

## Developing the coepetitive destination brand for the Greater Bay Area

Ksenia Kirillova<sup>a,\*</sup>, Jinah Park<sup>a</sup>, Mingyang Zhu<sup>b</sup>, Leonardo (Don) Dioko<sup>c</sup>, Guojun Zeng<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Hotel & Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 17 Science Museum Rd, TST East, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

<sup>b</sup> School of Tourism Management, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China

<sup>c</sup> Institute for Tourism Studies, Rm I-127, I-Building, Colina de Mong-ha, SAR, Macao

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### ABSTRACT

In light of intensified competition among destinations, tourism collaborations are used to enhance a region's attractiveness. Yet tourism collaboration in its pure form is rarely observed because destinations tend to be excludable and rivalrous. To better reflect this reality, the concept of coopetition has emerged. Coopetitive marketing, especially within the cross-border region at the macro level, is underdeveloped in tourism literature. This study assesses the prospect of developing a coepetitive brand of the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), which spans geographical, political, ideological, and jurisdictional borders. Based on cross-sectional survey in six member cities in the GBA (N = 2135), this study investigates homogeneity and heterogeneity of the cities' existing destination images, and identifies the effects of identity salience (residents and short- versus long-haul tourists) and of borders (SARs versus Mainland). Theoretically, this study consolidates the concept of coopetition and cross-border marketing in the light of different stakeholders' perceptions. The findings underpin the uniqueness of the member cities with unity in a possible common brand.

### 1. Introduction

Given the ever-increasing competition among tourism destinations, collaborative strategies of co-branding and joint marketing under a regional destination marketing framework are often used to enhance destinations' market positioning (García, Gómez, & Molina, 2012; Wu & Song, 2001). Destinations are then conceptualized as complex, co-producing networks (Haugland, Ness, Grønseth, & Aarstad, 2011), in which place images and value propositions are integrally linked to consolidate supply at the regional level (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, & Baloglu, 2017). From the perspectives of strategic place branding, collaboration among destinations is also beneficial to enhance competitiveness in a sustainable manner and to signal the unique value of offered products, services or experiences (Haugland et al., 2011; Naipaul, Wang, & Okumus, 2009).

Specifically, existing literature shows that collaboration among tourism destinations can instigate a new development path for urban and regional economies. Although mature tourism destinations tend to have an effective market positioning, underpinned by a well-established institutional framework, they are in danger of stagnation (Baum, 1998). Collaboration with developing tourism destinations can be a starting point for new pathways through the introduction of heterogeneity and diversity into the product portfolio, the transplantation of ideas from

elsewhere, and even an upgrade of the existing tourism industry (Martin & Simmie, 2008; Martin & Sunley, 2006). In addition, collaborative destination planning and marketing can facilitate and, if necessary, modify intra-regional flows (Prokkola, 2007a). Efficient transport connections within the region can stimulate visits to neighboring destinations, not only horizontally but also hierarchically, by redirecting tourist flows to second-tier destinations and thus promoting more equal regional development (Wu & Carson, 2008). Tourism collaboration, especially within cross-border regions, is also thought to foster international relationships across the regions (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019; Pasquinelli, 2012). In the analysis of a joint marketing campaign between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (part of the UK), Gooroochurn and Hanley (2005) documented the mutually beneficial (although asymmetrical) spillover effect of tourism arrivals between the two countries. Finally, mutually beneficial relationships with other destinations allow for more equal distribution not only of tourism benefits but also of associated costs (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019).

Despite the advantages offered by destination collaborations in theory, in practice, tourism collaboration in its pure form is rarely observed. This is because all destinations compete for a tourist's individual budget, even though they share a common goal, and have a need to improve their attractiveness and productivity (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017a). To better reflect this reality, scholars have

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [ksenia.kirillova@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:ksenia.kirillova@polyu.edu.hk), [ksenia.kirillova@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:ksenia.kirillova@polyu.edu.hk) (K. Kirillova), [jinah.park@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:jinah.park@polyu.edu.hk) (J. Park), [answery32@126.com](mailto:answery32@126.com) (M. Zhu), [don@ift.edu.mo](mailto:don@ift.edu.mo) (L.D. Dioko), [zenggj@mail.sysu.edu.cn](mailto:zenggj@mail.sysu.edu.cn) (G. Zeng).

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drawn on the concept of co-competition, or the simultaneous cooperative and competitive behavior among firms to increase performance (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011). The idea is that organizations may find it beneficial to compete in some areas while simultaneously taking advantage of collaborative alliances in other aspects (Galvagno & Garraffo, 2010). Kylänen and Rusko (2011) present the case of the Pyhä-Luosto in Lapland, Finland, in which the tensions between cooperation and competition are beneficial to manage the interplay between private and public sectors in tourism development. The heterogeneity of resources, which is different yet complementary, is the driving force of co-competition: it provides a competitive advantage when a destination acts alone but requires the joint effort to access unavailable resources in other situations (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). These ideas are also found in Wang and Krakover (2008), as well as in Hill and Shaw (1995) who underscore the importance of compatibility of heterogeneous tourism products in partnering tourism destinations. In this way, destinations may collaborate in terms of *en-route* transportation and joint promotion, yet compete in terms of attracting target markets and investment capital. Research also shows that successful competing destinations have governance mechanisms that signal management commitment, mutual trust, and well-defined communication channels (Chin, Chan, & Lam, 2008; Della Corte & Sciarrelli, 2012). The above presents the obvious challenge for most destinations but particularly those that are divided by jurisdictional, political, and ideological borders (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019).

Co-competition, as opposed to competition, with another destination poses implications for destination branding, of which assessing existing images of partnering destinations is a critical part (Cai, 2002; Gartner, 1989). Destination branding is selecting a consistent element mix to distinguish the destination through a positive image building (Cai, 2002). However, if underpinned by the concept of co-competition, then the process of destination branding involves an active and methodological building of a consistent image by: (1) identifying existing heterogeneous images of partnering destinations, and (2) integrating the complementary components into a common imagery. Unlike cooperative branding, in which the resulting brand acts as an umbrella brand for individual destinations (Cai, 2002), a brand built on the principle of co-competition should not supersede unique brand identities of partnering destinations.

Despite the greater attention given to the issues of collaboration within tourism networks in the academic literature (e.g. Kozak and Buhalis, 2019), cooperative behavior in tourism remains at the periphery. In Chim-Miki and Batista-Canino's (2017a) review, there were 15 tourism-specific studies that focused on cooperative networks, most of which were published outside tourism journals. These studies were either theoretical in nature or focused on micro- (intra-firm) or meso- (inter-firm) levels (e.g. Fong, Wong, & Hong, 2018). Macro- (inter-network) and meta- (regional) cooperative relationships in tourism and especially its marketing implications, such as branding, have not been explored to date. Further, existing research, tends to focus on delineating various forms of and criteria for successful collaborative marketing alliances (Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012; Hill & Shaw, 1995) and their activities (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019; Wang & Krakover, 2008), such as cooperative branding (Cai, 2002). Yet, since the very first publication on tourism co-competition by Edgell & Haenisch (1995), there has been a lack of specific examples of how to implement cooperative destination marketing. A research gap can also be observed in terms of understanding cross-border regional branding, although tourism across political and ideological borders is a significant contributor to many regional economies (Boonchai & Freathy, 2018).

Based on the idea of network co-competition, the current study aims to assess the possibility of developing a destination brand in the region that spans geographical, political, juridical, and ideological borders. Set in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (simply the Greater Bay Area, or GBA), the study first intends to gauge existing images of destination cities, for the purpose of evaluating how

heterogeneity-homogeneity among destinations poses a barrier or enabler of joint destination branding. In addition, this research intends to evaluate the roles of identity salience and of cross-border context in facilitating the development of the cooperative destination brand.

## 2. Literature review

This section first provides the general background on the GBA initiative and specifically its tourism aspects. The conceptual background of tourism co-competition is then outlined, followed by a review of the literature on destination image. Finally, the roles of various stakeholders in destination branding are discussed.

