The Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on the Chinese Tourist Industry

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Abstract

The tourism business in China has been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, resulting in extensive limitations on travel, the closure of popular tourist sites, and a substantial decrease in travel demand. The ramifications of these advancements have had a significant impact on the complete tourist value chain, encompassing travel companies, tour operators, hotels, restaurants, and various other service providers in China. The objective of this research is to present a comprehensive analysis of the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Chinese tourism sector, encompassing its economic, social, and environmental aspects. The economic ramifications encompass a decrease in financial inflow, employment reductions, and a diminishment in foreign currency gains. Social impacts include a reduction in cultural exchange, a decline in the number of international visitors, and a reduction in the opportunities for education and personal growth. Environmental impacts include a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a decline in the pressure on fragile ecosystems. The paper also examines the challenges facing the Chinese tourism industry as it attempts to recover from the pandemic, including the need to rebuild consumer confidence, adapt to new health and safety measures, and develop new business models. The paper concludes that the Chinese tourism industry will need to work closely with governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to develop a sustainable and resilient recovery plan that takes into account the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the crisis.

Keywords: Covid-19; Economy; Tourism industry; Travel industry

Introduction

The global tourism industry has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the closure of several tourist locations worldwide. The tourist industry is often seen as the sector most susceptible to the impacts of the epidemic. Consequently, significant endeavours have been undertaken to reinstate the industry; yet this objective remains unattainable due to the continued proliferation of the illness. Frequent occurrences of calamities are seen within the tourism business. The containment of COVID-19 pandemics has proven to be challenging owing to the adverse impacts on the tourism and hospitality sectors, the global economic downturn, disparities within the tourism industry, and the limited prediction of their future trajectory (Assaf & Scuderi, 2020).

In January 2020, the global awareness of COVID-19 significantly increased. The escalating number of verified cases prompted a swift response from the Chinese authorities. The global community was taken aback by the comprehensive imposition of a lockdown on the city of Wuhan on January 23, 2020. Following a span of seven days, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially designated the pandemic in China as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). By that point in time, the cumulative number of confirmed cases amounted to 7711, of which a mere 83 instances were reported beyond the borders of China (Lu *et al.*, 2021). The nations of China, South Korea, and Iran experienced the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the course of a single week, the number of reported cases in the country of South Korea saw a significant increase, rising from 30 to 1,000.

Similar to the occurrence of a black swan event and the impact of World War Two, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial influence on worldwide healthcare systems, permeating several facets of human existence (Collins-Kreiner & Ram, 2020). On January 30, the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed a worldwide emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the prevailing circumstances, governmental authorities in industrialized nations have implemented measures like border closures, travel restrictions, and quarantine protocols. These actions have been motivated by concerns over the potential negative impacts on their economies. The economic disruptions have had a significant impact on several primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors. These sectors include industries engaged in the extraction of raw materials, the production of completed products, and the provision of services, respectively (Chau *et al.*, 2023).

Traveling is often regarded as a very enjoyable means of discovering and experiencing new locations, provided that there are no illnesses, criminal activity, or natural calamities. Pandemics and outbreaks of epidemics are two alarming concerns for vacationers. In such a circumstance, it might be vexing to manage and navigate the circumstances at hand. Passengers assume a crucial role in the transmission of illnesses across various locations. In recent times, the global community has encountered a critical situation arising from the rapid transmission of the coronavirus. In recent months, global attention has been focused on epidemics as a consequence of the appearance of a novel coronavirus. The aforementioned virus exhibits a high level of peril and has a rapid transmission rate, resulting in widespread outbreaks throughout various regions globally. The transmission of this virus occurs from human beings to animals. In 2002, the transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) occurred from avian species to the human population. In 2012, the transmission of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) occurred from camels to humans. From November 2002 to June 2003, a total of 8000 individuals were afflicted with the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus, with about two-thirds of these cases originating from China. Taiwan, Singapore, Canada, Hong Kong, etc. saw similar impacts. Consequently, the traveler opted to refrain from visiting Southeast Asia in order to decrease the likelihood of contracting an illness (Purba, Fathiah, & Steven, 2021).

