinese hotel research is important to provide a meaningful insight into the growing research field.

In terms of institutional contribution, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University tops the list (41 articles, 44.1%), with an overwhelming number of publications on Chinese hotels, followed by Sun Yat-Sen University with eight articles, City University of Hong Kong with seven articles, Oklahoma State University with six articles, and Chinese University of Hong Kong, Griffith University, and Cornell University with four articles each. The top five prolific institutions represent the research leaders of different regions in this area (see Table 3). Hong Kong and Taiwan were examined

**Table 3**  
List of the top five contributing institutions.

Name of institutions	Country/region	Number of articles	Rank
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	China HK	41	1
Sun Yat-Sen University	China	8	2
City University of Hong Kong	China HK	7	3
Oklahoma State University	USA	6	4
Chinese University of Hong Kong	China HK	4	5
Griffith University	Australia	4	5
Cornell University	USA	4	5

separately from Mainland China because they have different research systems (Leung et al., 2013). In a previous review by Gross et al. (2013), the top five contributing institutions were the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Chinese Academy of Sciences, City University of Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Sun Yat-Sen University. Considering their research was limited to publications before 2009, the changes in ranking may partly reflect research advances in the most recent five years. To date, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University maintains its leadership in Chinese hotel research, while Sun Yat-Sen University replaced the Chinese Academy of Sciences as the second most contributing institution, indicating the outstanding position of this research topic in China. The updated top five rankings also included Oklahoma State University and Cornell University in the US and Griffith University in Australia, which indicates that Chinese hotel research has also received considerable attention from scholars worldwide.

3.3. Research methods

The analysis of research methods in this paper aims to obtain a better understanding of the contemporary methodological applications for academic studies in Chinese hotel research. Among the research approaches, quantitative approach (59, 63.4%) remains the most dominant approach, which is similar to the findings in previous review studies (Law et al., 2012; Gross et al., 2013). Among the 93 articles, 18 adopted a qualitative approach and 16 adopted a mixed approach. To better illustrate the mainstream of research approach in Chinese hotel research, Fig. 1 presents a contingency table of research approach and research foci. As shown in the figure, most studies in each research focus used quantitative approach.

Conversely, qualitative approach (40, 60.6%) is the main method in Chinese hotel research before 2007, according to the findings of

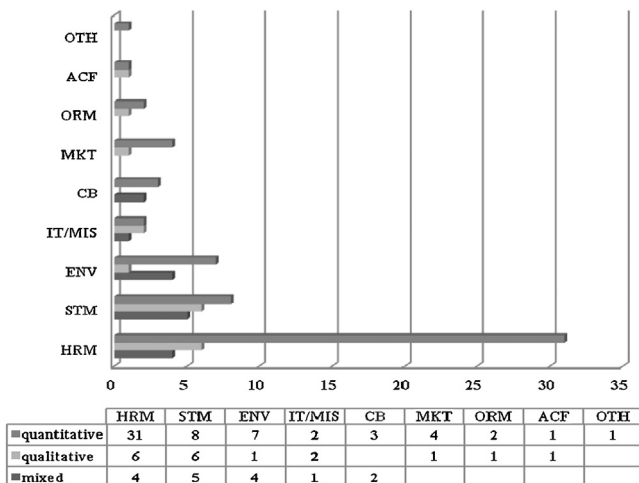


Fig. 1. Research approaches by research foci of papers from 2003 to 2013.

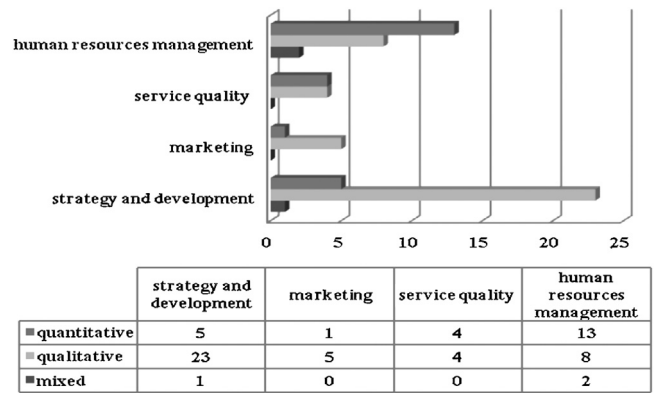


Fig. 2. Research approaches by research foci of papers from 1984 to 2007 (Kong and Cheung, 2009).

previous synthesis study conducted by Kong and Cheung (2009), and only three articles adopted a mixed approach (see Fig. 2).

