Assessing barriers to the development of convention tourism in Macau

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Abstract: Convention tourism has become a popular style of travel, drawing attention from the industry and academia. From the industry perspective, the studies have focused on finding the barriers to the convention tourism development of Macau. This study uses a qualitative approach to collect data on the convention tourism industry. The results indicate that economy, capacity, infrastructure and facilities, human resources, marketing, tourism resources and attractions, policies and regulations, and transportation are the main barriers to the development of convention tourism of Macau. Finally, it provides suggestions and conclusions for convention tourism practitioners.

Subjects: Conferences and Exhibitions; Tourism; Strategic Management; The Business of Tourism

Keywords: convention tourism; barriers; convention development; Macau

1. Introduction
The convention is one of the fastest and largest growing segments in the hospitality industry globally. Conventions ensure high exposure and a huge number of tourists for many destinations in a country (Weber & Roehl, 2001). A convention is a gathering of individuals at an arranged place and time to discuss the same topic or some common interest. According to previous research, Davidson and Cope (2003) define business tourism as referring to individuals traveling for work-related purposes. Business tourism has four section, namely, incentive trips, exhibitions, corporate hospitality, and meetings (Davidson & Cope, 2003). Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) consider that business tourism brings significant advantages over leisure tourism. In recent years, convention tourism has undergone rapid development as a new style of the tourism industry. Based on the functional nature of the meetings, conventions can be normal or tourism type. However, the...
differences are blurred because the delegates are away from their regular workplaces and engage in leisure opportunities without any restrictions (Høyer & Naess, 2001).

The convention industry has a significant effect on the economy of a country, and many Asian countries have already discovered that convention tourism creates great business opportunities. According to the Singapore Business Review (2019), the Asia-Pacific region emerged as the fastest-growing region for the meeting, incentive, convention, and event (MICE) industry globally, generating 229 USD billion dollars or 28.4% of global MICE revenue in 2018, according to Colliers International. Meanwhile, Southeast Asia collectively made up 10% of the market share in Asia in terms of square meters sold for exhibitions. Singapore’s MICE market accounted for US$1.58 billion or 22% of its tourist receipts in 2018. Another established MICE market, Hong Kong, received 2 million MICE arrivals in 2018, up 2.1% from 2017 (HKTB, 2019). In South Asia, Thailand has devoted considerable marketing resources to target the convention and meeting market segments. Thailand ensured hearty hospitality for 36,364,467 MICE travelers in 2017, which yielded revenues of BT179.601 billion. In this huge group of travelers, 35,316,508 domestic MICE travelers contributed to BT 91.142 billion of revenues, while 1,047,959 international MICE visitors contributed revenues of BT 88.459 billion (The National Thailand, 2018). Although the annual revenues of the Tokyo Big Site in 2017 was only JPY 21.2 billion, the economic effect arising from exhibitions and other events, such as conventions at the venue, has been preliminarily estimated to reach JPY 750 billion annually (KPMG, 2019).

In 2016, the Macau SAR government implemented a five-year development plan to enhance Macau’s industrial structure to develop the gaming and non-gaming industries. The plan focuses on promoting Macau as a diversified, modernized, and international tourist city. To explore new markets and sources of customers, it grants the First Development position to the convention industry to enhance the overall business from the tourism and leisure industry. According to the statistics of the MICE committee of Macau, from 2015 to 2017, the value-added of Macau convention and exhibition activities increased to 35 billion patacas, or 0.4% to 0.9% share of value-added in all industries. In recent years, rapid industry development of the Macau convention and exhibition industry has earned international recognition. According to a report by UFI, the growth rate (5.2%) of Macau’s exhibition market ranked among the top 10 in the Asia-Pacific region in 2018. This figure is higher than the average growth rate (IPIM, 2019). In 2019, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) (2018) showed that 39 International Conference Association events held in Macau were recognized, and Macau’s ranking among Asia-Pacific cities rose from 34 in 2013 to 17 in the same year (IPIM, 2019).

Convention tourism development attracts many researchers. The primary consumer of convention-related products, such as meeting facilities, accommodations, catering, transportation, and tourism activities (dining, shopping, leisure, and tours) is the delegate. Delegates often create high economic growth through these convention products, and this behavior positively affects the host communities (Han, 2014; Han & Hwang, 2017). Papadopoulos et al. (2014) measured the perceptions of place and image of Greek convention destinations among event planners. Han and Hwang (2017) studied the green behavior of delegates in convention tourism sustainability.