Literature Review

Overview of tourism industry

The tourist industry has been significantly impacted by the adverse effects of COVID-19, resulting in a decline in both supply and demand. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, there is a potential risk to around 50 million jobs within the global travel and tourism industry (Assaf & Scuderi, 2020). In the first quarter of 2019, there was a global influx of 1.45 million Chinese tourists visiting Vietnam. However, in January 2020, this number saw a significant decline, reaching a total of 644,000 visitors. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a transformation within the tourist industry, driven by epistemological factors. The major epistemological paradigm in psychology elucidates human behavior by highlighting its adaptive purpose and fundamental aim (Islam & Fatema, 2020). According to Lu *et al.* (2021), evolutionary epistemology distinguishes between proximal and ultimate determinants of human behavior. The aforementioned methodology is sometimes referred to as causality within the realm of philosophy. To date, much research in the field of tourism has mostly concentrated on immediate factors to elucidate human behavior, therefore neglecting the examination of underlying factors (Collins-Kreiner & Ram, 2020).

Evolutionary psychology posits that people have innate physiological and psychological mechanisms that manifest for many purposes, such as the pursuit of safety, avoidance of illnesses, forming social ties, seeking advantageous positions, achieving social status, maintaining friendships, and providing care for family members. In this exposition, we focus our attention on the mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the field of tourism research, it is important to elucidate human behavior as an initial standpoint for the process of evolution. For example, a correlation between the commencement of reproductive behavior and a preference for engaging in hazardous travel endeavors in humans suggests that risk-taking enhances reproductive success. Furthermore, there are other techniques, besides those elucidated by Griskevicius and Kenrick (2013), that also have a significant influence on the behavior of visitors. These approaches contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the many perspectives in tourism research. Tourism is a modern phenomenon that diverges significantly from conventional sociological and psychological metrics used to assess its positive impact. Therefore, researchers who possess knowledge of latent psychology may cleverly use strategies for tourism that are grounded in current methodologies.

Purba, Fathiah, & Steven (2021) have shown the significance of visitors' capacities to mitigate the risk of contracting illnesses and their perception of susceptibility to health-related repercussions associated with tourism activities. Insufficient research accompanies these studies in investigating visitors' evaluation and prevention of diseases. This study examines both the financial and interpersonal impact of outbreaks and pandemics on tourists. It reveals that tourists exhibited self-

protective behavior in response to the worldwide outbreak of swine flu in 2009 and made pragmatic decisions based on their perceived vulnerability to avoid travel. These results demonstrate the importance of illness avoidance in comprehending how individuals act on a substantial scale (Chau *et al*., 2023).

There is a correlation between the inclination to prevent sickness, the presence of xenophobic attitudes, the desire for immunization, and the aim to use locally sourced food. Moreover, the evolutionary traveling perspective may be used to provide travelers a comprehensive understanding of the situation at hand throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the scholarly literature on tourism examines the relationship between pandemics and their resulting effects, such as ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and feelings of crowding. Regarding the matter of COVID-19, the island model demonstrates its applicability as an environmental measurement which has precipitously transformed the global landscape. This notion pertains to the impact of microorganism illnesses on the global environment. The behavior of visitors has undergone notable changes as a result of the phenotypic flexibility and ecological differences caused by bacteria. Previous studies have shown a correlation between the transmission of illnesses and the conduct of visitors (Islam & Fatema, 2020).

Tourism is susceptible to several forms of crisis. Tourism, on both a global and regional scale, has been greatly impacted by serious circumstances, which include the 9/11 terrorist attack, the 2003 SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic, and the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004. Viral infections that are easily transmitted may lead to a public health emergency, which can have a significant negative impact on both regional and worldwide tourism. This is because travelers can spread the virus while they are traveling and can also get infected by other individuals who are carriers of the virus. The scale of the current COVID-19 epidemic is unprecedented in the annals of human history. Hence, it is logical to recognize that although we may gain information from past epidemics and pandemics about their impact on tourism, our current comprehension of the connection between global epidemics and tourists may be significantly limited in the context of COVID-19 (Assaf & Scuderi, 2020).

Researchers in the realm of tourism have conducted studies on SARS; however, it cannot be directly compared to COVID-19 in some respects. Tourism researchers have analysed the effects of the SARS epidemic on tourism and related businesses from many viewpoints. The study investigates the influence of SARS on the number of tourists visiting Hong Kong. Their research identified severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) as an external shock factor that may have a lasting effect on the quantity of visitor arrivals (Haryanto, 2020). The researchers proposed that tourist authorities should take into account actions targeted at the nations where the outbreak originated in order to effectively mitigate the adverse impact of SARS. Another study examines the effects of SARS and the Avian Flu on the demand for foreign travel in Asia. The researchers discovered that the number of cases had a substantial effect on nations hit by SARS, while this impact was not significant for countries afflicted by the Avian Flu.

