

## Meeting Planners' Perception on Convention Destination Attributes: Empirical Evidence from Six Major Asian Convention Cities

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*This paper examined meeting planners' perception on Asian convention destinations and their attributes. Meeting Planners, Certified Meeting Professionals (CMP), were asked to indicate (1) how they plan to select destination by checking the attributes of a destination, (2) meeting venues and overnight accommodations. This study will contribute to the literature on the meeting and convention management since it deals with the planner's aspects in the context of his/her role in the site selection procedure as well as strategic event/meeting planning process. Descriptive statistics using frequency distribution and mean performance scores showed that Tokyo is ranked as the first preference followed by Hong Kong, Singapore, and Beijing. Furthermore, findings indicate that meeting facilities are very important attributes attracting and pulling meeting planners as well as their meetings, conventions, and exhibitions to the city. As this study is one of the first cross-national empirical tests of its kind to compare the important convention destination attributes, the findings of this study strengthen the destination management organizations (DMOs) in explaining their meeting attractiveness within the context of hosting more meetings to their cities.*

**Keywords:** Meeting Planners, CMP, DMO, Attributes, Destination, Strategic Meeting Planning

JEL Classification: L83

### I. Introduction

The importance of hosting a meeting and convention to a city has emerged as a crucial strategic decision for stakeholders of a destination since the numbers of meetings, attendees, and spending create a positive economical multiplier impact to a destination. Meeting, convention, and exhibition (MCE) industry has emerged as one of the most important segments of many Asian countries. Previous studies on destination image and attributes have concentrated on state or single country but none on multiple cities in Asia. For example, in 2010, the MCE industry contributed some HK\$35.8 billion (US\$4.6 billion), increased by 18.5 percent from 2008, to the local economy equivalent to 2.1 percent of Hong Kong's total GDP, while generating the equivalent of 69,150 full-time jobs, increased by 13.4 percent from 2008 (Hong Kong Exhibition Convention Industry Association Report, 2011). The MCE industry has emerged as one of the largest and fastest growing sector. Therefore, the stakeholders in Hong Kong are formulating new growth strategies for the long-term success of both the industry and Hong Kong.

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Hong Kong, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Singapore are but a few examples of Asian convention destinations inducing a larger share of the conventions to their cities as they recognize their positive economic multiplier effects to their communities. The meeting planners play an important role in determining the site selection and their decisions are very critical to the cities hosting the meetings and conventions.

The issue of convention destination attributes and image has recently received considerable attention in the academic literature. Chacko and Fenich (2000) stated marketers and policy makers in these destinations are keenly aware that it is important to understand the key destination attributes reviewed by meeting planners in the site selection process, as the meeting planners' decisions are depended upon the destination's attributes and play pivotal roles since it is the real source of competitive advantage of destinations because they allow destinations to differentiate themselves (Beerli and Marin 2004; García *et al.*, 2012; Bregoli, 2013). Past studies on the site selection and destination attributes focus on one single destination and few destinations. Even those studies are exclusively centered in Western regions: North America and UK/Europe (Weber and Ladkin, 2003; Baloglu and Love, 2005; Lee and Back, 2005; Mair and Thompson, 2009). Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore and determine meeting planners' perceptions on destination attributes for six major convention cities in Asia: Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore where the convention and meetings industry has emerged as one of the most important sectors in the city and resulting in keen competition among potential host destinations sites (Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Chen, 2006). By using taxonomy of destination attributes developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1997) and extended by Chacko and Fenich, (2000) and Chen (2006), this study aims to identify the most influential determinant factor toward the site selection as determined by meeting planners and its subsequent attributes. To the best knowledge of the author such a determination has not been done in the existing literature.

The next section describes the literature review on the meeting and convention planners' perception on destination attributes and is followed by research methodology, results, and discussions. This paper concludes with a discussion of the meeting planner's perception on the destination attributes and the significance of its relationship with the destination's stakeholders such as destination management organizations (DMOs) in explaining their meeting attractiveness within the context of hosting more meetings to their cities.

## II. Literature Review

For meeting and convention planners, choosing a convention site and venue involves many complex factors since it determines whether the meeting objective and return on investment (ROI) are successfully achieved or not, as a meeting and convention planner plays a very important role on behalf of boards of directors or committees and provides very valuable inputs and information into what city will best provide the highest value of the stakeholder of the affiliation. Clark, Evans, and Knutson (1998) indicated that as members of the buying center, association meeting planners play a key role in including convention cities in the final consideration set in associations' decision making process because of their expert and information power. Therefore, meeting and convention planners' perception on the possible convention sites becomes crucial and should be of great interest not only of convention venues but also of associations (Baloglu and Love, 2005).