Many studies examine convention tourism from different perspectives, such as sustainability and destination image. In recent years, a popular area of research is the study of barrier factors in tourism. Ma et al. (2017) studied preferences, motivations, and barriers of Chinese visitors at Australian wineries, Khalil et al. (2018) explored the barriers in medical tourism of East Azerbaijan province, while Luo et al. (2019) investigated the barriers of Macau entertainment tourism for sustainable development. However, few studies have examined convention tourism development through barrier factors. Hence, to bridge this gap, this study focuses on the barrier factors of Macau convention tourism, such as government attitude, religion, attraction, capacity, and association. Our research contribution is two-fold: the first is literature, which reveals the barriers to the development of the Macau convention tourism industry. Second, the results have been shown to be valuable for countries trying to develop convention tourism.
2. Literature review

2.1. Convention tourism development of Macau
Regardless of the data, practitioners, and trends of all parties, the convention and exhibition industry has been developing steadily in recent years. From 2009 to 2018, MICE items increased from 1192 to 1427, indicating an increase of 19.4% (See Figure 1). The DSEC (2018) reported that the attendants/delegates nearly tripled from 57.1 thousand visitors to 2.12 million. From 2015 to 2017, the value-added of MICE increased from 1.44 billion MOP to 3.5 billion MOP, indicating an increase in value-added in all industries from 0.4% to 0.9% Macao Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC)(2019) (See Figure 2).

Figure 1. Number of Events in Macau.

(Sources: DSEC, 2019)

Figure 2. Number of visitors to Macau.

(Sources: DSEC, 2019)
Macau began developing its convention and exhibition industry in 2002; it had 266 convention and exhibition activities at that time, with about 20 companies and approximately 200 employees. Kowie (2019) considered that at the time Venetian-Macau Convention and Exhibition Center was officially put into use in 2007, the Macau convention and exhibition industry entered the development stage. At present, the DSEC (2018) reported that Macau holds more than 1400 convention and exhibition activities each year, with about 3500 employees, driving about 50 million MOP of added value, accounting for 0.9% of Macau’s GDP, and becoming an important industry with a moderately diverse economy.

For two consecutive years, the city ranking of Macau climbed to 72 in the world, among the top 100 cities in the global area. The MICE industry in Macau has shown significant improvements from its previous ranking of 93 in 2015. According to the statistics from International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) (2016), Macau’s city ranking climbed to 17 in 2016 in the Asia-Pacific region, up four places from the previous year.

In Macau, the “One-Stop Service for MICE Bidding and Support” is a popular method of promotion to attract large international meetings. For example, the 9th ACM SIGGRAPH Conference and Exhibition on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques in Asia attracted approximately 50 countries and regions, with over 6,000 attendees. The International Dragon Awards and the Worldwide Chinese Life Insurance Congress attracted about 7,200 participants. Macau, with its exceptional array of luxury hotels, innovative environments, and glittering casinos, attracts numerous leisure and business travelers; it is one of Southeast Asia’s most popular MICE locations.

2.2. Barriers to convention tourism in Macau
Tourism growth has improved the economy and helped resolve many socio-cultural problems in Macau. Many countries have become aware of the importance of tourism in the last few decades. However, tourism development has positive and negative effects on society, especially the barriers to tourism development. These barriers have become an important topic for improving the economy through tourism. Sharma (2004) found that limited information, limited awareness, and limited funding are the most important barriers. Kay et al. (2009) found that information, timing and time, cost, peer group, and personal interest, understanding and socialization, personal access, physical access, and product are the eight barriers of interconnection. Kantawateera et al. (2015) claimed that the transportation problem is one of the main barriers that hinder tourism development. Ghodr et al. (2017) considered the most important barrier to be safety and security issues. Summers et al. (2019) found that the four main barriers of tourism restricted Australian tourism development. Some barriers include the reluctance to collaborate with tourism businesses, lacking understanding of the structure and behavior of the tourism industry, lacking business acumen, and lacking financial and human resources.