### 2.1. Background of the Greater Bay Area

Since the reform and opening-up in 1978, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao region has experienced several zoning and planning changes. The GBA is a revamped version of the Pearl River Delta Metropolitan Region (PRD), which was proposed by the China government in 2008 in the wake of the financial crisis (Li, Xu, & Yeh, 2014). PRD development plan, which was the initial name for this region, emphasized economic development that was expected to trickle down to the rest of the Chinese economy. Since tourism is considered as a strategy for 'economic breakthrough,' provincial and central governments have had ongoing conversations on the cooperation mechanism (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2009). A decade later, the GBA was proposed to further integrate the industries, technology, and people within the region (Xinhua, 2019). Covering 56,000 km<sup>2</sup>, GBA has a total of 69 million residents, with a 85% of urbanization rate, GDP of US\$1.5 trillion (BrandHK, 2019), and the highest container throughput in the world (UNWTO/GTERC, 2018). By 2018, infrastructural interconnectivity had been improved through several landmark projects, such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong High Speed Rail Link (Fig. 1). These projects were intended to facilitate intra-regional mobilities of goods and people, the aim being to redistribute tourism flows from the cities with higher tourism development and international reputation to neighboring second-tier cities.

As regional disparities in the GBA accentuated, especially between Hong Kong and Mainland cities (Liu, 2017), recent collaborative practices between the Guangdong and Hong Kong governments efforts made to transform the social and cultural landscape, and develop the GBA into an intra-regional innovation and technological hub. The same holds true for the nine member cities of Guangdong province in Mainland China, namely Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Huizhou and Zhaoqing. These cities are heterogeneous, varying greatly in population size and density, as well as in their histories, with regard to urban formation and identity. For instance, Shenzhen and Zhuhai are the so-called migrant cities where people predominantly speak Mandarin Chinese, while Guangzhou and Zhongshan have a long history of Cantonese-speaking residents. Besides, the borders between Mainland China and Hong Kong, SAR, or Macao, SAR, denote geopolitical and social division. As Ferrer-Gallardo (2008) argues, borders and re-bordering function as barriers or bridges, and, as such, they become delineators of identity. In this way, the borders in the GBA are also symbolic representation of the 'us-them' segregation. In the context of the present study, the most researched issue is the antagonism between local Hong Kong residents and Mainland Chinese tourists (e.g. Rowen, 2016; Tse & Qiu, 2016; Zhang, Wong, & Lai, 2018). Chen, Hsu, and Li (2018) report that Hong Kong residents simultaneously feel superior to Mainland Chinese visitors, for example in terms of education and dominant values, and at the same time, disadvantaged because of the need to share limited resources with a large number of visitors.

The GBA currently has no joint destination marketing organization (DMO). Instead, collaborative relationships among the three

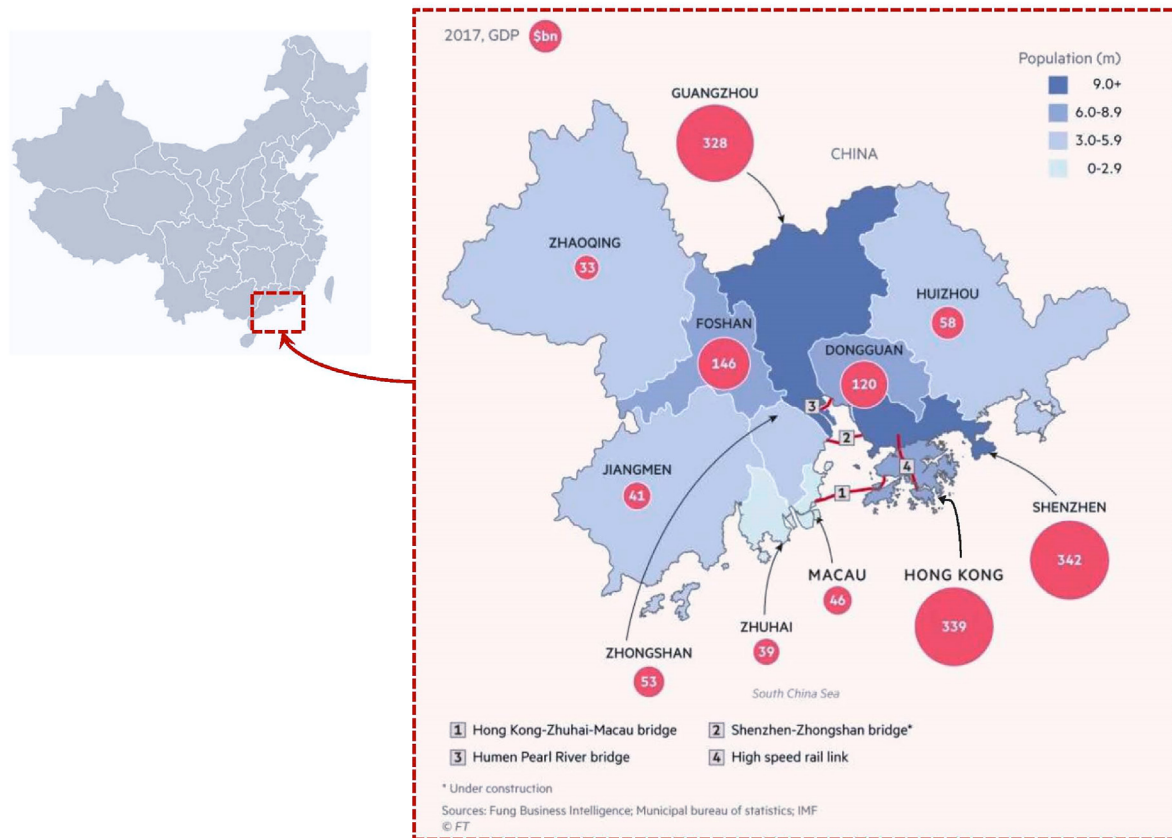


Fig. 1. Outline map of GBA. Source: Financial Times, by B. Bland <https://www.ft.com/content/fe5976d8-ab81-11e8-94bd-cba20d67390c>.

jurisdictions in terms of tourism are limited to brief information on the Hong Kong DMO website ([discoverhongkong.com](http://discoverhongkong.com)). There, visitors are invited to explore the section ‘Beyond Hong Kong,’ in which a short background of the GBA is presented, along with a cursory description of each member city. However, the Guangdong provincial tourism marketing does not cross-promote either Macau or Hong Kong, and a similar approach is observed in Macao. Although the Hong Kong Commerce and Economic Development Bureau has recently developed the Greater Bay Area’s information portal ([bayarea.gov.hk](http://bayarea.gov.hk)), it is very much Hong Kong-centric and with only two paragraphs dedicated to tourism as an important policy area. No marketing strategic plan has been publicly proposed or discussed.

2.2. Tourism co-competition

One angle from which to understand co-branding across state boundaries is the concept of co-competition (the mixture of competition and cooperation), which refers to the simultaneous cooperation and competition among firms to increase performance (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011). Recent studies have argued that organizations do not always engage in either competitive or cooperative relationships with each other and both relationships can occasionally co-exist (Della Corte & Aria, 2016; Wang & Krakover, 2008). Co-competitive behavior tends to occur under the conditions of high external competition when there is a need for unity among the destinations to jointly design marketing strategies, to share risks and knowledge (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017a,b; Czakon, 2009). Co-competition can occur at four levels, such as intra-organizational (micro-level), inter-organizational (meso-level), inter-networks (macro-level), and regional co-competition (meta-level) (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017a,b). The macro-level co-competition, which is of interest here, refers to collaborative yet competitive

behavior among two or more organizational systems such as tourism destinations within a geographic region. Studies have identified the critical elements of successful co-competition as: (1) heterogeneity of resources, (2) customer proximity, (3) inter-dependency, and (4) mutual trust (Gnyawali & Park, 2009).

In tourism practice, co-competition may emerge when tourism enterprises cooperate or compete among networks in a collaborative destination-marketing context (Wang & Krakover, 2008). If co-competition is observed in tourism businesses, these organizations are simultaneously involved in the relationship of competition due to conflicting interests and of cooperation due to common interests. Wang and Krakover (2008) identified inter-dependence, complementarity, common goals, and co-locations as critically important for successful co-competition in tourism. Hill and Shaw (1995) demonstrated that successful tourism alliances are formed in situations when member-regions: (1) are in close proximity to each other, (2) have en-route transportation connections, (3) have compatible tourism attractions, which are different yet complementary (4) similar standards of tourism products, e.g. accommodation, retailing, catering, and 5), have many multinational tourism enterprises. Fyall, Garrod, and Wang (2012) distinguish three forms of destination collaboration: (1) organic, (2) mediated intra-destination, and (3) mediated intra- and inter-destination. Although favoring the latter two, researchers have argued that collaborations allow “for new ‘internal’ competition to emerge in the form of smaller ‘clusters’ within the larger collaboration,” highlighting the problematics of purely collaborative links (Fyall et al., 2012, p. 22). Focusing on inter-organizational collaboration in tourism, Fong et al. (2018) have shown that co-competition implies five distinct elements, namely exploiting, exploring, bridging, sharing, and boundary spanning, of which the former two attest to the notion of competition, while the latter three are associated with cooperation.