An outbreak may have a profound impact on tourism, affecting several sectors associated with the industry. The study investigates the impact of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) on

Singapore's hotel industry. The study examines how SARS affected the performance of hotel stocks in Taiwan. The results indicated that hotel firms listed on the stock market suffered significant decreases in both profits and stock prices as a result of the impact of SARS.

Researchers have expressed concerns about the comprehensive ramifications of the COVID-19 epidemic on the worldwide tourist industry. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the existing literature pertaining to the influence of COVID-19 on the tourist industry seems to consist mostly of conceptual analyses or commentary. Several empirical studies have been conducted to examine the effect of COVID-19 on the tourist industry, including specific sectors that include transportation and accommodation. As part of these investigations, the COVID-19 tourism index has been developed to provide a comprehensive assessment of this impact. In order to assess the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the worldwide tourist industry, researchers also used secondary web data. For example, text mining methods were used to analyse TripAdvisor comments, revealing the various worries expressed by travelers in different geographical locations in relation to the epidemic (Rahimian, Masoudi Rad, & Zareei, 2022). The study utilized data from the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak to model the effects of Chinese visitors' influx on the United States and Australia in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Haryanto, 2020). The findings indicate that there is a potential timeframe of 6 to 12 months for the marketplace to regain its pre-pandemic levels. In a similar vein, both the Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) model and the Generalized Additive Model (GAM) have been used to predict the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourist industry. The findings of their study suggest that there is a potential decrease in foreign visitor arrivals ranging from 30.8% to 76.3%, with no anticipated recovery before June 2021.

Figure 1: Overview of Tourism Industry
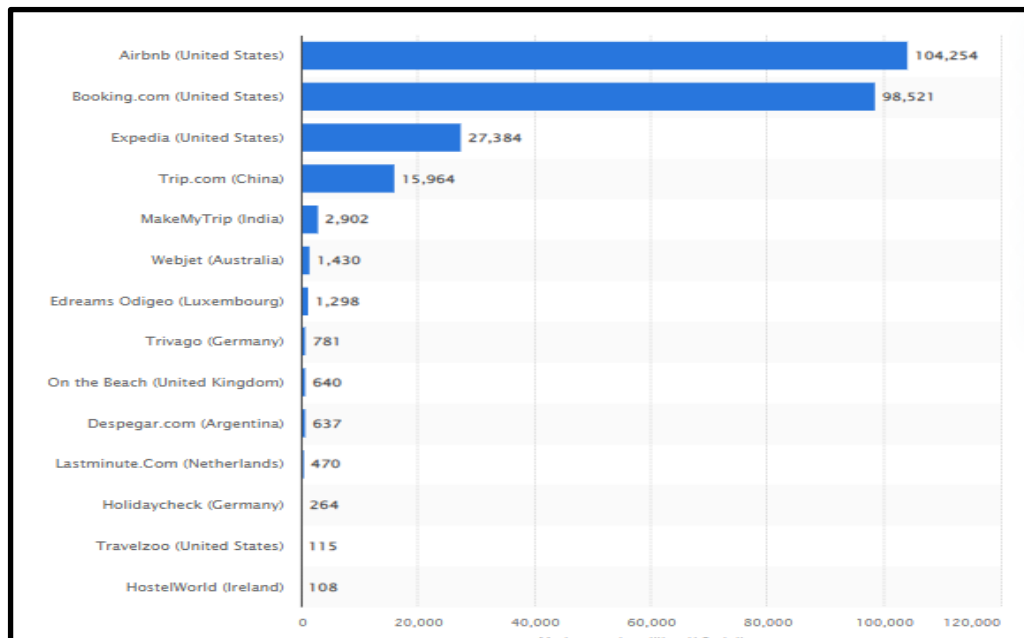

Source: (Statista, 2022)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism industry of China