Some studies on tourism literature have also examined barriers. Khalil et al. (2018) found that the main barriers to the development of Iran medical tourism were culture, marketing, management, brokerage, transfer, international issues, and policy problems. In addition, using a barrier framework, Rokni et al. (2017) found that the main barriers of medical tourism are language, promotion, number of experts, policy, and government regulations. Marzo-Navarro and Pedraja-Iglesias (2009) found that distance to destination, time, and cost were barriers to wine tourism development. Whms (2016) found that economic, natural, socio-cultural, demand, supply, and service providers were some barriers to the development of cruise tourism.

Many factors can be barriers to industry development. Some examples include legal regulation or a government department to coordinate the sector, infrastructure, transportation, attractions, human resources, border gate capacity, and business climate (Wan, 2011). Among regional tourism studies, Verity and Larry (2017) found that the main factors affecting tourism development in Macau were competing destinations, community alienation, and a narrow industrial base. Kit and
McCartney (2015) revealed that human resource challenges were a notable obstacle to the further development of the MICE industry and ultimately to the diversification of Macau’s economy. Furthermore, Macauhub reported that the neighboring Hengqin area of Zhuhai had 106 square kilometers of land, which over three times that of Macau. It was building convention and exhibition facilities that would challenge those in Macau (O’Neill & Cheong, 2017). Yang and Liu (2018) found that production factors, such as land reclamation brought both positive and negative effects. The reclamation of land created a large number of flat and excellent urban space to compensate for the shortage of land resources to reduce development constraints. Meanwhile, Macau began experiencing the urban heat island effect.

The above literature shows that different kinds of tourism sectors have unique characteristics of barriers. In recent years, there has been global recognition of the rapid development of the convention and exhibition industry of Macau (The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2019). Unfortunately, few studies have focused on the main barriers to convention tourism development in Macau. Therefore, this study investigates this aspect.

2.3. Proposed model
Qiu et al. (2007) considered four main dimensions affecting convention participation decision-making: location factors (attractiveness and accessibility of the convention destination), personal/business factors, association/conference factors, and total cost factors. For industry development study, Heung et al. (2011) found that attractions, location capacity, government attitude, and promotion affected the development of medical tourism development.

However, few studies have examined the factors that affect convention tourism development in Macau. Based on this literature review, the theoretical model of this study proposes explicating the formation of convention tourism development. The model comprises tourism resources and attractions, capacity, association, government attitude, and religion.

3. Methodology

3.1. Qualitative research approach
This study first adopts a qualitative research approach in exploring the tourism barriers. This approach is suitable for research findings not discovered by quantification or statistical procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Second, when researchers consider a situation that cannot be adequately describe or interpret quantitative measures or the variables that need to be identified that will be tested quantitatively in the future, the qualitative methods are normally chosen (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Based on the objectives of the research, using convenience and purposive approach for sampling was reasonable when considering our objectives of the research, which is also common in qualitative research, to choose research participants to understand the barriers of industry’s perspective angle of Macau convention tourism. There are different kinds of methods of qualitative data collection, and most are based on unstructured or semi-structured techniques. In this study, because of its exploratory nature grounded theory was chosen.

| Table 1. Interview questions |
|-------------------------------|
| (1) Do you see Macau as a convention tourism destination in Asia? Why or why not? |
| (2) Do you think Macau has sufficient capability to support convention tourism development? For example, resources to attract tourism and city capacity, please share your opinion. |
| (3) Do you think that the Related Association affects the development of convention tourism in Macau? Please list some examples. |
| (4) What do you think is the role of the Macau government in convention tourism development? |
| (5) Do you think that the religious beliefs of delegates hinder convention tourism development? Why? |
| (6) Can you think of any other factors that could be a barrier to the development of convention tourism in Macau? |
The grounded theory is a procedure or a method that helps researchers understand categories and construct links and relationships between categories. The grounded theory offers an explanatory framework that can help us understand the phenomenon under investigation. The researchers of grounded theory use key strategies to identify, refine, integrate categories, and ultimately to develop theory, the strategies that include constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and theoretical coding (Corbin, 2017). The grounded theory is applied in this present study.

3.2. Data collection
The qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with convention sectors. The interviewees were selected from related industries to help understand the barriers to the development of convention tourism in Macau. From December 2019 and January 2020, twelve interviewees from the sectors of exhibition, convention association, event, hotel, and service provider, which are representative of the Macau convention tourism industry, were selected. The interviewees were from different management levels and included managers, general managers, and supervisors.