Joint promotion for multi-destination not only benefits from the conceptual or functional planning (Hall, 1998), but also diversifies the tourism experiences through the alliance of unique destinations with common regional culture. A brand signals product credibility (Erdem & Swait, 1998), and thus the combination of two brands may provide greater assurance about product quality than does a single branded product (Helmig, Huber, & Leeflang, 2008). From the perspectives of tourism destination, either the collaboration among neighboring destinations (Naipaul et al., 2009) or international pairing (Hill & Shaw, 1995) is beneficial to one region when the tourism outcome resulting from a cooperating venture exceeds when a region acts alone. Beyond the sender side of signaling phenomenon, Decker and Baade (2016) also highlighted that perceived dissimilarity on brand fit serves as a signal in the effectiveness of brand alliances with respect to consumers. Collaborative marketing in is also important as tourists' decision heuristics, since the fundamental purpose of co-branding in the cooperative context is to gain entry for the region to initial awareness or early evoked set (Um & Crompton, 1992).

Although cases of tourism cooperation are readily available in existing literature (see Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017b, for a review), very few cases of cooperative branding in tourism were identified at the macro- or regional levels. Although not explicitly referring to cooperation, Prokkola (2007a) describes the case of tourism development at the Finish-Swedish border and the development of cross-border brand 'Destination Arctic Circle.' Despite border separation, the region's new brand identity is built on the historic unity of the borderland culture, e.g. language, social and economic ties. Destination Arctic Circle is branded as "a harmonic cross-border destination in which the border itself is more of a bureaucratic formality than a real barrier" (Prokkola, 2007b, p.130). Despite the joint brand and promotions at national and European levels, the competition over visitors and funding pose as barriers to collaboration. Finnish entrepreneurs also more actively embrace this joint venture than the Swedish side. Another example is the joint marketing of Iguassu Falls located at the borders of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay (Pololguassu, 2014; as cited in Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017b). The cross-border network engages in co-marketing, visitor education, industry training, and tourism infrastructure improvements but competes for visitor arrivals. Nilsson, Eriksson, and Ek (2010) present another European case of cooperative identity building in the Baltic Sea Area, encompassing three regions located in four countries (Sweden, Finland, Germany, and Poland). In their study it was demonstrated that, despite joint aspirations to be seen as the Area for economic development, integration and political cooperation, the three regions differed in how they built this identity. The researchers noted that the attractiveness of the Area must lie in the differences between its regions and the uniqueness of the landscapes. Aside from this heterogeneity, the cooperative behavior within the Area is encouraged by European Union programs that, on the one hand, promote regionalization (inner cohesion) but, on the other hand, aim for internalization (joint competition). The final case (Sirisuthikul, 2018) discusses cooperative tourism branding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that consists of 10 countries. Although each member-country was uniquely and differently perceived by Asian and non-Asian tourists, authenticity was the common value perception of the entire region. Authenticity was thus recommended to be at the foundation of ASEAN branding and considered by member countries in their independent branding strategies.

### 2.3. Destination image

Destination image is a well-established yet evolving topic in the tourism literature. It is defined as an individual's compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processed from various sources, including actual visits, which results in a mental representation of a destination's attributes and feelings about a destination (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Destination image is regarded as a critical determinant of

tourists' visit intention to a destination and can be formed from non-commercial and commercial sources of information, leading to organic and induced destination images, respectively (Gunn, 1988). An organic image originates from autonomous agents such as mass media broadcasted news reports, films, documentaries and books about a place, as well as firsthand accounts of other travelers. Li, Pan, Zhang, and Smith (2009) refer to this image as the baseline image to emphasize that it stems from passive and ongoing information gathering on the part of potential tourists, rather than active and intentional search that accompanies trip planning at later stages. Induced image, meanwhile, derives from a conscious effort of tourism marketing communication in the form of advertising, public relation activities, and media influencers, and others. Although DMOs cannot directly influence a destination's organic image, its effect could be mitigated by an effective and targeted induced image. The image formed by organic and induced sources of information perceived before an actual visit to a destination is often referred to as secondary (Phelps, 1986), while the image resulting after the visit is termed as primary.

To conceptualize it in a different way, a destination image is thought as consisting of cognitive, affective, and conative components (Gartner, 1994). The cognitive component refers to beliefs and knowledge a tourist has about the destination attributes. The affective component attests to feelings or emotional responses towards various features of a place. The conative component relates to behavioral manifestations (e.g. intentions, actual visit) regarding a destination. The three components are related sequentially in image formation, with the cognitive image providing the foundation, followed by affective and, ultimately, conative image (Akgün, Senturk, Keskin, & Onal, 2019; Gartner, 1994; Styliadis, Shani, & Belhassen, 2017). Image may also be changed over time (Pike, Jin, & Kotsi, 2019) due to tangible and intangible factors (e.g. infrastructure and socio-political environment) within a hosting region (Beerli & Martin, 2004) that communicates the region's positioning (Kotler et al., 2017).

Destination image is the core for constructing, distributing, and promoting a destination brand (Pike, Jin, & Kotsi, 2019). As one dimension of brand equity, destination image is positively related to destination awareness, perceived quality and loyalty (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). The branding of tourism destinations thus must be built based on a positive destination image held by tourists (Cai, 2002; Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012), and should further (re)shape the images by reducing perceived risk and creating emotional connection (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). Broderick and Pickton (2005) emphasized that the aim of image and brand management is to create impressions for differentiating products and to build the value for both the consumer and supplier of the products or places, especially by joint promotion or cooperative branding across administrative borders (Pasquinelli, 2012). Taking tourism in Ireland as a case study of cross-border body, Gooroochurn and Hanley (2005) showed that joint promotion of two regions generated inter-regional tourism demand spillovers. Cai (2002) also showed that cooperative branding with geographic and cultural proximity not only builds a stronger brand identity but also creates greater favorability of brand associations towards a regional entity than its member destinations (among multiple communities or cities). In his research on the regional brand for Old West County, consisting of seven counties in New Mexico (USA), both the region and its members had benefited from cooperative branding. The joint brand was found to be based on a consistent cognitive image and shared destination attributes. It improved attribute-based associations and resulted in more favorable attitudes towards the region, than towards its members.

### 2.4. Destination branding and stakeholders

Apart from its complexity and multi-dimensionality, a destination image is elusive as it can vary across different groups of stakeholders (Assaker, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2011). For instance, the image may reflect



a different narrative depending on which group is in the position of power within a destination (Stylidis, Shani, & Belhassen, 2017; Xu & Ye, 2018). A tourism destination as a place which is not visited by tourists but it is where residents live (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004). In response to the increasing focus on residents as part of the place, destination branding is developing into a place branding (García et al., 2012; Zenker, Braun, & Petersen, 2017), and cooperative behavior and shared values among stakeholders is becoming essential for the newly defined regional destinations (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2016). Blichfeldt (2005) thus argued that a place brand must capture the spirit of its people in as much as the residents and interactions with such residents are the core elements of place brand. In the case of Hong Kong, Wassler, Wang, and Hung (2019) demonstrated the effect of brand congruity on residents' destination brand attitudes and ambassadorship behavior. Stylidis et al. (2017) reported that, even though the cognitive-affective-conative relationship in the destination image formation is also applicable to residents, the impact of the affective component on the overall image and behavioral intentions are less pronounced for residents than for tourists. Residents' image of the place was positively related to place attachment and support for tourism (Stylidis, 2018). The discrepancies in destination image between tourists and residents is referred to as a 'destination image gap,' even though it does not occur in all destinations (Ryan & Aicken, 2010). In the recent review, Stylidis (2020) has argued that residents are important stakeholders not only due to their ability to affect tourism but also in their capacity as tourism employees and as 'tourists' within their own cities (e.g. when accompanying visiting friends and family).