Content analysis of previous research on the destination attributes showed that promotional appeal of the city and destination service have significant effect in the overall ratings of destination (Chacko and Fenich, 2000; Kim and Kim, 2003; Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Wu and Weber, 2005;

Chen, 2006; Chiang *et al.*, 2012). Crouch and Ritchie (1997) developed a taxonomy for classifying the multitude of site attributes which are classified into eight categories and Oppermann (1996) and Chacko and Fenich (2000) using importance-performance analysis, looked into convention destination attributes of meeting planners and illustrated how individual destinations have different strengths and weaknesses. Chen (2006) used the analytical hierarchy process (AHP) to provide a general understanding of decision factors and determine the relative weight of critical attributes affecting site selection. Table 1 shows destination attributes determined by previous research.

**Table 1: Destination Attributes**

Category	Destination attributes
Accessibility	Availability of air service Cost of air service Convenience of local transportation
Local support	Destination service Government support Convention personnel Personnel efficiency
Extra-conference opportunities	Promotional appeal of city Climate Sightseeing Shopping Cultural attractions
Accommodation facilities	Hotel room availability Hotel room rates Helpfulness of service people Meeting space availability Cost of food and beverage
Costs	Transportation expenses Lodging expenses Food and beverage expenses Commodity prices
Others	Friendliness of local people Safety of attendees

Sources: Oppermann (1996), Crouch and Ritchie (1997), Chacko and Fenich (2000), Baloglu and Love (2005), Chen (2006).

The variables operationalized for this study are determined by previous studies and mainly extracted from the Crouch and Ritchie (1997) taxonomy findings from the Chacko and Fenich's (2000) study and Ching-Fu Chen (2006). In addition, even previous studies show many destination attributes are very critical in making a decision on site selection, other attributes (i.e., safety of delegations) might provide significant impact on the rating of a city. For example, a destination such as Seoul may be perceived negatively due to a tension between South Korea and North Korea.

### III. Research Questions

The review of literature introduces many convention destination attributes, but the importance of those attributes is not clearly measured in the context of convention and meeting planners' point of view toward the top convention cities in Asia. Based on the research questions from Chacko and Fenich (2000) and Chen (2006), the following questions were constructed and augmented by the author in collaboration with the research objectives of this study in order to determine the perception of meeting planners on the selection of cities and their attributes.

1. If you have an opportunity to hold a meeting (convention, conference, or exhibition) in Asia, which city is your first choice, second choice, and so on?
2. What factors impact on you to prioritize sites as a prospective convention destination?
3. Within the factor, which attributes are more important than other attributes?

Once the research questions were constructed, the variables (i.e., attributes) were operationalized and designed in a survey questionnaire form to explore the extent to determine relative importance of each attribute in a sample of CMP Conclave participants.

## IV. Methodology

### A. Participants

Meeting and convention planners (Certified Meeting Professionals: CMPs) play a major role in the meetings, conventions and exhibitions (MCE) industry as they are deeply involved in the convention committee of the association and corporate segment in choosing the meeting and convention destination. Their selection criteria contain city, hotel, convention center, and extra-conference events. Therefore, their perceptions on convention destination are very critical whether the city could host the meeting or not. A sample of CMPs was selected from the participants of the 2010 CMP Conclave held by the Convention Industry Council (CIC) from July 17-19, 2010, in Baltimore, MD. The CMP Conclave is the industry's only exclusive meeting of CMPs (CIC, 2010) and the site survey was used in order to enhance higher return rate. From this source, 150 survey forms were distributed to the CMP Conclave attendees and a sample of 61 (40.7 percent) was returned from the meeting planners.

### B. Instrument and Procedure

The questionnaire requested the CMPs to prioritize the cities as an overall destination for meetings, conventions, and exhibitions. Six major convention cities in Asia were chosen: Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In addition, it requested the CMPs to enlist other cities that he/she might consider as another convention destination alternative besides six cities.

The six major-destination attributes or factors were based on a taxonomy developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1997) and used in the work of Chacko and Fenich (2000): meeting facilities, accommodation facilities, costs, site environment, local support, extra-conference opportunities (shopping, entertainment, etc). I chose these particular attributes because these attributes were used and verified by others in terms of their reliability and validity. Furthermore, the questionnaire requested the CMPs to rank the sub-attributes in the context of their importance within the six major attributes or factors in determining and selecting the city as their best alternatives.

To determine the selection with its priority of the best city from six alternate cities, importance of destination attributes and sub-attributes the data were analyzed using descriptive

statistics as measured through central tendency such as mean, mode, median, and frequency distribution.