The questionnaire was done in a semi-structured style with open-ended questions based on the characteristics of convention tourism in Macau. The interview questions were focused on development, capability, tourism resources and attractions, associations’ effects, government effects, religious beliefs of delegates, and other factors that hinder the development of convention tourism of Macau.

The questions of the interview are listed in Table 1. These questions are as follows (see Table 1).

For data collection, the in-depth interview was employed with key interviewees from the convention tourism industry. One interviewer asked the questions, and the other took audio-recordings of the responses. Each interview lasted about 20 minutes, and the questions can be freely answered in Chinese and English. After collecting the questionnaires, the data were preceded through content analysis to record, code, and analyze.

All the interviews were transcribed immediately to verify and approve all interviews to avoid confusion and ensure content validity (Mubuza et al., 2014). The content analysis approach was used in this study. The advantage of content analysis is that it opens the results for further discussion and investigation. Second, it minimizes any influence of “a priori” theory and ensures that researchers examine the information independently (Jennings, 2011).

3.3. Data analysis
Data analysis requires three steps. First, the researcher transcribed original data from the interview and prepared it for content analysis. The data were checked for redundancy. It means that the review ended if no new information was obtained (Dunn, 1986; Patton, 1990). Based on the literature above, the interview was ended when the information from the twelve interviewees had any redundancy.

Second, the initial stage for coding is analyzing data. Open coding involves combining closely related categories in which overlap was found and identifying variations within the categories. In the coding, two researchers were involved, and they cross-validated the categories and interpreted them carefully. According to the process of open-coding, the researchers read the materials that were organized several times and further analyzed the contents of each interview. Then every researcher developed sub-categories based on the comparison and refinement of the findings.

In the final stage, the researchers refined the results of the first two stages for further coding. The transcripts were reviewed again to identify the factors hindering the development of the Macau convention tourism industry. The sub-categories and themes that emerged were subjected to related convention tourism bodies and convention sectors. The axial coding enabled putting the
refined subcategories together to identify the main themes or categories (Dey, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the relationships among themes to be identified. Using this process, the information provided by the different respondents were compared and then compared with the information obtained in the interviews and analyzed the secondary documents, both of which are important steps to validate the identification of themes and main categories (Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006). After the inter-relationships were identified and revisited among the coded and categorized statements, then a framework was developed finally.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Interviewee characteristics
In the study, the personal interview was used to identify the barriers to Macau convention tourism development. Seven interviewees were from the convention sectors (such as exhibition, convention
association, event), and the rest were from related convention sectors (hotels and service providers). The descriptive statistics are as follows. Among the 12 interviewees, half had more than 10 years of experience. Most of the interviewees’ job positions are manager or above. Table 2 shows the demographic information of the interviewees.

4.2. Framework of the study

Figure 3 shows the framework that highlights the barriers to the development of the Macau convention tourism. Nine factors represent the main barriers to convention tourism development, which include economy, capacity, infrastructure and facilities, human resources, marketing, tourism resources and attractions, policies and regulations, and transportation. The solid arrows in Figure 3 show the direct effects of the development of the Macau convention tourism and the dashed arrows show the inter-relationships of the factors. An example of the answer of interviewee 3 on capacity: “Meanwhile, the other factor that restricts city capacity is the scarcity of land, which raises another barrier to convention tourism development. The lack of land resources is a major problem; it is necessary to find a place to build a new convention and exhibition venue to attract more international conventions, and exhibition projects to settle in Macau (Interviewee 3).”

| Themes                     | Sub-Themes                                      | Frequency |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| **Economy**               | High living costs                               | 5         |
|                           | Economic structure relies on gambling industry   | 3         |
| **Capacity**              | Frequent traffic congestions                     | 7         |
|                           | Land scarcity                                    | 8         |
|                           | High population density                          | 7         |
| **Infrastructure and facilities** | Airport is too small                           | 6         |
|                           | Insufficient pedestrian bridges                  | 3         |
|                           | Insufficient car tunnels                         | 3         |
|                           | Lack of new venues                               | 2         |
|                           | Insufficient new hotels                          | 2         |
| **Human Resources**       | Few talents                                      | 2         |
|                           | Insufficient normal labor                        | 3         |
| **Marketing**             | Lack of middle managers                          | 2         |
|                           | Small scale of market                            | 3         |
|                           | Lack of efficient market promotion               | 5         |
|                           | Lack of local brands of convention productions   | 3         |
| **Tourism Resources & Attractions** | Lack of new traveling facilities               | 5         |
|                           | Lack of new traveling areas                      | 5         |
|                           | Low attractiveness                               | 1         |
| **Policy and Regulation** | Complicated visa application procedure           | 4         |
|                           | Complicated convention preparing procedure that takes too long | 3         |
|                           | High inspection fees of boarder gate             | 2         |
| **Transportation**        | Insufficient international airlines              | 6         |
Based on the example above, it can be determined that capacity and infrastructure and facilities have direct influence (solid arrows) on the convention development of Macau. Meanwhile, the infrastructure and facilities affect (dashed arrow) capacity.