Aside from residents, perceptions of destination image and quality can vary based on tourist characteristics. Under the premise that tourists are diverse, tourism marketers identify the segmentation criteria for defining a homogeneous market within the larger heterogeneous market (Dolnicar, 2008). A number of studies have utilized criteria such as demographics, socioeconomic status, psychographic characteristics and geographic origins of visitors (Park et al., 2016). Of these, geographic segmentation and segmentation by distance traveled (short-versus long-haul) is perhaps the first and still most-commonly used in tourism (Cai & Li, 2009). As proposed by McKercher and Lew (2003) in the idea of distance decay, because there is a trade-off between travel time and the time spent at the destination, tourism demand decreases with increased distance. Cai and Li (2009) found significant differences in visitor demographics and socio-economics among various distance-traveled segments. Moscardo, Pearce, and Morrison (2001) emphasized the importance of geographic origins (e.g. international, interstate and intrastate visitors, local residents) for refining market segmentation. One explanation for differences in perception was tourists' cultural backgrounds, as longer-haul tourists were likely to come from contexts that are less culturally proximate to that of a destination. In this sense, the distance-traveled can act as a proxy for cultural (Ahn & McKercher, 2015) or aesthetic (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015)

distance between a tourists' place of origin and a destination. In Sirisuthikul (2018), Asian tourists tended to see the ASEAN as the place for creative industries, uniqueness and culturally diverse, while non-Asian tourists valued interactions with locals and sustainability. Based on this background, three types of stakeholders relevant for the GBA branding can be identified: local residents; GBA tourists, who are tourists originating from locales within the GBA; and non-GBA tourists, who are tourists originating from locales outside the GBA. Because these types of stakeholders are likely to have varying degrees of identification with a member city and the GBA region, in this research, this distance-based segregation is conceptualized as identity salience.

### 3. Method

As tourism destinations can be newly zoned on the basis of visitors' perceptual patterns, a network/system generated by co-competition relationship might shape a new destination boundary. Existing images of an individual member city are expected to play a role, and the joint destination brand will be proposed on the basis of already established affective and cognitive images. In this regard, this study addresses the boundaries of spatial cognition and conceptual re-bordering for joint destination brand. Current literature also points to the importance of incorporating the views of residents and short-versus long-haul tourists in the process of destination branding. The empirical findings shed light on the cooperation/competition relationships in cross-border destinations in their endeavor to create the collective yet dynamic brand, while, at the same time considering stakeholders with different social identities.

#### 3.1. Data collection

To identify existing primary images of GBA cities, a large-scale, cross-sectional survey with residents and tourists in six cities of the GBA (Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Zhongshan) was undertaken during October–November 2018. Considering the tourist arrival data (PwC, 2017) and the substance of GBA tourism plans (Xinhua, 2019), six tourism cities were identified and the questionnaires were distributed in well-known tourist attractions and transportation hubs of each city. For example, tourists in Hong Kong were intersected at Victoria Harbor Promenade, while residents were surveyed in local parks (e.g. Victoria Park) and other recreational zones. Table 1 presents the sample profile.

To assess the effect of identity salience of respondents, data were collected from three types of stakeholders: (1) GBA tourists (n = 725, or 34%), or intra-regional visitors from another location within GBA; (2) non-GBA tourists (803, 37.6%), who were all the other tourists, such as inter-regional domestic visitors and international tourists; and (3) local residents (607, 28.4%) of each city. In all, the final sample size was 2135, of which Macao had 510 (23.9%) and Hong Kong had 509

**Table 1**  
General profile of respondents.

Demographic variables			Freq.	Countries/regions	Freq.
Age (Valid N = 2135)	15–24	911 (42.6%)	Nationality (Valid n = 2112)	Mainland China	1673 (79.2%)
	25–34	712 (33.3%)		Macao SAR	159 (7.4%)
	45–54	293 (13.7%)		Hong Kong SAR	148 (6.9%)
	55–64	134 (6.3%)		Taiwan, China	30 (1.4%)
	65 or above	26 (1.2%)		Philippines	14 (0.7%)
Gender (Valid N = 2135)	Male	959 (44.9%)		US	14 (0.7%)
	Female	1176 (55.1%)		UK	14 (0.7%)
Travel type (Valid N = 1676)	Tour group	163 (7.6%)		Republic of Korea	11 (0.5%)
	Non-tour group	1513 (70.8%)		Singapore	7 (0.3%)
				India	7 (0.3%)
				Canada	6 (0.3%)
			Australia	6 (0.3%)	
			Others	23 (1.1%)	

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics for scale measures (N = 2135).

Variable	Destination	Types of respondent	N	Mean	Std.dev	Std.err	
Affective image	Macao		510	3.5779	0.65663	0.02908	
			509	3.3880	0.65826	0.02918	
			291	3.7388	0.57431	0.03367	
			226	3.6615	0.63151	0.04201	
			307	3.9959	0.54550	0.03113	
			292	3.9872	0.54683	0.03200	
		GBA tourist		725	3.6907	0.59574	0.02213
			803	3.7316	0.61963	0.02187	
			Local resident	607	3.5972	0.74878	0.03039
			510	3.4057	0.36129	0.01600	
Cognitive image	Hong Kong		209	3.3898	0.33168	0.01470	
			291	3.5407	0.31684	0.01857	
			226	3.5593	0.34390	0.02288	
			307	3.5210	0.32162	0.01836	
			292	3.6473	0.38014	0.02225	
			725	3.4918	0.33602	0.01248	
		Non-GBA tourist		803	3.4924	0.34736	0.01226
			Local resident	607	3.4712	0.38774	0.01574
			510	3.4057	0.68537	0.03035	
			509	3.3898	0.58698	0.02602	
Destination quality	Guangzhou		291	3.5407	0.55106	0.03230	
			226	3.5593	0.53761	0.03576	
			307	3.6834	0.55125	0.03146	
			292	3.6390	0.61324	0.03589	
			725	3.6397	0.56507	0.02099	
			803	3.6471	0.57280	0.02021	
		tourist		607	3.4517	0.66930	0.02714
			Local resident	607	3.4517	0.66930	0.02714
			510	3.4057	0.68537	0.03035	
			509	3.3898	0.58698	0.02602	

(23.8%) of the total number of respondents. These were followed by Zhongshan (307, 14.4%), Guangzhou (291, 13.6%), Zhuhai (292, 13.7%), and Shenzhen (226, 10.6%). The quota sampling procedure was followed in each city to intersect the three types of respondents in similar proportions.

### 3.2. Survey instrument

The questionnaire consisted of four sections and was concerned with respondents' evaluation of the city in which the fieldwork was conducted. In this way, respondents (residents and tourists) in Zhuhai were asked to evaluate Zhuhai, while respondents in Macao were asked questions about Macao. First, tourist respondents were surveyed about their current trip characteristics (e.g. duration, previous visits). Second, the image was evaluated as consisting of affective (four items) and cognitive (17 items) image components, measured by Russell's (1980) five-point Likert scale (see Table 2). Russell's scale is perhaps the most commonly utilized tool to measure the destination image in tourism literature, and it demonstrated internal consistency and construct validity across numerous tourism contexts (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; San Martín, Herrero, & García de los Salmones, 2019). Although alternative measurements with unstructured techniques have emerged (Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008; Stepchenkova, Su, & Shichkova, 2019), structured methods can better facilitate comparisons between destinations (Jenkins, 1999). Destination quality was measured by the five-item (Unpolluted environment, High-quality accommodation, High-quality infrastructure, High level of cleanliness, and High level of personal safety) scale (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). After re-coding the seven negatively worded items (i.e. gloomy, tired, hostile, sinful, overcrowded, noisy, and unsafe), the Cronbach's alphas by city ranged between 0.732 and 0.815 for destination image and between 0.707 and 0.829 for destination quality scales. The third section was comprised of open elicitation of free associations developed by John, Loken, Kim, and Monga's (2006) brand concept mapping approach. Respondents

were asked to list: (1) three free associations when thinking about a city, (2) what do the people residing in the said city value (shared brand values), and (3) associations describing the people of the said city (brand personality). Although these data are not part of the study reported in this paper, these insights are drawn upon to better understand and contextualize the quantitative findings. The final survey section tapped into respondents' socio-demographic information.