The large change of research approach is not surprising. Kong and Cheung's (2009) study reviewed Chinese hotel articles from 1984 to 2007, during that period of time, China's hotel industry was at the beginning and developing stages. During that time scholars had limited knowledge about Chinese hotels. As such, a qualitative approach appears to be more appropriate since it is well-suited for exploratory studies (Morse and Field, 1996). With the rapid development of China's hotel industry in both the industry and research, more studies adopted a quantitative approach or mixed approach in recent years for improving the generalization of research results (see Figs. 1 and 2).

Fig. 3 demonstrates the trend of research approach across the years in 2003–2013. Apparently, the proportion of both quantitative and mixed approaches has been increasing in the recent five years (2009–2013), and it is plausible the trend will continue in the future. With a quantitative approach, data are easily summarized and analyzed, while a mixed approach can overcome the disadvantages of a single approach (Creswell et al., 2003). The trend also shows the increasing rigor of Chinese hotel research, which is a positive sign in terms of knowledge development.

Concerning data collection, the dominant data type was primary data (79 articles, 84.9%). Only 18 papers used secondary data prepared by governments or other private organizations. Questionnaire survey was the most commonly applied method for data collection (60, 64.5%), followed by in-depth interview with 21 articles and focus group interview with seven articles. As regional difference is a distinctive feature of China's economic and societal development, analysis of geographical coverage and sample source is therefore necessary. In identifying the regions where data were collected for Chinese hotel research, majority of the analyzed

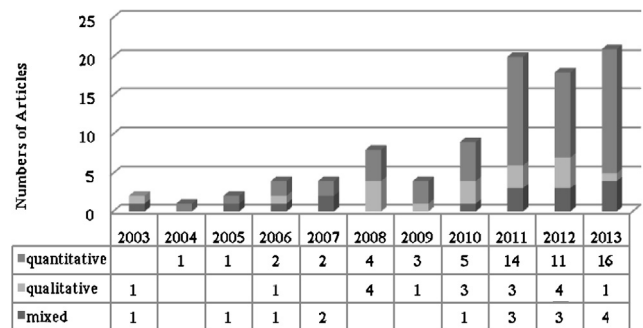


Fig. 3. Research approaches by year of publication.

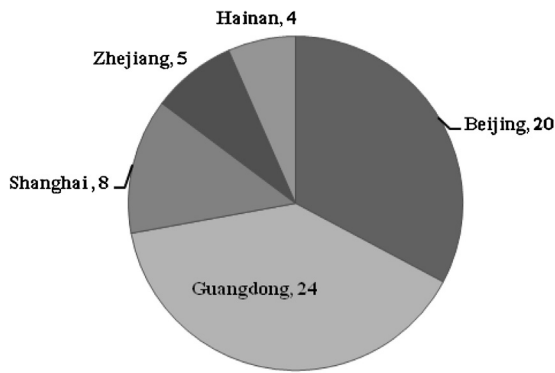


Fig. 4. Geographical coverage and sample source.

studies collected data from developed or coastal cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou (see Fig. 4).

Only 11 articles (11.8%) collected data from China’s central and western regions. In addition, among the 258 authors who contributed to Chinese hotel research, there are merely 11 authors whose institutions are located in central and western parts of the country, whereas the overwhelming majority is from developed countries or coastal cities in China. The state can probably be attributed to the convenience of data collection. Although western China or inland cities exhibit a certain disparity in developing hotel practices compared with coastal metropolitan cities, the limited sample source of the eastern regions in China may not accurately reflect the entire Chinese hotel industry. Moreover, numerous world-famous tourist destinations with high demand for hotel development are located in western China (i.e. Tibet, Xinjiang, Yunnan, and Sichuan). Thus, collecting data from these areas may yield widely different results.