4.3. Barriers for convention tourism
Table 3 lists the key barriers to the development of convention tourism. In this section, each factor was investigated and similar barriers mentioned in prior literature were observed (Kantawateera et al., 2015; Kay et al., 2009; Rokni et al., 2017; Wan, 2011).

4.3.1. Economy
Some interviewees considered that high living costs and an economy reliant on the gambling industry as some of the economic problems in Macau. Not all participants can manage the costs and waste time on transportation. In addition, participants from certain regions (such as Palestine) find it more difficult to obtain visas for Macau; many participants had to cancel at the last minute, causing massive personal losses (Interviewee 6). Industries that support convention tourism development are lacking and the economic structure of Macau relies on the gambling industry, which lacks sufficient professional buyers, and the country finds it difficult to develop other industries (Interviewee 3).

4.3.2. Capacity
Most participants emphasized that Macau should increase its capacity. Two sub-themes were identified as the primary challenges of city capacity. One is frequent traffic congestion. Frequent traffic congestion is a major problem in Macau (Interviewee 2). The other factor that restricts city capacity is the scarcity of land, which raises another barrier to convention tourism development. The lack of land resources is a major problem, and makes finding a place to build a new convention and exhibition venue to attract more international conventions, and exhibition projects to settle in Macau necessary (Interviewee 3). High population density is also an important factor for Macau. Macau has a small territory and high population density, its cities have very limited resources, and the huge tourist population has led to traffic paralysis (Interviewee 6).

4.3.3. Infrastructure and facilities
The third barrier is the lack of public convention activities in Macau, including its airport, insufficient pedestrian bridges, insufficient car tunnels, lack of new venues, and insufficient new hotels. Macau should build more pedestrian bridges, traffic tunnels, and barrier-free passages to ease the flow of people and avoid roads so that guests can relax more comfortably. We should continue to optimize the transportation hub and expand the international airport to enable large passenger aircrafts to park comfortably (Interviewee 2). Based on the capacity and tourism resources problems, we can improve the tourism infrastructure by building new hotels and tourism facilities to support city capacity (Interviewee 5). The number of convention venues in Macau is also insufficient (Interviewee 4).

4.3.4. Human resource
According to the interviewees' responses, human resources faced three sub-theme challenges: lack of talent, insufficient normal labor, and lack of middle managers. At present, few talents in the convention and exhibition industry have modern management knowledge, planning, public relations, and experience in organizing conferences and modern information technology (Interviewee 5). Human resource in Macau is also insufficient. Macau has 3000 employees in conventions at present, and this will increase in the future; however, a lack of middle managers remains (Interviewee 3). The main problem of the labor factor is gathering a large number of workers (Interviewee 9).

4.3.5. Marketing
In Macau, marketing factors have restricted the development of convention tourism. According to the investigation, the sub-theme of the market contained a small size of the local market, lacked efficient market promotion, and local brand of convention production. The first constraint of the convention and exhibition industry in Macau is the limited local market and domestic demand.
The second is the need for the international popularity of the convention and exhibition industry in Macau to be improved (Interviewee 4).

4.3.6. Tourism resources and attractions
Macau has relatively few tourist attractions in Macau, and this fact has a profound effect on the mid- and long-term development of convention tourism in Macau (Interviewee 6). Macau should develop new attractions or travel facilities (Interviewee 10).

4.3.7. Policies and regulations
Some interviewees considered policies and regulations as another barrier to convention tourism development. Visitors to Mainland China often spend considerable time waiting for visas. Many conventions have been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Interviewee 1). Exhibitions and preparations for conventions in Macau is a very complicated process. Foreign conventions and exhibitions must not only tackle complicated procedures but also wait a long time for visas. Hence, fewer large overseas exhibitions or conventions have chosen Macau as the venue (Interviewee 7). The inspection cost is as high as tens of thousands of RMB for the border gate of Mainland China, which hampers participation in Macau conventions (Interviewee 4).