The questionnaire was originally prepared in English, and then translated into Chinese with simplified and traditional characters, and back-translated by experts, external to this research. After the pilot fieldwork with 50 respondents in each location, the full-scale survey was administered by trained tri-lingual (English, Mandarin Chinese, and Cantonese Chinese) research assistants.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Destination images and destination quality

To identify the relationship between two treatment effects (i.e. six destination cities and three types of respondents) and destination image (i.e. two dimensions of destination image and destination quality), the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) models with Scheffe's post-hoc tests were conducted. In MANOVA, the effect sizes were calculated using partial eta squared (partial  $\eta^2$ ). The cut-off values of effect sizes with partial eta squared were defined as 0.01 (small), 0.06 (medium), and 0.14 (large) for the measure of the proportion of variance explained (Richardson, 2011). The affective (four items) and cognitive (17 items) images were tested, as well as destination quality (five items). Three sets of MANOVA results are summarized in Table 3, specifically, differences across six destination cities (Column 1), differences by the respondent type (Column 2), and the effect of the destination by respondent type (the interaction term) in Column 3. The largest effect size was observed for destination city on affective image ( $\eta^2 = 0.064$ ) and cognitive image ( $\eta^2 = 0.181$ ).

In terms of affective image ( $F = 2.795, p = 0.000$ ), differences between destinations ( $p = 0.000$ ) and differences between destinations by types of respondents ( $p = 0.000$ ) indicated significant results by Wilks' lambda test, while the effect of types of respondents ( $p = 0.091$ ) showed a lack of significance. Generally, the entire GBA was seen by both residents and tourists as *relaxing* and *pleasant*; however, Zhuhai and Zhongshan on the Western side of the Bay tended to elicit stronger feelings of pleasantness and relaxation, followed by Macao and Guangzhou, while Shenzhen and Hong Kong tended to lag behind in these dimensions. Hong Kong and Macao also led the way in terms of *gloomy* and *tired*. In sum, Zhuhai and Zhongshan elicited the most favorable associations for residents and visitors, while Hong Kong and Macao evoked less intense feelings of arousal and excitement, and the cities Guangzhou and Shenzhen did not prompt any distinct and pronounced feelings. The statistically significant interaction suggests that the above effect depended on the respondent type (resident versus GBA tourist versus non-GBA tourist), as will be explained in the next section.

For 17 items of cognitive image ( $F = 1.819, p = 0.000$ ), differences between destinations ( $p = 0.000$ ), differences by types of respondents ( $p = 0.000$ ), and differences between destinations by types of respondents ( $p = 0.000$ ) indicated significant results in terms of Wilks' lambda test. Overall, there were considerable geographical differences in cognitive images emitted by the six cities, from the perspectives of both residents and tourists. The inner cities of Shenzhen, Zhongshan, and Zhuhai were seen as *clean* and *friendly*, while the larger cities, Hong Kong and Guangzhou, were viewed as *accessible* but *overcrowded*. Respondents viewed Macao as *touristy*, *sinful*, *less safe*, and, similarly, Hong Kong as *hostile*, while they described Shenzhen as *lively*, *new*, and *natural*, *pretty*, and *upmarket*. Hong Kong was also perceived as *noisy* yet *lively*, and *sophisticated*. Local residents tended to have a more critical appraisal of the destination city in terms of *cleanliness* and *underdevelopment*, but more favorable in terms of *safety*.

**Table 3**  
MANOVA summary of destination image (N = 2135).

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Destination	Types of Respondent	Destination x Types of Respondent
<i>Affective Image</i> Box's test ( $F = 2.795$ , $Sig. = 0.000$ )			
Relaxing	94.856***	4.024*	5.522***
Gloomy	33.277***	0.827	5.547***
Pleasant	18.811***	3.268*	4.038***
Tired	17.168***	1.232	3.627***
MANOVA Model	$F = 28.943***$	$F = 1.714$	$F = 3.024***$
(Wilks' lambda)	partial $\eta^2 = 0.064$	partial $\eta^2 = 0.003$	partial $\eta^2 = 0.014$
<i>Cognitive Image</i> Box's test ( $F = 1.819$ , $Sig. = 0.000$ )			
Clean	9.399***	4.753**	2.325*
Accessible	18.409***	7.783***	2.687**
Friendly	26.333***	0.776	0.851
Hostile	66.556***	0.127	2.116*
Sinful	23.093***	1.190	3.687***
Interesting	15.051***	0.542	4.826***
Lively	24.366***	0.092	5.788***
Nature	28.455***	0.107	2.967**
Overcrowded	186.828***	8.227***	5.366***
Pretty	10.923***	0.914	1.601
Noisy	103.703***	2.909	3.028**
Sophisticated	68.824***	0.396	1.591
New	55.926***	0.023	2.100*
Underdevelopment	53.662***	11.452***	3.370***
Upmarket	81.399***	2.835	1.661
Unsafe	13.109***	5.478**	2.188*
Touristy	6.164***	0.738	1.233
MANOVA Model	$F = 27.401***$	$F = 3.392***$	$F = 2.079***$
(Wilks' lambda)	partial $\eta^2 = 0.181$	partial $\eta^2 = 0.027$	partial $\eta^2 = 0.017$
<i>Destination Quality</i> Box's test ( $F = 2.432$ , $Sig. = 0.000$ )			
Unpolluted environment	15.502***	7.675***	4.525***
Accommodation quality	25.746***	7.672**	1.989*
Infrastructure quality	38.606***	8.106***	3.519***
Cleanliness	10.806***	16.588***	4.908***
Personal safety	13.831***	1.085	5.084***
MANOVA Model	$F = 28.75***$	$F = 4.901***$	$F = 3.202***$
(Wilks' lambda)	partial $\eta^2 = 0.063$	partial $\eta^2 = 0.011$	partial $\eta^2 = 0.015$

Notes. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .

In terms of destination quality ( $F = 2.432$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), there were significant differences among destinations ( $p = 0.000$ ), types of respondents ( $p = 0.000$ ), and destinations by types of respondents ( $p = 0.000$ ; Wilks' lambda test,  $p < 0.05$ ). Overall, Zhuhai and Zhongshan were rated highly for *unpolluted environment*, while Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou scored the best for *high quality infrastructure*. It is noteworthy that Hong Kong was perceived as having the lowest *quality of accommodation*. Hong Kong, Zhongshan, and Macao enjoyed the highest levels of perceived *personal safety*, while Guangzhou was seen as *unclean*. Local residents rated the destination's *unpolluted environment*, *accommodation quality*, *infrastructure quality*, and *cleanliness* significantly lower than both types of tourists.

The MANOVA results suggest that there were significant variations among destination cities in GBA in terms of affective, cognitive destination image, and destination quality. To identify regional integration and co-competition relationships, the homogeneity and heterogeneity between the cities is now focused upon. The heat map in Fig. 2 visually represents the homogeneous subsets for all respondents broken down by the destination city, with significant differences in bold. Overall, there was an observable tendency to form pairs of Hong Kong-Macao, Guangzhou-Shenzhen, and Zhongshan-Zhuhai, especially when it came to the affective image. Overall perceptions of cognitive image and destination quality of metropolitan and first-tier cities (i.e. Macao,

Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen) were more complex, whereas the pairing trends still applied to the cognitive images of second-tier cities (i.e. Zhongshan-Zhuhai). This pairing of the destination image may not only imply a possible close collaboration within pairs for micro-targeted promotion but also between pairs for a wide variety of experiences, although there exists the danger of having a substitution effect within a pair.

4.2. Co-competition potential for cities in the destination region: the effect of identity salience

In addition to significant main effects, the aforementioned MANOVA (Table 3) showed that the differences in destination images (affective and cognitive) and perceived destination qualities depend on the type of respondents (resident versus GBA tourist versus non-GBA tourist). To understand the sources of the effect, this was followed up with simple effects ANOVAs (all six destination cities by respondent type), the results of which are presented as heat maps in Fig. 3. Non-GBA tourists as beneficiaries of inter-regional mobility and those originating from longer-haul, including international locales can be expected to be least familiar and to have least attachment with the GBA region. In terms of affective image, they tended to view the destinations as sharing similar levels of *tired*, *pleasant*, and *gloomy*, yet the two Mainland cities Zhongshan and Zhuhai maintained the highest rank of *relaxing* and *pleasant*. When it came to cognitive image, the entire GBA region scored uniformly on *clean* and *safety*, yet the large metropolitan cities of Hong Kong, Macao, and Guangzhou tended to be viewed jointly in terms of *accessibility*, *overcrowdedness*, *interesting*, and *lively*. This perhaps attests to these cities' greater level of tourist arrivals and overall brand recognition among the six destinations. Interestingly, Hong Kong was seen as the least *friendly*. In terms of destination qualities, all six cities were perceived as having moderate levels of *unpolluted environment* and above average *cleanliness*, with Hong Kong and Shenzhen perceived as low on *accommodation quality*.