It is noteworthy that when we examined the cross-tabulations of research foci and sample source, the findings suggested that more than half of the studies on hotel HRM obtained data from 5-star hotels and the sample sources in vast majority of the HRM research are 4-star and above hotels (see Fig. 5). We concede that high star-rated hotels to some extent contribute more to the economy, but the sample representativeness of HRM issues in Chinese hotels deserves further investigation.

In terms of data analysis methods, we adopted multiple counts of one paper because more than one data analysis tool is generally used in an academic study. Among the 93 papers, 38 involved

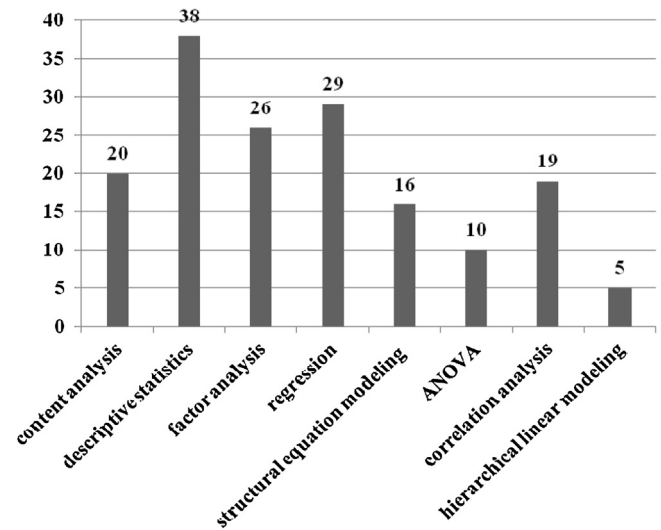


Fig. 6. Major data analysis methods.

descriptive discussions, while 20 papers adopted content analysis (see Fig. 6).

In terms of statistical techniques, the most popular method was regression (29 articles), followed by factor analysis (26 articles), and the correlation test (19 articles). Notably, a dramatic increase was observed in the application of structural equation modeling (SEM) in the recent five years, with 16 papers adopting SEM as their major hypothesis testing method. The sophistication and diversification of the methods imply the progress in Chinese hotel research.

#### 4. Research foci and trends

As shown in Fig. 7 and Table 4, the research foci of the analyzed papers were diverse. HRM was the most popular research focus with 41 articles (44.1%), followed by STM with 19 articles (20.4%), and ENV with 12 articles (12.9%). Similar to the findings in previous synthesis studies, no papers focused on EDU. In addition, none of the analyzed papers focused on LAW, which is contrary to the review results in other hospitality literature synthesis studies (e.g. Law et al., 2012).

In this study, we also determine whether any other obvious difference in research theme exists and whether the existing Chinese hotel studies have mirrored the current industry practice. The following sections provide a horizontal comparison among the research foci to determine a potential research void, as well as a vertical comparison for Chinese hotel research to investigate the

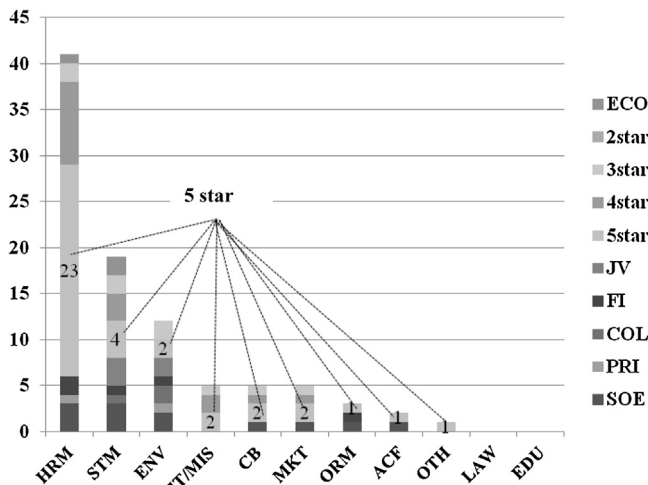


Fig. 5. Research foci and sample source.