4.3.8. Transportation
The main concern for delegates participating in convention activities was traveling directly to the destination country. Interviewees agreed on the lack of international airlines. At present, the International Transportation Network (Europe, USA, and other regions) is still very limited. This limitation translates into high travel costs for European and American merchants to Macau. Furthermore, some convention participants have to pay high inspection and checking fees to pass the border gates when they carry necessary facilities or products. Thus, it is important to improve border gate management (Interviewee 4).

5. Discussion and implications
The findings of this study identify the eight primary barriers (eight factors) in the development of convention tourism in Macau. Several general implications are suggested to improve these barriers. This study can serve as a reference for key players in the convention industry.

5.1. Economy
At present, the economic structure of Macau relies on the gambling industry. Land scarcity has restricted diversification in a short period. In addition, for some countries, such as Pakistan, applying for a visa to Macau to participate in conventions can be difficult and complicated, and the loss would be very high, raising the living costs of Macau.

Based on the above situation, the Macau government can boost cooperation with Mainland China to develop Hengqin Island together. The advantage of the larger land capacity of Hengqin can effectively diversify industries in the future.

5.2. Capacity
An important part of society's carrying capacity is the different assets of their social space in which the locals' perception affects tourism. It does not measure the pure relationship between locals and visitors (Alvarez-Sousa, 2018). The city capacity of Macau is not only restricted by land scarcity but also by traffic and population factors. Land scarcity will diminish in the future as the central government of China releases 85 square kilometers of sea area, which is now managed by Macao SAR based on the basic law of No.7/2018 of Macao SAR.

The Macau Government Tourism Office released the Master Plan in 2017. One of the policies being implemented seeks to optimize traffic conditions for visitor flows from different attractions (Beitler, 2019). For example, the Macau SAR has constructed a major transport infrastructure-Light Rail Transit (LRT) system, which will improve the city's capacity.
5.3. Infrastructure and facilities

Our study shows that many problems require resolution at the infrastructure and facilities level. Macau is a platform in the convention tourism industry. For perceived by the participants, the lack of all kinds of venues, fairs, and the nature of sales of most exhibitions, reduce the attractiveness of Macau’s MICE events. However, Macau has very limited capacity. MICE veterans have agreed and urged that Macau should expand the airport and increase the number of international flights (Cheang, 2016). In addition, insufficient footbridge, insufficient car tunnels, and insufficient new hotels will also reduce the attractiveness for tourists.

In the future, the Macau government needs to cooperate with Hengqin Island with Mainland China. Based on the advantage of the large land area of Hengqin, Macau can more effectively expand its infrastructure and facilities and improve its hospitality capability.

5.4. Human Resource

The results show that human resource shortages, especially specialists, experts, and middle managers, is another major problem of the Macau convention industry. To attract huge talents and laborers globally, the Macau SAR government needs to implement new rules to support the further development of convention tourism.

5.5. Marketing

The findings of our investigation reveal that marketing promotions for convention tourism in Macau are insufficient. Defining the brand positioning of Macau Convention Tourism is a useful marketing strategy, but it also lacks promotion. The “Convention Destination of the World” is a marketing strategy that can define the convention tourism development in Macau. Furthermore, convention providers must offer “signature” products with Macau characteristics. For example, the fireworks show in Macau has become a must-see activity for many tourists, and combining this activity with convention products will encourage more tourists to take part in it. This goal also conforms to the China central government’s policy of expanding domestic demand.

5.6. Tourism resources and attractions

The results show that tourism resources and tourism attractions are insufficient to attract different types of tourists. The government has focused on solving this barrier. Hengqin Island is geographically close to Macau, and has many world-class tourism infrastructure elements. The central government of China has released several policies for Hengqin Island, which coordinate with the development of Macau (Alves, Osorio, Guo & Khong, 2019). Thus far, development on Hengqin Island has focused on commercial trade, logistics, education, R&D, science, financial services, high technology projects, cultural creation, healthcare, leisure, and tourism (Luo, 2018). Combining these development with convention and tourism elements in Macau will attract many different tourists.