Various projects and articles have been undertaken to examine the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on transportation in China. A thorough analysis is performed to assess the influence of COVID-19 on the movement patterns of individuals using cellular signalling data obtained from the Greater Bay Area in China. The results indicated that the impact of COVID-19 on major cities was more significant compared to peripheral regions, and there was a decrease in the prevalence of non-commuting travel. It examines the ways in which older individuals in Kunming, China, adjusted their accessibility structures and travel habits in response to the COVID-19 epidemic (Hu & Zhu, 2023). The findings suggested that those over the age of 60 had difficulties while using public transportation. Recent research has identified four distinct stages that will characterize Chinese mobility in 2020, each exhibiting varying degrees and patterns of alterations in movement. The cellular signalling information was used to examine the distinct characteristics of disparity in the reaction and adjustment to the outbreak across different cities (Yu *et al.*, 2023). A balanced randomized block modelling technique was used to study the intercity transportation network in China during the early months of 2020. Based on the movement patterns and physical locations of the cities, four distinct network blocks were discovered. The COVID-19 epidemic and travel restrictions had a profound impact on the intercity transportation network in China, causing a notable disruption in its original hierarchy. As a consequence, the network became more fragmented at the local or regional level, even throughout the recovery phase (Rokni, 2021). Škare, Soriano, Porada-Rochoń (2020) have examined the real changes in visitor movement after two phases of the COVID-19 epidemic in China, using three seasons of mobile phone data. The report disclosed that the quantity of domestic visitors in Beijing subsequent to the outbreak surpassed the amount before the pandemic, indicating a robust resurgence in tourism demand. Analysis indicated that during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, female and elderly travelers were found to be more susceptible to the assault. However, their behaviors underwent a reversal one year later, indicating a dynamic adjustment in tourists' interests and risk appraisals (Rokni, 2021).

This study examines the current literature on crisis management in the tourism sector, specifically addressing the consequences and significance of COVID-19 for the worldwide tourism industry. The research discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic presented tourism stakeholders with the chance to reconsider and reform their tourist strategies (Hu & Zhu, 2023). This included improving health and safety protocols, using digital technologies, and reinforcing cooperation and coordination efforts. This case study examines the management of tourist locations in China that have reopened following the COVID-19 epidemic, with a focus on exploring tourism destination management. The research introduced a comprehensive four-step methodology for effectively overseeing tourism locations in times of crisis and in the aftermath (SHT, 2020). The poll conducted in 2020 examines the impact of the coronavirus on the inclination of Chinese inhabitants to engage in tourism and travel (Yu *et al.*, 2023). The study used a structural equation model (SEM)

to investigate the connections among environmental and personal variables, perceived risk and value, and the inclination to engage in travel. The impact of environmental and human variables on both assessed benefits and the desire to travel was influenced by perceived danger. An importance-performance study was conducted to assess the influence of bed-and-breakfasts on visitor satisfaction in Zhejiang.

Figure 2: China's revenue from tourism from 2012 to 2022
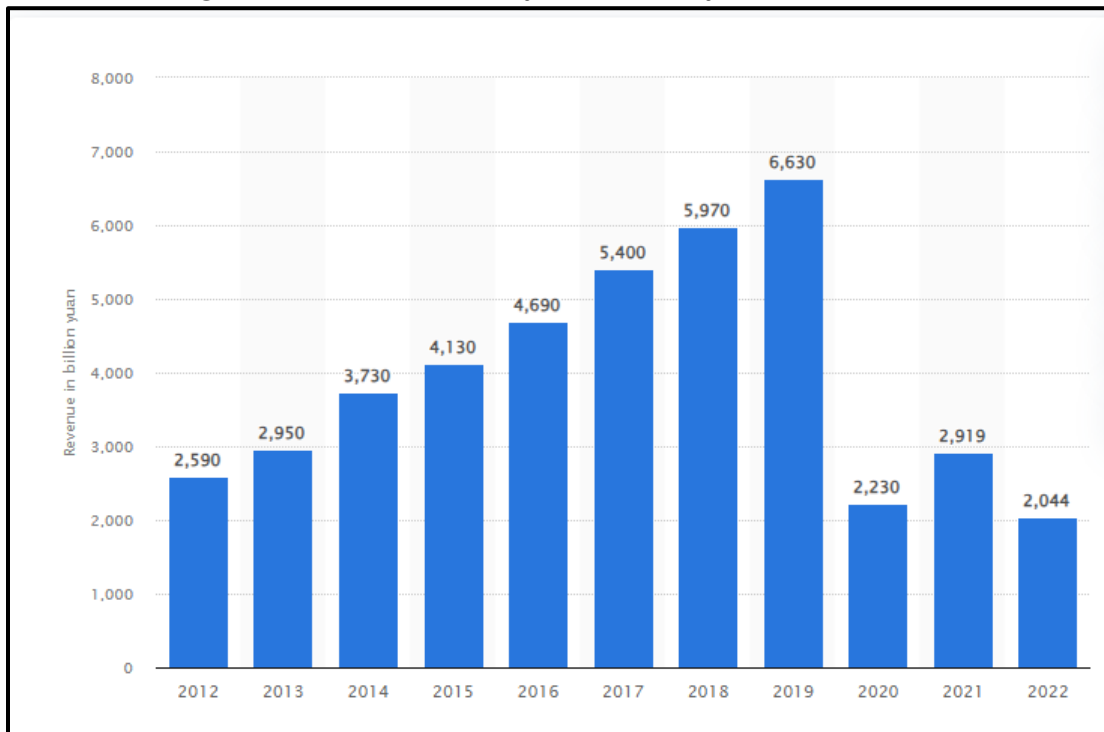
Source: (Blazyte, 2022)