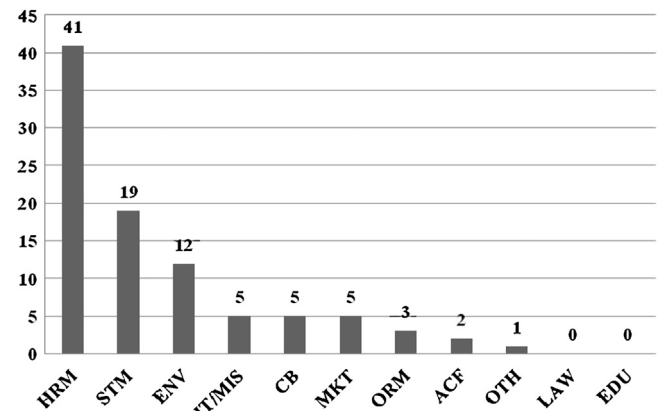


Fig. 7. Research foci.

**Table 4**  
List of research foci and publications.

Research foci	Publications	Number of publications
Human resource management	Hui et al. (2003), Yeung (2006), Sun et al. (2007), Littrell (2007), Otis (2008a), Otis (2008b), Kong et al. (2010), Fiksenbaum et al. (2010), Wong and Chan (2010), Hon and Lu (2010), Fisher et al. (2010), Chan (2010), Hon and Leung (2011), Fisher and McPhail (2011), He et al. (2011a,b), Li et al. (2011), Tuleja and Roberts (2011), Hon (2011), Fock et al. (2011), Wang and Wong (2011), Chang et al. (2011), Zhao et al. (2011), Hon (2012), Hon and Chan (2013a,b), Jian et al. (2012), Cheung et al. (2012), Qu and Zhao (2012), Song et al. (2012), Shen and Huang (2012), Kong et al. (2012a,b), Li et al. (2012), Hon and Chan (2013a,b), Hon and Chan (2013a,b), Ma et al. (2013), Wu et al. (2013), Hon and Lu (2013), Hon et al. (2013), Kong (2013), King et al. (2013), Luo et al. (2013), Song and Chathoth (2013), Kong et al. (2011)	41
Strategic management	Huang and Snell (2003), Qu et al. (2005), Wong et al. (2005), Yan et al. (2007), Qu (2007), Qu and Ennew (2008), Mak (2008), Tsang and Yip (2009), Gross and Huang (2011), Hsu et al. (2012a,b), Chan and Ni (2011), Miao et al. (2011), Guillet et al. (2011), Huang et al. (2012), Gu et al. (2013), Lo (2013), Hung (2013), Zhang et al. (2013a,b), Zhang et al. (2013a,b)	19
Green and environmental issues	Chan and Wong (2006), Lu et al. (2006), Chan et al. (2008), Chan et al. (2009), Wang et al. (2010), Xu et al. (2011), Kong et al. (2012a,b), Chan (2012), Zhou et al. (2012), Xu and Chan (2013), Mak et al. (2013), Chan et al. (2013)	12
Information technology and management information systems	Ma et al. (2003), Ye et al. (2011), Law and Chen (2012), Beldona et al. (2012), Ting et al. (2012)	5
Consumer behavior	Kim et al. (2006), Han et al. (2008), Kwortnik and Han (2011), Hsu et al. (2012a,b), Xie and Heung (2012)	5
Marketing	Ye et al. (2009), He et al. (2011a,b), Jones and Jing Guan (2011), Jones et al. (2011), Peng et al. (2013)	5
Operations management	Xiao et al. (2008), Heung et al. (2008), Zhang et al. (2012)	3
Accounting and finance	Chen and Kim (2010), Chen (2013)	2
Others	Gu and Ryan (2011)	1

changes of research foci in recent years. In addition, this paper identifies priorities for future research by comparing relative research effort against industry developing practice.