GBA tourists, as intra-regional visitors, can be expected to have a greater familiarity and to identify better with the region, and consequently for there to be less variation observed in their perception of the destination cities. In terms of affective image, the six were seen as *pleasant*, *non-gloomy*, with Zhongshan and Zhuhai, once again, scoring most on *relaxing*. For the cognitive image, the region was seen uniformly as very *touristy*, *clean*, *pretty*, and quite *lively*, with Guangzhou perceived as most *accessible*, Zhongshan and Zhuhai as most *friendly*, Hong Kong as least *friendly*, and Macao as most *sinful*. The latter can be explained by Macao's reputation as a gambling center, which is also confirmed by the qualitative data of free associations when respondents associated Macao with casinos and prostitution, while respondents associated Hong Kong with fast-paced, money-mindedness, and consumerism. For destination qualities, GBA tourists tended to see the region uniformly as very *safe*, yet, once again, with Zhongshan and Zhuhai scoring the best in terms of *unpolluted environment*, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen best in *quality infrastructure*.

Finally, although the city residents tended to be more critical in their evaluation of their own cities, they also tended to see the six cities as equally *touristy* but differing significantly in other evaluative dimensions. Altogether, Hong Kong and Macao residents saw less favorability of their own cities in terms of affective, cognitive images, and less favorably in destination qualities, except in the case of Hong Kong as *safe* and *accessible*. Contradicting this, and consistent with tourists' evaluations, residents of Zhongshan and Zhuhai rated their cities highly in terms of *relaxing*, *pleasant*, *safe*, and *unpolluted environment*. Taken together, the above findings indicate that tourists and residents converged in their perceptions of the Mainland cities Zhongshan and Zhuhai and had rather divergent evaluations of Macao, Hong Kong, and Guangzhou when it came to affective, cognitive image, as well as destination qualities.



		Macao	Hong Kong	Guangzhou	Shenzhen	Zhongshan	Zhuhai
Affective image	Relaxing	3.79	3.12	3.80	3.52	4.29	4.16
	Gloomy	2.48	2.50	2.12	2.15	2.05	1.93
	Pleasant	3.76	3.69	3.92	3.80	4.11	3.98
	Tired	2.75	2.75	2.65	2.52	2.37	2.26
Cognitive image	Clean	3.73	3.86	3.84	4.03	4.02	3.97
	Accessible	3.82	4.12	4.12	3.97	3.85	3.68
	Friendly	3.76	3.52	3.91	3.82	4.08	3.97
	Hostile	2.34	2.63	2.02	2.01	1.88	1.80
	Sinful	2.32	2.29	2.08	2.16	1.89	1.84
	Interesting	3.62	3.77	3.87	3.74	3.37	3.60
	Lively	3.58	3.85	3.95	3.99	3.43	3.68
	Nature	3.28	3.14	3.25	3.25	3.40	3.90
	Overcrowded	3.66	4.07	3.81	3.41	2.64	2.51
	Pretty	3.67	3.79	3.99	3.84	3.73	3.97
	Noisy	3.30	3.66	3.34	3.13	2.61	2.50
	Sophisticated	3.17	3.49	3.32	3.18	2.64	2.59
	New	3.18	3.17	3.57	3.97	2.84	3.39
	Underdevelopment	2.97	2.41	2.39	2.18	2.89	3.10
	Upmarket	3.29	3.59	3.73	3.89	2.87	2.97
	Unsafe	2.48	2.22	2.29	2.27	2.04	2.15
Touristy	3.92	3.80	3.80	3.63	3.78	3.99	
Destination quality	Unpolluted environment	3.31	3.15	3.24	3.23	3.53	3.61
	Accommodation	3.48	3.05	3.64	3.49	3.55	3.51
	Infrastructure	3.42	3.85	4.03	3.96	3.54	3.52
	Cleanliness	3.54	3.71	3.57	3.89	3.76	3.77
	Safety	3.70	3.96	3.75	3.77	4.04	3.79

Fig. 2. Heat map for classification of destination image and quality for GBA cities.

Note: The mean difference at the 0.05 level is highlighted in bold.

### 4.3. Differences in cross-border regional destination image

The GBA region, consisting of three jurisdictions (Hong Kong, Macao, Mainland China), has the potential for a successful cooperative relationship. The three are geographically co-located, culturally proximate, and inter-dependent in terms of transportation, economic, and political links. For customer proximity, the three also predominantly rely on the Mainland Chinese market as a tourism source, while their own residents substantially contribute to tourism arrivals of the neighbors. For example, Hong Kong visitors are the second largest source market for Macao after Mainland Chinese (PATA, 2019).

Despite these similarities, the three regions differ in terms of their existing tourism market positioning and branding. With the UNESCO designated historic center, Macao draws heavily on the Portuguese post-colonial cultural heritage in its positioning efforts. Since the early 2000s, it has also rapidly expanded as a world gambling location, known as the ‘Monte Carlo of the Orient,’ surpassing Las Vegas in terms of gambling revenue (BBC, 2015). Most recently, Macao is envisioned as Asia’s capital of entertainment and cultural events (Keegan, 2016). Hong Kong’s market positioning, on the other hand, has been dominated by the ‘Asia’s world city’ since 2010, which emphasizes brand values of progressive, free, stable, opportunity, and high quality (BrandHK, 2019). The Hong Kong Tourism Board is currently making efforts to promote Hong Kong, which was previously known as a ‘shopping paradise,’ as a destination of rich heritage, gastronomy, and natural beauty. Most recently, the social unrest of 2019 Hong Kong protests negatively affected the tourism industry (HKTB, 2019). In response to the crisis, the Hong Kong Tourism Board launched the ‘hki-sion.com’ website, which is aimed at stimulating tourism consumption. Across the border, the Guangdong Province promotes itself as a place of rich Chinese heritage as well as natural beauty (Visit Guangdong, 2019). Variations exist, however, when it comes to newly developed

cities of Zhuhai and Shenzhen that are homes to less historic and more human-made attractions such as theme parks and bustling skylines. Altogether, the above indicates differences yet complementarity of tourist attractions among the three areas, which may pave the path for joint tourism marketing underpinned by cooperation.

Given this background, the next step was to empirically test whether the destinations delimited by border generate different destination images, with a view to encourage cross-border visitors and residents. The result of the comparison between Mainland cities and two SARs of Hong Kong and Macao showed significant differences in the destination image. Interestingly, Mainland cities were perceived significantly more favorably than the two SAR destinations in terms of destination quality and awarded higher ratings of affective and cognitive images. The comparison was then broken down into three regions (Mainland, Macao, and Hong Kong), as shown in Table 4a. It can be observed that Hong Kong was rated the lowest in terms of affective image, while it performed on par with Macao in terms of cognitive image and destination quality. The pattern persisted even when the respondents were broken down into tourists and residents (see Table 4b), further corroborating the results presented in the previous section.

Jointly, these findings point to the importance of the geographical and political boundaries between Mainland China and the SARs when it comes to understanding the differences in mental images and brands. Despite the three regions sharing the geographical locale, ethnic Chinese population and the language(s), the differences in the paths of historic development (e.g. colonial history for the SARs), political systems, and ideologies continue to create the boundary in people’s perception and develop along the ‘One country, two systems’ principle. However, from the destination branding perspective, this result also suggests that Mainland cities may be better suited to assume a leading role in the creation of the joint destination brand of GBA. As a dynamic force, the four Mainland cities in the study are increasing their