Difficulties faced by the Chinese tourism industry in COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Chinese tourism sector, leading to substantial disruptions and difficulties for both firms and individuals operating within this industry. The tourism industry of China is confronted with several notable challenges due to the global pandemic, including diminished demand, constraints on travel, mandatory quarantine protocols, and financial hardships (Škare, Soriano & Porada-Rochoń, 2020).

In the aftermath of COVID-19, one of the greatest obstacles facing the tourism business is lower demand. The pandemic caused extensive travel restrictions and lockdowns, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of individuals traveling to China. The tourist sector of China has experienced a notable impact, as businesses dependent on tourism as a source of income have been compelled to reduce operations or cease operations altogether. The reduction in business seen by airlines, hotels, restaurants, and tour operators has resulted in financial difficulties and employment losses (Usui *et al.*, 2021).

Methodology

The analysis in the review relied on secondary data. Secondary data analysis involves using pre-existing data that was gathered by an alternate entity for a distinct objective in order to address novel research inquiries or acquire supplementary understandings. This kind of study is distinguished from primary data analysis, which involves the immediate acquisition of data by the analyst for a particular research endeavour. As the initial phase of secondary analysis, the study formulated a vital question related to this particular research: "What is the worldwide effect of the COVID-19 outbreak on the travel and tourist industry of China?" After that, the team of investigators identified, assessed, and formulated the ultimate conclusion based on the secondary information set. The research mostly relied on reviews, published papers, and articles. In addition, news, stories, and online sites were also consulted in order to gather various additional sources of information. In the next section, the analytic method started with contextual secondary data, which included examining journal articles and reports accessible to the person conducting the study. The numbers of observations collected from the analyses were analysed in order to get more in-depth outcomes from this research on the coronavirus in the tourist sector. The information that was accessible was used to perform a descriptive study of the tourist industry and its accompanying regions. The analysis of secondary data is an advantageous study method that enables researchers to use pre-existing data to address research inquiries or acquire an understanding of diverse subjects. Nevertheless, it requires meticulous evaluation of data integrity, ethical concerns, and the congruence between available data and the findings of this project.

Discussion

The objective of this study project is to examine the effects of COVID-19 on the tourist choices of Chinese citizens. Our study indicates that Chinese outbound destination choices were influenced by COVID-19. These preferences altered from the initial outbreak and advancement period of COVID-19 in Chinese tourism to the particular phase when it has been proclaimed a worldwide outbreak in June 2020 (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

According to Lu et al. (2021), during the first phase of the COVID-19 epidemic, when it was confined to China, popular Chinese tourist sites including Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, the United States, and Thailand saw a major decline in their preference ratings due to being heavily afflicted by the virus. During the advanced phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, nations heavily affected by the virus, such as Italy, the US, France, and the UK, saw a major decline in their rankings. Nevertheless, this research indicates that the decline in preference is not only attributable to the intensity of COVID-19 infection in a particular location. Australia had a notable decline in its rating, dropping from 5th to 10th. However, it is important to note that Australia's containment efforts for COVID-19 were very successful and served as a model for other countries worldwide (Vărzaru, Bocean, & Cazacu, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant ramifications in several domains, including the realms of international affairs and politics. The

precipitous decline in the relationship between Australia and China since April 2020 must have influenced this decrease in preference. All these data indicate that the influence of COVID-19 on the psychological state of tourists may not be immediate or straightforward. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely the primary catalyst for several linked transformations around the globe, such as political distrust among nations and societal discontent stemming from the epidemic. These changes, in turn, might influence alterations in visitor preferences (Wang, 2023).