5.7. Policy and regulation

Macau is like any other tourism destination. The crucial factors that determine Macau’s convention tourism industry are the policies and regulations of the local government and the central government of China. China plays an important role in the development of convention tourism development in Macau SAR. Data and results from the statistics of Macau SAR (DSEC, 2019) show that the Macau tourism industry relies mainly on tourists from mainland China. Entry restriction is the crucial factor (Sheng & Gu, 2018).

The central government of China needs to further relax restrictions on visas for Macau and set convention aisles to improve the efficiency of inspection at boarding gates. The Macau government should also offer additional conveniences to the Belt and Road area tourists or the Greater Bay Area tourists and residents, such as a 24-hour policy for border crossing. The conventions’ application procedures are complicated and take too much time. Hence, to encourage investments and support industry development in Macau, new policies and regulations should focus on simplifying and accelerating the convention startup process.
5.8. Transportation

The Macau government is taking steps to improve the diversity and quality of its tourism products. However, the air transport conditions and land resources still restrict the development of airport capacity and diversification of tourism products (MGTO, 2017).

An effective method for improving accessibility to Macau is by strengthening the connection between Macau and other cities in the region. It is easy to access Macau through the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), which is very close. Many international visitors come to Macau through the Sky pier, which provides regular ferry service between HKIA and Macau. The direct connectivity between Macau and HKIA improves Macau’s accessibility significantly. In addition, direct and convenient connections with Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport and Shenzhen International Airport are also important for Macau (MGTO, 2017). For example, direct connectivity to HKIA will increase Macau’s accessibility. The opening of the Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macau Bridge has also improved the accessibility of Macau.

6. Conclusion

In this study, eight main barriers to the development of convention tourism in Macau were identified as follows: economy, capacity, infrastructure and facilities, human resources, marketing, tourism resources and attractions, policies and regulations, and transportation. Most findings in this study are normally congruent with previous tourism literature and add new insights to the literature on convention tourism.

Convention tourism in Macau remains restricted by the limitations of its land and other resources. Hence, the following suggestions are provided to foster the development of convention tourism in Macau.

First, to overcome these barriers, the government and associations should find ways to boost convention tourism in Macau. Making Macau a global convention tourism destination is a common long-term strategic goal. The tourism bureau of Macau SAR, convention associations, and other stakeholders should cooperate in a formal institution to pursue the development of the convention tourism industry in Macau, boost its advantages in a fiercely competitive manner.

Second, According to the Talent Development Committee’s “2019–2021 Convention and Exhibition Industry Talent Demand List”, the huge manager and professional talent gaps for middle and senior management is more obvious, especially that of developing supervisors, project managers (convention and exhibition planning and on-site management), sales managers and other positions. It shows that a large gap still needs to be filled (Qihong, 2021). The Macau SAR government’s talent policy successfully approved cases ranging from 499 in 2006 to a total of 730 in 2015 with 81 cases and 150 people. This mechanism was revealed in recent years. However, there have not been many successful cases of overseas return of Macau talents and thus, they have been temporarily unable to play a key role (Chen et al., 2020).

Based on the situation mentioned above, the government should support the cultivation or introduction of industry talents and experts. The government, training institutions, and related industries should have a long-term vision and take responsibility for talent planning and training. The Macau SAR government should also provide active support for the convention and exhibition industry and cooperate with international convention and exhibition authority organizations, such as importing the courses of CEM, EMD, and other international certification training and test. After completing the entire course and passing the exam, the government can offer training tuition subsidies for the students. In the future, when the world normalizes, the Macau SAR can import more international certification organizations and professional qualifications courses and licenses, and invite domestic and foreign professionals to hold online conferences to make the further corporation and discussion (Zheng, 2021).
Macau SAR should relax its visit restrictions for tourists, enhance its fundamental and tourism facilities and infrastructure, simplify startup procedures of convention business, and improve marketing promotion for better destination branding and the overall development of convention tourism in Macau.

However, this study also has some limitations. First, given the small scale of the Macau convention tourism industry, it is difficult to obtain interview appointments from many senior and general managers, and convention executives, and most have a tight schedule. Furthermore, this study only focused on the convention industry in Macau. Because of the limited scope of this study, future studies could also focus on the community and the government and tourists in the future.

Funding
The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information
Cite this article as: Assessing barriers to the development of convention tourism in Macau, Songhong Chen & Jian Ming Luo, Cogent Social Sciences (2021), 7: 1928978.

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