



# Chapter 70

## Contexts of Political (Un) Stability in Asia and the Chinese Instrumentalisation of Tourism


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### ABSTRACT

*Tourism is one of the most vulnerable sectors in the face of economic, political, environmental, and social changes. The study regarding the relationship between political phenomena and the dynamics of international relations and tourism is still at an infancy stage. The authors refer, in particular, to contexts of crisis, catastrophes, and conflicts in their relationship with tourism indicators. This is the purpose of this work, focusing on the Chinese case due to its particularities. In other words, they want to see how some regional political phenomena—the Asian context—are reflected in the development of Chinese tourism. They find that there is an immediate correspondence between the number of Chinese tourists and the contexts of political instability, but in which tourist flows are very dependent on government guidelines. Although subject to market dictates, they often obey geopolitical imperatives.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been recognised as a dynamic sector for the development of global and regional economies. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018), this sector contributed directly and indirectly to 10% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a tenth of employment and 30% of service exports. In addition, it is an important sector for world trade and a major contributor to economic growth. The UNWTO also pointed to sustained growth: globally, international tourist arrivals grew to 1,326 million in 2017, registering a 7% increase over the previous year, which is the most significant increase since the global economic crisis of 2009 (UNWTO, 2018). According to the pace of growth, international tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to exceed 1.4 billion by 2020 and reaching 1.8 billion by 2030 (OMT, 2011).

Taking into account the volume and the rapid growth of tourism, it appears to be increasingly interconnected to other industries and fields. Note, for example, the relationship established between environmental conditions and tourism, health risks or international security. Although less discussed than the economic dimension in the tourism literature, the political dimension is very relevant (Richter, 1989). Tourism is often involved in political problems between states. Tourism development can be affected by its patterns, processes and direction (Hall, 2010). The interrelationship between tourism, politics and international relations is essential to understand how the international system works: from the exchange of ideas and changes in the image and representation of the "other", to formal diplomacy between states. Using Taoism symbolism, tourism has a positive and negative direction, both in terms of consequences, and in the way governments use it in their foreign policy actions.

Edgell (1990) underlines, in this perspective, that sometimes a government can prohibit outbound travel to war zones or territories of hostile nations. This was the case of the United States, when the country applied an economic embargo to Cuba in 1962, limiting the right of American citizens to trade, invest and travel to the "island of Fidel" (Hinch, 2010, p. 97). The cold war scenarios were conducive to the creation of political barriers between people, causing tourist losses. In fact, there was a drop of 75% concerning travel from the United States to the Soviet Union (Edgell, 1990). This action taken by the United States later led to a kind of "revenge" manipulated by the Soviet Union. In 1984, under the encouragement of the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc (except Romania) also boycotted the Los Angeles Olympic Games. Other examples show the same trend. The crash of a Korean civilian plane, shot down by Soviet jets in 1983, led several Western countries to ban flights to the Soviet Union or Soviet planes to land in their countries. Another case occurred in 1980, after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. Following this offensive, the United States denied the landing of Aeroflot flights in American territory (Richter, 1989). The President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, also encouraged the Americans and the Olympic Committee to boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow (Richter, 1983).

Asia is also conducive to cases that interrelate politics with tourism. If in many scenarios in the Far East, tourism is very conditioned to the will of political actors, in China this dependence is much greater. China has a political system of central leadership, exercising strong control over outbound travel, often instrumentalising this sector in achieving strategic objectives. Many travel constraints between countries in Asia are the result of local incidents. Examples are the tensions on the island of Diaoyu / Senkaku, the recurring crises in the Korean peninsula, the tensions in the South China Sea, terrorism in Central Asia, border tensions with India, Sino-American relations or the Taiwan Strait crisis. In this paper, we intend to analyse some of the regional political constraints and their relations with the tourism sector, centred on the Chinese context. We highlight the way in which this country has controlled outbound

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