According to Rokni (2021), the outcomes have substantial literature and policy ramifications. These ramifications of COVID-19 affecting the Chinese tourist industry seem intricate. While travel laws and norms have a noticeable impact on the travel system and its recovery, the psychological effects may not be as readily apparent. While many psychological impacts may be directly attributed to COVID-19, some are likely to be indirect and influenced by other variables, like tension and eroded trust between nations as a result of the pandemic. Research has shown that the impact of SARS on tourism differs across nations. The data corroborate this assertion and indicate that there is no universally applicable answer to the methods for revitalizing tourism. Nations must take into account the distinctiveness of their own tourist assets and the circumstances of each source market in order to revive their primary international tourism markets (Wang, Meng, *et al.*, 2021).

COVID-19 has had a very important effect on the local tourist business due to the implementation of travel prohibitions and border shutdowns. Unlike previous pandemic crises, which were characterized by unique shocks that had a dominating influence, the current crisis has caused widespread shocks that are affecting the industry on a worldwide scale (referred to as the globalization effect). In past pandemic crises, such as SARS (2002) and H1N1 (2009), the domestic tourist sector experienced specific shocks inside the country (Wen *et al.*, 2020). After the pandemic cases ceased to be recorded, the tourism business saw a rebound effect, the magnitude of which was influenced by factors such as perceived risk, fear of danger, financial standing, and hysteresis. Prior research has shown the tourist industry's strong ability to withstand and recover from disruptions. On a typical basis, the tourism sector has reduced its recovery time from 26 months to 10 months between 2001 and 2018. Nevertheless, there is a possibility of an alternate result this time (Yiwei *et al.*, 2021). According to Yeh (2020), in previous pandemic crises, the negative impacts on domestic tourist industries were mostly caused by unique and unpredictable events. As soon as domestic shocks ceased (with no reported instances of illness), there was an instant resurgence in incoming arrivals. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis leads to the amplification of the crisis via global impacts in the form of shared shocks. Therefore, if a nation does not have a COVID-19 notice in place (referring to unique and unpredictable events), it will not see a fast recovery in the number of incoming visitors if neighbouring nations do not lift their COVID-19 alerts (referring to a shared and widespread event). For instance, although a COVID-19 notice may be cancelled for the European zone, travelers from China will not be allowed to enter until the alert is also released for China (Zhong *et al.*, 2021). Pandemic crises, like COVID-19, exhibit amplifying effects via both unique and shared shock pathways, leading to a far more profound crisis in comparison to previous

pandemic occurrences. Previous instances of pandemics were characterized by isolated and unique disruptions as well as limited, widespread disruptions. The combined impact of unique and shared disruptions is significantly straining the tourism sector. Another significant relationship occurs with the financial period. The occurrence of pandemics coinciding with the highest point in monetary cycles, as is the case now, exacerbates the adverse effects of the pandemic, thus constraining the ability of businesses and governments to respond effectively on an economic level. Investments in infrastructure and employment see a significant decrease, leading to a sharp dip in real wage and family income, which in turn causes a reduction in overall consumption (Vărzaru, Bocean, & Cazacu, 2021). Given the significant levels of private and governmental debt, the ability of both private sector initiatives in the tourism industry and government economic policy measures to stimulate the sector is constrained (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study's findings found that the Chinese central and local governments adopted top-down preventative and control efforts throughout the period of widespread illness caused by the pandemic. The use of official financial assistance to reinvigorate China's tourist industry and enhance its worldwide reputation has garnered significant interest. Emerging trends in Chinese tourism, such as risk mitigation, digitization, and an emphasis on the environment and cultural heritage, are now pivotal for the future growth of the industry. Dark tourism has emerged as a viable method for tourist recovery, not only to commemorate those who have died in the epidemic but also to preserve national patriotism.

Overall, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge on worldwide tourist reconstruction and resilience by addressing the gaps related to the recovery of Chinese tourist industry towns and cities, which are internationally acknowledged for their efficiency and rapidity. This research offers a comprehensive perspective on the measures implemented in the pandemic situation, encompassing both preventive measures and strategies for recovery. It aims to examine how the aforementioned strategies and precautions have adapted over time in response to the changing nature and various waves of the pandemic's outbreaks. Previous studies have previously discussed tactics and trends, including the use of emerging technology and the exploration of novel techniques to achieve an environmentally conscious tourism paradigm. This research has supplemented these approaches by including the tactics used in Chinese cities, which rely on financial assistance and leverage the advantages of natural, cultural, and legacy assets to stimulate tourism while implementing adaptable and surveillance systems to limit the spread of contagion. The studies have also emphasized the pandemic's role as a catalyst for dark tourism, a trend that might potentially extend to subsequent worldwide health crises.

Conflict of Interests

The writers state that they personally have no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgement

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