		Macao	Hong Kong	Guangzhou	Shenzhen	Zhongshan	Zhuhai
Affective image	Relaxing	3.95	3.21	3.86	3.48	4.36	4.12
	Gloomy	2.42	2.48	2.10	2.13	2.11	1.96
	Pleasant	3.93	3.76	3.95	3.78	4.15	3.93
	Tired	2.64	2.52	2.61	2.56	2.40	2.37
Cognitive image	Clean	3.81	3.81	3.96	4.03	4.08	3.88
	Accessible	3.82	3.99	4.04	3.85	3.74	3.60
	Friendly	3.82	3.56	3.96	3.78	4.11	3.95
	Hostile	2.27	2.68	1.99	2.05	1.96	1.82
	Sinful	2.17	2.36	2.04	2.35	1.96	1.86
	Interesting	3.76	3.84	3.90	3.71	3.27	3.62
	Lively	3.71	3.98	3.93	3.87	3.23	3.73
	Nature	3.39	3.12	3.30	3.27	3.15	3.91
	Overcrowded	3.50	3.86	3.72	3.31	2.71	2.61
	Pretty	3.72	3.81	4.04	3.85	3.64	3.91
	Noisy	3.17	3.63	3.22	3.10	2.65	2.65
	Sophisticated	3.13	3.49	3.23	3.12	2.64	2.68
	New	3.19	3.23	3.57	3.96	2.81	3.37
Destination quality	Underdevelopment	2.74	2.34	2.32	2.30	2.93	2.95
	Upmarket	3.40	3.63	3.78	3.88	2.92	3.00
	Unsafe	2.40	2.23	2.29	2.41	2.08	2.39
	Touristy	3.94	3.79	3.96	3.59	3.76	3.99
	Unpolluted environment	3.47	3.23	3.32	3.20	3.52	3.52
	Accommodation	3.64	3.21	3.70	3.44	3.60	3.58
	Infrastructure	3.62	3.82	4.06	3.92	3.55	3.55
	Safety	3.72	3.69	3.75	3.88	3.78	3.80

a. Heat map of homogeneous subset: non-GBA tourists

Note: The mean difference at the 0.05 level is highlighted in bold.

		Macao	Hong Kong	Guangzhou	Shenzhen	Zhongshan	Zhuhai
Affective image	Relaxing	3.91	3.33	3.74	3.43	4.20	4.13
	Gloomy	2.38	2.27	2.08	2.29	2.13	2.06
	Pleasant	3.80	3.79	3.94	3.70	4.01	4.04
	Tired	2.72	2.77	2.73	2.67	2.48	2.22
Cognitive image	Clean	3.84	4.01	3.78	4.03	4.01	4.05
	Accessible	3.88	4.02	4.16	4.06	3.91	3.79
	Friendly	3.80	3.58	3.86	3.83	4.08	3.96
	Hostile	2.29	2.52	2.03	2.02	1.91	1.89
	Sinful	2.28	2.17	2.04	2.02	1.95	1.88
	Interesting	3.66	3.81	3.81	3.78	3.18	3.62
	Lively	3.58	3.90	3.98	4.00	3.35	3.71
	Nature	3.33	3.22	3.21	3.11	3.49	3.86
	Overcrowded	3.44	4.12	3.89	3.48	2.53	2.41
	Pretty	3.71	3.78	3.94	3.70	3.73	3.94
	Noisy	3.19	3.57	3.39	3.19	2.59	2.39
	Sophisticated	3.10	3.49	3.36	3.38	2.60	2.47
	New	3.31	3.12	3.54	4.02	2.68	3.41
Destination quality	Underdevelopment	2.87	2.41	2.31	2.06	2.80	3.11
	Upmarket	3.39	3.61	3.70	3.90	2.83	2.94
	Unsafe	2.57	2.31	2.28	2.22	2.03	2.13
	Touristy	3.96	3.78	3.67	3.63	3.89	4.01
	Unpolluted environment	3.49	3.30	3.17	3.24	3.63	3.59
	Accommodation	3.51	3.08	3.57	3.67	3.60	3.41
	Infrastructure	3.52	3.91	3.99	4.14	3.61	3.52
	Safety	3.73	3.88	3.48	3.95	3.74	3.84

b. Heat map of homogeneous subset: GBA tourists

Note: The mean difference at the 0.05 level is highlighted in bold.

		Macao	Hong Kong	Guangzhou	Shenzhen	Zhongshan	Zhuhai
Affective image	Relaxing	3.44	2.73	3.79	3.64	4.30	4.25
	Gloomy	2.69	2.85	2.23	2.06	1.91	1.79
	Pleasant	3.48	3.45	3.85	3.90	4.18	4.00
	Tired	2.94	3.04	2.57	2.33	2.23	2.18
Cognitive image	Clean	3.48	3.73	3.72	4.01	3.96	4.01
	Accessible	3.75	4.43	4.21	4.04	3.92	3.68
	Friendly	3.63	3.39	3.92	3.87	4.04	4.00
	Hostile	2.50	2.73	2.05	1.94	1.75	1.70
	Sinful	2.56	2.36	2.21	2.03	1.75	1.78
	Interesting	3.40	3.61	3.92	3.74	3.69	3.55
	Lively	3.08	3.62	3.90	4.13	3.74	3.59
	Nature	4.13	3.06	3.23	3.36	3.61	3.94
	Overcrowded	4.13	4.29	3.82	3.47	2.66	2.49
	Pretty	3.55	3.77	4.00	3.94	3.83	4.06
	Noisy	3.59	3.81	3.48	3.11	2.57	2.42
	Sophisticated	3.32	3.50	3.41	3.07	2.68	2.57
	New	3.01	3.14	3.61	3.94	3.04	3.41
Destination quality	Underdevelopment	3.40	2.50	2.67	2.11	2.94	3.27
	Upmarket	3.02	3.53	3.70	3.90	2.86	2.96
	Unsafe	2.47	2.09	2.31	2.11	1.99	1.91
	Touristy	3.94	3.83	3.72	3.67	3.68	3.96
	Unpolluted environment	2.88	2.82	3.20	3.24	3.43	3.72
	Accommodation	3.23	2.79	3.66	3.39	3.43	3.53
	Infrastructure	3.03	3.80	4.03	3.84	3.47	3.48
	Safety	3.06	3.50	3.41	3.84	3.74	3.68

c. Heat map of homogeneous subset: Residents

Note: The mean difference at the 0.05 level is highlighted in bold.

Fig. 3. A. Heat map of homogeneous subset: non-GBA tourists. B. Heat map of homogeneous subset: GBA tourists. C. Heat map of homogeneous subset: Residents.

Note: The mean difference at the 0.05 level is highlighted in bold.

competitiveness with a more relaxing, safe, and clean environment, as perceived by the respondents, and thus may have a greater positive impact upon the joint regional brand.

Table 4A  
Border effect on destination image and quality (N = 2135).

Variable	Geographical borders in GBA	N	Mean	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Affective image	Mainland Cities	1116	3.86	-13.781	
	Macao and Hong Kong	1019	3.48	(0.000)	
Cognitive image	Mainland Cities	1116	3.56	-11.304	
	Macao and Hong Kong	1019	3.39	(0.000)	
Destination quality	Mainland Cities	1116	3.65	-5.582	(0.000)
	Macao and Hong Kong	1019	3.51		

Table 4B  
Border effect on destination image and quality (3 regions, N = 2135).

Variable	Geographical borders	N	Mean	F (Sig.)	Multiple Comparison
<i>Overall data (n = 2135)</i>					
Affective image	Mainland Cities	1116	3.8589	108.860	Mainland cities > Macao > Hong Kong
	Macao	510	3.5779	(0.000)	
	Hong Kong	509	3.3880		
Cognitive image	Mainland Cities	1116	3.5669	64.143	Mainland cities > Hong Kong, Macao
	Macao	510	3.4057	(0.000)	
	Hong Kong	509	3.3898		
Destination quality	Mainland Cities	1116	3.6584	16.538	Mainland cities > Hong Kong, Macao
	Macao	510	3.4871	(0.045)	
	Hong Kong	509	3.5391		
<i>Two types of tourists (n = 1528)</i>					
Affective image	Mainland Cities	793	3.8235	36.638	Mainland cities > Macao > Hong Kong
	Macao	365	3.6795	(0.000)	
	Hong Kong	370	3.5061		
Cognitive image	Mainland Cities	793	3.5474	24.247	Mainland cities > Hong Kong, Macao
	Macao	365	3.4582	(0.000)	
	Hong Kong	370	3.4073		
Destination quality	Mainland Cities	793	3.6749	3.103	Mainland cities > Hong Kong
	Macao	365	3.6329	(0.045)	
	Hong Kong	370	3.5870		
<i>Local resident (n = 607)</i>					
Affective image	Mainland Cities	323	3.9458	106.032	Mainland cities > Macao > Hong Kong
	Macao	145	3.3224	(0.000)	
	Hong Kong	139	3.0737		
Cognitive image	Mainland Cities	323	3.6150	57.764	Mainland cities > Hong Kong, Macao
	Macao	145	3.2734	(0.000)	
	Hong Kong	139	3.3432		
Destination quality	Mainland Cities	323	3.6180	30.758	Mainland cities > Hong Kong > Macao
	Macao	145	3.1200	(0.000)	
	Hong Kong	139	3.4115		

Note. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level in the multiple comparisons.