## V. Results and Discussions

The descriptive statistics of the meeting planners indicate that the largest portion of the meeting planners belong to the association (n=27, 44 percent) followed by the corporation meeting profession (n=21, 34 percent). Most meeting planners were female (n=50, 82 percent) while male planners were counted as only 11 (18 percent).

### A. Destination Preference

Of the six Asian convention destinations given, Tokyo (mean=2.67, mode=1) achieved the lowest mean score on a prioritization, therefore, it is ranked as the first preferred convention destination. It was followed by Hong Kong, Singapore, Beijing, Shanghai, and Seoul (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Mean Performance Scores of CMPs Perceptions on Six Convention Destinations**

	Tokyo <sup>a</sup>	Hong Kong	Singapore	Beijing	Shanghai	Seoul
Mode	1	2	2	4	5	6
Mean	2.67	3.08	3.10	3.61	3.90	4.77
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6

<sup>a</sup>n=61 for each city where n is the number of observations.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of preferences from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> (1= the most prioritized, 6= the least prioritized). Used as Non-parametric rank (order) statistics.

According to the mean performance scores of attributes/factors for affecting convention site preference reported in Table 3, meeting facilities (2.82) and site (city) environment (2.92) were the two most important factors for selecting a convention destination site, followed by accommodation facilities (3.16), costs (3.23), local support (4.07), and extra-conference opportunities (e.g., shopping) (4.75). In contrast to the findings of Chen's (2006) study which shows *site (city) environment* is of the highest importance, this study's finding proves the meeting planners give more weight to meeting facilities.

**Table 3: Mean Performance Scores of Attributes for Site Selection**

	Rank	Mean
Meeting facilities	1	2.82
Site (city) environment	2	2.92
Accommodation facilities	3	3.16
Costs	4	3.23
Local support	5	4.07
Extra-conference opportunities	6	4.75

n=61.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of preferences from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> (see footnote of Table 2).

The mean performance scores of attributes for meeting facilities which was chosen as the most important factor affecting site selection showed that space size and its availability (2.93) and condition and quality (3.82) of meeting facilities were the two most contributing attributes followed by suitability of facilities (3.98) and variety of properties (4.52). In contrast, reputation (5.07) and rental rates (5.87) were the bottom two rankings (see Table 4). These findings that *space size (capacity) and its availability* and *condition and quality* confirm the findings of previous research (Oppermann, 1996; Baloglu and Love, 2005).

**Table 4: Mean Performance Scores of Attributes for Meeting Facilities**

	Rank	Mean
Space size and its availability	1	2.93
Condition and quality	2	3.82
Suitability of facilities	3	3.98
Variety of properties	4	4.52
Reputation (image)	5	5.07
Rental rates	6	5.87

n=61.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of preferences from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> (see footnote of Table 2).

In Table 5, the mean performance scores of attributes/factors for affecting convention site environment indicated that city accessibility (2.13) and site (city) image (2.23) were the two most important factors for selecting a convention destination site, followed by suitability (2.66), and infrastructure (2.98). In contrast to the findings of Chen's (2006) study which shows *suitability* is of the highest importance, this study finds that meeting planners give more weight to *city accessibility* and *city image*. These attributes seem to indicate promotional appeal is important to meeting planners since these make it easier to market the convention destination and site to prospective attendees as mentioned by Chacko and Fenich (2000).

**Table 5: Mean Performance Scores of Attributes for Site (City) Environment**

	Rank	Mean
City accessibility	1	2.13
Country (city) image	2	2.23
Suitability	3	2.66
Infrastructure	4	2.98

n=61.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of preferences from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> (see footnote of Table 2).

The mean performance scores of attributes for accommodation facilities selection show that meeting space size and its availability (4.57) and condition and quality (4.64) of meeting facilities were two of the most contributing attributes followed by hotel room rates (5.18) and suitability of facilities (6.07). These findings do not support for DiPietro *et al.*'s (2008) and Oppermann's (1996) findings that "safety and security were among the most important factors." In contrast, reputation (6.38) and helpfulness of service people (6.54) were the bottom two rankings (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Mean Performance Scores of Attributes for Accommodation Facilities**

	Rank	Mean
Meeting space size and its availability	1	4.57
Condition and quality	2	4.64
Hotel room rates	3	5.18
Suitability of facilities	4	6.07
Reputation (image)	5	6.38
Helpfulness of service people	6	6.54

n=61.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of attributes (see footnote of Table 2).

In Table 7, the mean performance scores of attributes/factors for affecting costs indicated that hotel room rates (2.36) and airfare (2.49) were the two most important factors for costs factor, followed by room rental (2.79), food costs (3.38), technological equipment rental (4.15), and local transportation (4.80) respectively. The finding from *costs* attribute shows the *hotel cost (rate)* is the most important attribute while Chacko and Fenich (2000) observe that *airfare* is highly regarded among the costs attributes.