#### 4.1. Horizontal comparison

As shown in Fig. 8, the most noted focus was ACF, which is the most researched field abroad (Law et al., 2012) but it is almost the least studied topic in Chinese hotel research. Only two Chinese hotel studies that focused on ACF were found in SSCI-listed journals. The evident difference between international hotel studies and Chinese hotel studies may be attributed to the unequal status of research development. Since accounting and finance are essential elements in operating a successful business (Weygandt et al., 2008), it is not surprising that a large number of researchers and practitioners are interested in investigating ACF in hotels worldwide. However, China's hotel industry started relatively late but is developing fast. As such, more attentions were attracted in strategy and marketing. In fact, accounting and finance issues may become even more vital due to China's complicated economy, especially in current China's hotel industry. For instance, in latest years, there is an oversupply of hotel rooms in some big cities because more upscale hotels were built by local real-estate developers for the sake of low-cost land without seriously considering the actual market demand. Thus, in the long run, accounting and finance issues are not only a matter of success, but also a matter of survival for China's hotels. Moreover, more than half of the indigenous hotels in China are state-owned, with complicated ownership and bureaucratic structure and control (Mak, 2008). Intense competition exists as the number of foreign chains moving into China increases in recent years, stimulating numerous problems. Accordingly, the findings of this study hint a desperate need to further explore ACF in Chinese hotels in the future. Compared with international hotel research, a lack of ORM studies is noted as well. The reason for this deficiency may be similar to that regarding ACF. However, the reality is that more foreign operators who have franchise arrangements in China are facing operation conflicts between domestic and foreign

stakeholders. In addition, revenue management, which has been highly applied in the western hotel industry, is a suitable managerial tool for the Chinese hotel industry in changing the globally oriented market. Thus, the lack of research focus on ORM is beyond reality and the needs of the contemporary industry. Undoubtedly, more attention should be given on ORM in Chinese hotel research.

Another major difference is that no Chinese hotel study focuses on LAW. Among international hotel research, in a study conducted by Law et al. (2012), seven articles were found to examine LAW. The reason for this absence in Chinese hotel research might be similar to other research foci like ACF and ORM. Chinese hotels research still remain at the development stage, scholars and hotel practitioners are thus more interested in the issues about strategy and development. The scarcity of Chinese hotel research on LAW does not necessarily mean that few legal issues exist in China's hotel industry. Exactly the opposite, there are various legal disputes on employment law and management contract. One of the major concerns of LAW issues in China's hotel industry might be the legal problems with property. In China, real-estate developers constructed hotels in the name of residential projects, which lead to serious inequality of interests in Chinese real-estate industry and affects the fairness of market economy. The uniqueness and complexity of law issues in Chinese hotel industry might be another cause for lack of research contribution. In this paper, we only found one study that is related to LAW, but the main purpose of the article was to evaluate the organic search listing performance in the context of hotel trademarks in search engines (Beldona et al., 2012). In the future, scholars who are interested in the Chinese hotel industry should formulate solutions to fill the research gap.

Additionally, it should be noted that the proportions of STM and ENV studies in Chinese hotel research are twice the proportion of international research. As we discussed previously, the different status in research development stages leads to the disparity of research foci between Chinese hotel research and international research. More attentions were paid on STM due to the rapid development of China's hotel industry. As for ENV, the relatively more concerns on environmental issues of Chinese hotels may be due to

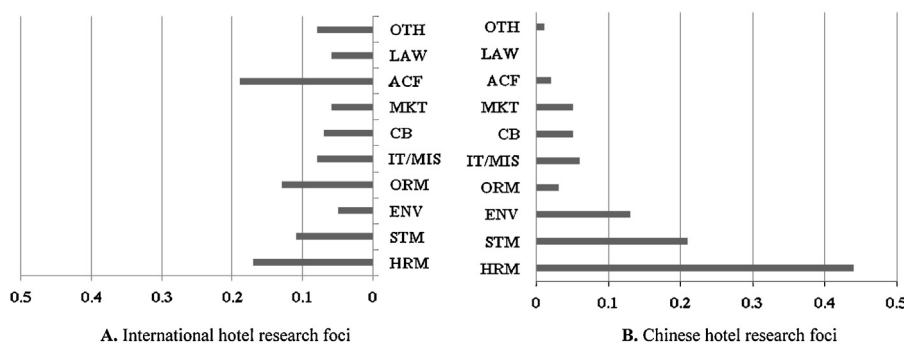


Fig. 8. Comparison of research foci between international and Chinese hotel research. (A) International hotel research foci. (B) Chinese hotel research foci.

their dual task of speeding up economic development as well as facing the challenges in controlling depletion of natural resources and environmental pollution (Zhang and Wen, 2008). As the largest developing country in the world, environment protection and sustainable development in China are of primary importance not only for herself, but also for the world.