### 5. Conclusions and implications

Motivated by the need to assess the possibility of developing the cooperative brand, this study has investigated similarities and differences in the existing image across the six destination cities within the GBA, examined heterogeneous perceptions of respondents with varying identity salience (intra-regional tourists, inter-regional tourists, and residents), and evaluated the border effect. First, the assessment of the perceptual fit for future cooperative branding between member cities has identified clustering by pair, which underpins regional integration but also cooperation relationships by identifying the homogeneity and heterogeneity between the cities. It is suggested that the Mainland cities of Zhuhai and Zhongshan should take the lead in branding efforts. The

finding of destination image pairing provides managerial implications for a collaborative partnership between intra-pairs for microtargeted marketing and promotion, and the differentiation strategies to cope with the competition and substitution effect. Although giving the priority to one member to lead the network seems contrary to the concept of co-competition in the theoretical sense, it is not uncommon and is naturally occurring in practice. In Prokkola's (2007b) case of Destination Arctic Circle, one side (Swedish) was more embracing the co-competitive network than the other (Finnish). The most important finding of this study, however, is that despite considerable differences in destination images and qualities across the destinations, clusters of common perceptions exist, such as safety, new-ness, quality infrastructure, accessibility, pleasantness, and openness. Although the present study corroborates Sirisuthikul's (2018) findings in the case of the ASEAN, in that it is possible to develop the co-competitive destination brand across national borders, the present study shows that the new brand must be more complex to capture the diversity of member cities. Like Nilsson et al. (2010), it can be concluded that international competitiveness of the GBA must lie in differences between the member cities united by the common brand.

Additionally, the present study found that the border effect between the two SARs and the Mainland cities in tourists' perceptions points to the possibility of what Gooroochurn and Hanley (2005) call as 'asymmetric spillover effect.' As in their case of the north of Ireland, joint destination marketing has the potential to be efficient and effective as a major tourism destination generates a 'spillover effect' and unequally influences neighboring or subordinate/subsequent cities. This study, however, has shown that the existing destination image is more advantageous for minor and lesser-known cities in a region (e.g. Zhongshan), suggesting a potential reverse spillover effect. Further, as in the example with Destination Arctic Circle (Prokkola, 2007a), the present study has found that despite the ambitions to create a borderless region, national borders, or in the present case, the borders between two political systems, remain more than a matter of bureaucracy and continue to shape distinct images, despite common cultural/linguistic backgrounds and close economic ties.

Another finding relates to the heterogeneous perceptions of the six destinations by residents, intra- and inter-regional tourists, with residents having most critical evaluations. Residents of Hong Kong and Macau had the least favorable perception of their cities, perhaps due to more intense and extensive tourism development, bordering over-tourism (Cheng & Li, 2019). This means that there exists a destination image gap (Ryan & Aicken, 2010) between tourists and residents, which may negatively affect residents' support for tourism development and even regional integration, jeopardizing branding efforts. Further, although, in this research, intra-regional visitors were termed tourists, it is perhaps more appropriate to think of them simultaneously as the region's residents due to their dual position. On the one hand, they are residents who are most familiar with their respective destinations. On the other hand, because of co-location, they can be the most frequent tourists. Thus, for successful cross-border tourism marketing, the definition of residents should be extended to include both destination- and region-level citizens.

### 5.1. Theoretical contribution

At a conceptual level, this study consolidates the concept of co-competition and cross-border marketing for the integrated regional destination in the light of heterogeneous features of member cities and stakeholders' perceptions. First, to the best of the authors' knowledge, it has been the first extensive study to empirically evaluate the possibility of joint branding under the co-competition conditions, thus contributing to the literature on forms of collaborative branding. Although destination branding is well understood in pure cooperative and pure competitive contexts, this study has paid attention to both heterogeneous and homogenous imagery, underscoring the notion of co-competition as most

proximate to tourism practice. Co-competition allows member destinations to enjoy the benefits of collaboration without sacrificing their uniqueness and independence in decision-making. Second, the research has provided much needed insights to the literature on tourism co-competition networks, which presently emphasizes in-destination co-competition among firms and sectors. This research is one of very few attempts to zoom into macro- and meta-co-competition. This knowledge is expected to be valuable, given the recent increase in political and economic integration initiatives, e.g. the Belt and Road Program, among others. Third, unlike existing literature that focuses on national borders, this research has been the first attempt to assess the real-life scenario for joint branding across not only geographical but also political, ideological, and jurisdictional borders in an economically potent yet politically volatile region. In the increasingly destabilized world, the study can be the blueprint not only for academic researchers but also for policymakers to assess co-competition potential in similar locales. Finally, although the role of residents in destination branding efforts has been acknowledged, it has not been evaluated in respect to a joint branding scenario. It is therefore shown that, in co-competitive marketing, the very concept of 'destination resident' must be extended to include the citizens of partner-destinations.

### 5.2. Practical implications

Results indicate that the six cities are unique and distinctly evaluated by tourists and residents alike, and thus they can be seen as a geographic amalgam of neighboring but contrasting communities. For a successful co-competitive relationship to exist, the co-competitive brand should not cannibalize the unique characteristics of destination cities and, instead, should focus on qualities shared by different communities. Such a co-competitive strategy is aimed to integrate the six cities into the regional brand while allowing for the possibility of developing and maintaining their competitive positions within the region. As a case in point, Zhuhai and Zhongshan elicited favorable and pleasant images of relaxation, unpolluted environment, and friendliness. As another example, Macao was associated with sinfulness, as represented by its gambling reputation and entertainment sector. It is recommended that the future joint destination brand understate these qualities to allow these destinations to pursue them independently. Instead, the joint brand identity should accentuate economic dynamism, innovativeness, openness, inclusivity, and quality of life. It also recommends that the emphasis on heritage, conventionality, and tradition is avoided, as the destination cities substantially vary in their tourist attraction inventories, although Zhongshan and Guangzhou are known for heritage attractions and their traditional Cantonese culture, the short history of newly developed cities Shenzhen and Zhuhai has not allowed them to develop heritage attractions.

To this end, this paper recommends the establishment of a Greater Bay Area Destination Management and Coordination Organization that will be tasked with developing, coordinating, and managing co-competitive marketing and promotion of the GBA destination brand. Equally funded by Guangdong provincial government, Macao and Hong Kong, this organization would cooperate with the existing tourism promotion organizations in the respective GBA cities. The organization would also be tasked with internal brand communication at both city- and region-levels. The disparity in the cities' evaluation across the two types of tourists and residents is perhaps due to underlying differences in political, social, and economic conditions of their cities' residents but also due to respondents' comfortableness to express such opinions. For example, residents of Hong Kong and Macao can be openly critical of their governments due to these jurisdictions' freedom of speech. However, before GBA residents can become the region's ambassadors, they themselves must believe that they live in the innovative and dynamic, open, and inclusive region. As the GBA branding initiative is somewhat a natural experiment, only time will tell if the proposed recommendations are successful.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. First, the identity salience was defined as the GBA tourist, the outside-of-GBA tourist, and the local resident. Since there can be a characteristic difference between other types of residents or tourists, such as residents who immigrated to/from the GBA, international tourists, and tourists who emigrated from the region, future study is encouraged to reflect more variability in the regional settings. Second, the data were collected several months before turbulent anti-government and anti-China protests (also known as the anti-extradition law amendment bill movement) broke out in Hong Kong in June 2019. Although results are symptomatic of Hong Kong residents' growing negative sentiments, they may not reflect the after-protest perceptions. Third, the GBA destination image in the present study was measured as onsite tourists' and local peoples' perceptions. Further empirical studies about potential tourists and their destination image formation before the visit would be critical for DMOs to decide on its branding strategies. Future research on the patterns of tourist flow and subsequent decisions in the GBA region could also be supplemented to examine an individual's interactions with the place (Beerli & Martin, 2004) amongst intra-regional destinations.

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### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Ksenia Kirillova:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Jinah Park:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Data curation, Visualization. **Mingyang Zhu:** Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Project administration. **Leonardo (Don) Dioko:** Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Project administration, Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Guojun Zeng:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

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