Both in Chinese and international hotel studies, HRM is the most frequently researched focus because of the labor-intensive nature of the hospitality industry. However, as shown in Fig. 8, Chinese hotel studies have a wide range of research foci that HRM accounts for nearly half of the publications on Chinese hotels. The findings may truly reflect the pressing problems of HRM in China’s hotel industry: the lack of qualified staff, high employee turnover rates, the unwillingness of hospitality and tourism undergraduate students to enter the industry, as well as the gap between school education and the industry realities (Zhang and Wu, 2004). What is particularly noteworthy is that while millions of graduates whose major is hospitality and tourism management are churned out of Chinese universities and colleges every year, only 10–20% of them choose a career that is related to their university training. Moreover, nearly 20% of this number will then leave for other industries a few years later (Wong and Liu, 2010). A possible reason for such a behavior may be attributed to the significant influence of Chinese parents on career choice and the not so positive image of hotel jobs in China. Therefore, it is natural that many researchers have recently focused on HRM in Chinese hotel research, but given that a vast amount of research have been done, we still determine how much enthusiasm is exhibited by editors of leading journals in receiving such research.

#### 4.2. Vertical comparison

In the vertical comparison (see Fig. 9), HRM replaced STM as the most researched focus in the recent five years. When the hotel

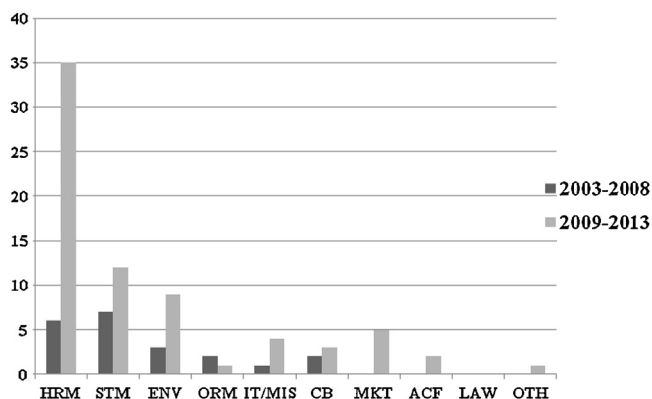


Fig. 9. Comparison of Chinese hotel research foci between the most recent five years (2009–2013) and the previous six years (2003–2008).

industry was at its initial development stage, strategy formulation was the most explored topic by scholars and practitioners. With the rapid growth of the hotel industry, the shortage of qualified employees became a severe problem. Thus, as shown in Fig. 9, the number of HRM publications has quintupled over the past few years, which exceeded that of other research foci. This dramatic increase indicates the serious situation of HRM in Chinese hotel industry. In recent years, Generation Y has become the essential labor force of China’s hotel companies, particularly for the front-line staff. According to China Tourism Association (2012) statistics, the average turnover rate of employees under the age of 25 in China’s hotel industry was as high as 43.16%. The severe problem might be attributed by unattractive salaries and benefits, lack of respect of the hotel profession from the society, and harsh/boring job conditions (Hung, 2013).

Another focus that has received considerable attention in recent years is ENV, which is consistent with the observation in other parts of the world. With the rapid expansion of Chinese hotels, pollution level increases and the vast consumption of non-renewable resources are expected. Academic researchers and the Chinese government, as well as overseas scholars, are thus concerned about the sustainable development of Chinese hotels, while the environment is maintained. The industry also has a strong impetus to implement pro-environmental actions because it depends on attractive and safe surroundings as a part of its core competence.

Research foci, such as MKT and ACF, only emerged in Chinese hotel research in the recent five years. Among the burgeoning foci, MKT was the most popular focus with five articles in total. As the hotel industry grew with the intense market competition, MKT justifiably gained considerable attention from scholars and industry practitioners. However, with the marketing actuality of China’s hotel industry, a lot of problems are worthy of further discussion and investigation. Since 2013, there has been a dramatic decline in the average revenue of Chinese hotels: hotel catering business dropped by 17.2%, meetings and other events dropped by 17.8%, while the total revenues of five-star hotels declined by 14% (China Tourist Hotel Association, 2013). The cold front was in part related to a series of detailed regulations proposed by the Government, such as canceling traditional year-end banquets and simplifying receptions, which reflects a unreasonable consumption structure of China’s hotel industry and the shift to the mass market seems to be quite imminent. Therefore, although an increased focus on MKT was apparent, MKT in Chinese hotel research remains insufficient in terms of both quantity and thorough examination.

#### 5. Implications

This synthesis study has presented an updated review of Chinese hotel research by drawing on a total of 93 articles published in SSCI-listed journals. The findings of this paper not only reflect the contemporary development of Chinese hotel research, but



also provide academic insights for hotel scholars and industry managers.

A total of 35 journals in SSCI were classified under the subject category of “hospitality, leisure, sports, and tourism”. However, the analyzed papers were only distributed in 10 hospitality and tourism journals. Moreover, more than one-third of the 93 papers were from the same journal, specifically the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. Although strong evidence showed a dramatic increase in Chinese hotel publications in recent years, the findings on the uneven distribution of articles among SSCI-listed journals suggest that the latest information on Chinese hotels remains limited to international readers. Therefore, researchers who are interested in publishing their Chinese hotel studies should consider submitting high-quality studies to SSCI-listed hospitality and tourism journals, such as *Current Issues in Tourism* (impact factor is 1.307 in 2012), *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* (impact factor is 1.089 in 2012), and *Leisure Sciences* (impact factor is 1.018 in 2012). Regarding the findings on authorship in Chinese hotel research, the review results of the most active authors and the most prolific institutions in this study provided useful information for academic administrators who are considering talent introduction or research cooperation, while prospective graduate students can identify the best fit according to their research interests (Park et al., 2011).

Regarding findings on methodology, the sophistication and diversification of research methods in contemporary Chinese hotel research were evident. Since 1999, advanced statistical methods have been increasingly introduced and applied by scholars, as academic institutions in China started learning methods from their western counterparts (Leung et al., 2013). Given that China is a vast country with uneven development between the East and the West, and the increasing demand of hotel accommodation in many world-famous tourist destinations which are mostly located in the western China (i.e. Tibet, Xinjiang, Yunnan, and Sichuan), the limited sample source of the eastern area may not represent the population of interest accurately. Another problem with the sample source of Chinese hotel research is that the majority (82.5%) of Chinese hotels are lower ranked hotels, whereas high-end hotels (i.e. four-star and above) just occupy 17.5% of the market (CNTA, 2011), yet the findings in this paper suggested that most studies only collected data from four- and five-star hotels in China. The review results on the excessively focused geographical coverage and sample source of high-end hotels in Chinese hotel research indicate that more data should be collected from different parts of the country to enhance the reliability of research outcomes. Moreover, although the increased application of sophisticated methods, such as SEM, suggests a progress in Chinese hotel research, some may question whether SEM is the optimal method to address research questions in research papers. Notably, simple methods can sometimes solve problems better. If a simple method is sufficient to answer the research question, developing a complex method might be unnecessary.

Findings on research foci showed the increasing growth and gradual change in line with industry development. However, these findings are unlike the belief of previous studies that research focus should change according to reality and the needs of the industry. In this study, we found only a few papers that focused on ORM or ACF, which could be in contrast to the actual industry demand. At present, hotel revenue management is more important worldwide and has become a vehicle in helping hotels become proactive in the selling process, rather than simply posting rates and waiting for sales ([www.hotelmarketingcoach.com](http://www.hotelmarketingcoach.com)). Effective operations using revenue management as a forecasting tool enables a hotel to respond quickly at the right time to reach the right target, especially in emerging markets such as China and India (Jones et al., 2011). As more Chinese real-estate developers flock to hotels

because of the preferential policies of land for tourism and hospitality, the hotel industry is now heading for a crisis of oversupply in some big cities. More efforts should thus be made by both academia and practitioners to avert possible bubbles. In addition, as mentioned in the previous section, only a few articles focused on a particular focus, such as MKT, CB, and IT/MIS. In China, the dramatic decline in revenue of the hotel industry in 2013 which was affected by the changed government regulations has alerted hotel practitioners that they have to be innovative on their marketing activities to attract more individual consumers. Considering that China has become one of the most important market sources of outbound tourism in the world, together with the belief that China's outbound tourism market has a large potential for future growth (Lai et al., 2013), understanding the consumer behaviors of Chinese tourists has a positive practical significance for hotel managers all over the world. To illustrate the needs of Chinese hotel industry and the competitive market, more countermeasures and mechanisms of MKT and consumers require further research efforts. Owing to the popularity of Internet applications in tourism and hospitality organizations, hotels in China are taking positive steps to meet the demands of the potentially large number of customers and to prepare for incoming challenges (Law and Chen, 2012). Thus, more studies should be conducted on how IT can enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness in the future. Some regional issues for local market interest were also discussed in this study not only for illustrating the unique aspects of Chinese hotel industry but also for providing possible references for other developing countries.

Finally, research is of limited value unless it successfully enters the commercial market, and the resulting commercial opportunities are maximized (Australian Institute for Commercialisation, 2001). Scholars and industry practitioners who are involved in Chinese hotels must not only track and record the dramatic expansion of the industry, but should also contribute to the development of the hospitality theory.

## 6. Conclusions

This study reviewed 93 academic articles that are related to Chinese hotels in SSCI-listed journals, unveiling the contemporary development of Chinese hotel research. Research on Chinese hotels dramatically increased after 2009, especially from 2011 to 2013, with more than half of the articles published in the most recent three years. Among the various publication channels of SSCI, the *International Journal of Hospitality Management* published the most number of studies, followed by *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* and the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*. Echoing previous research, the number of multiple-authored articles indicated a growing collaboration in hospitality research (Park et al., 2011; Leung et al., 2013). Regarding the most active authors and prolific institutions in Chinese hotel research, the ranking has changed in the recent five years. Thus, an updated insight was provided for this growing area. Advancement in methodological sophistication and diversification is evident, reflecting the increasing rigor of Chinese hotel research. However, the sample size of reviewed articles is not large, rendering its inability to make any generalized claims. Still, nine research foci in terms of a pre-determined framework with 12 categories (Law et al., 2012) were identified, and the findings indicated that HRM, STM, and ENV were the most popular research topics. Compared with the real situation in China's hotel industry, research on ORM, ACF, and LAW was relatively few, while HRM raised a heightened concern among Chinese hotel researchers.

With the recognition that SSCI-listed journals are generally the leading journals in the field, some academically valuable journals, which are not yet included in the SSCI list, have been excluded

in the analysis in this paper. According to the findings of this study, most of the articles published before 2008 were from non-hospitality journals. Since the research approaches and foci are different between/among academic fields, the conclusion of longitudinal trends should be further considered. Future work can thus provide more comprehensive results by expanding the sources of data collection.

Also, we only reviewed the articles related to the hotel sector and did not examine other affiliated hospitality sectors, such as restaurants, casinos, and spas, which are vitally related to the hotel industry. Future studies should, therefore, be conducted to extend the review by including affiliated hospitality sectors and other journals that are not included in the SSCI list. Another extension of this study may be to examine the citations of analyzed papers to provide valuable insights into the types of references used by the authors. This study adopted the grouping approach as proposed by prior synthesis studies (Law et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2013) to analyze each paper based on its manifested focus. Considering the multi-disciplinary nature of tourism and hospitality research, it is possible that one article may cover multiple foci. As such, to have a better way of classification might be a good direction for future work.

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