**Table 7: Mean Performance Scores of Attributes for Costs**

	Rank	Mean
Hotel	1	2.36
Airfare	2	2.49
Meeting room rental	3	2.79
Food	4	3.38
Technological equipment rental	5	4.15
Local transportation	6	4.80

n=61.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of attributes (see footnote of Table 2).

According to the results reports in Table 8, the mean of the performance scores of attributes for local support indicates that government's (CVB) support (1.82) and quality of industry personnel (1.93) were two of the most contributing attributes followed by efficiency of industry personnel (2.26) and helpfulness of service people (6.54). In contrast to Chacko and Fenich's (2000) findings which show *helpfulness of service people* was the important attribute for *local support*, this study shows *CVB's support* is the most important attribute for *local support*.

**Table 8: Mean Performance Scores of Attributes for Local Support**

	Rank	Mean
Government (CVB) support	1	1.82
Quality of industry personnel	2	1.93
Efficiency of industry personnel	3	2.26
Helpfulness of service people	4	6.54

n=61.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of attributes (see footnote of Table 2).

In Table 9, the mean performance scores of attributes/factors for affecting extra-conference opportunities costs indicated that sightseeing and cultural attractions (1.72) and shopping (2.26) were the two most important factors for extra-conference opportunities factor, followed by outside entertainment (2.67), and climate (3.34) respectively. As the samples of this study are limited to Asia, the meeting planners give heavy weight to the *sightseeing and cultural attractions*. This finding is in contrast to that of a previous research focused on the US domestic destinations (Oppermann, 1996; Chacko and Fenich, 2000; Baloglu and Love, 2005; DiPietro *et al.*, 2008).



**Table 9: Mean Performance Scores of Attributes for Extra-Conference Opportunities**

	Rank	Mean
Sightseeing and cultural attractions	1	1.72
Shopping	2	2.26
Outside entertainment	3	2.67
Climate	4	3.34

n=61.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of attributes (see footnote of Table 2).

The mean performance scores of attributes for other factors in Table 10 that could impact on the site selection show that safety of attendees (1.36) was the most important factor, followed by communication skill (English) of local employee's (2.41), friendliness of local people (2.72), and interaction with local CMP (PCO) (3.49), respectively. Meeting planners depend heavily on the safety of attendees as the meeting is held in foreign cities and this finding is similar to that of Chen's (2006) research.

**Table 10: Mean Performance Scores of Attributes for Other Factors**

	Rank	Mean
Safety of attendees	1	1.36
Communication skill of employees	2	2.41
Friendliness of local people	3	2.72
Interaction with local CMP (PCO)	4	3.49

n=61.

Note: rank refers to results from prioritizing of attributes (see footnote of Table 2).

## VI. Conclusions

This study is one of the first cross-national empirical tests of its kind to demonstrate the convention and meeting planner's destination choice based on its attributes and image. It is worthy to note that planners give high weight toward Japan among other cities in Asia. In addition, the most important finding from this study is that meeting facilities and site (city) environment are vital contributors to a convention destination. As many Asian cities compete for hosting the meeting, convention, and exhibition business and due to an economic turmoil, it is very critical for the cities to consider those attributes as a way to enhance and alter meeting planners' perceptions of their cities.

A number of studies on the meeting planners' perception focus on their own city attributes that are important in hosting convention delegations. The drawback of previous studies is that they simply listed and ranked the significant attributes without performing the competitive analysis. The significant contribution of this study is that by comparing six major competing cities it provides indicators in terms of convention destination alternatives. In other words, this study implies which attributes or factors are the most important to a meeting planner as well as to city convention stakeholders.

The results of this study indicate that attributes can play a valuable role in examining image and positioning strategies of a convention destinations image. As competition among Asian cities

increases, a well-conceived positioning strategy becomes vital. For example, Seoul would do well to promote city environment as well as safety of attendees.

This study only examined six Asian convention destinations and their attributes. Other Asian cities as well as other attributes could have been utilized in order to elaborate the findings. Furthermore, this study uses only descriptive analysis techniques using an ordinal measurement. Other statistical analysis tools should be used such as factor and regression analysis in order to determine the importance of destination attributes and to understand the co-relationship among destination attributes. In addition, meeting planners may consider other attributes as an important considering factor in site selection. It is hoped that this study contributes to the base of understanding the meeting planners' perception on Asian convention destinations and their attributes and utilizes the results to promote their destination positioning strategy. Therefore, the city will attract more meetings, conventions, and exhibitions to their cities in order to flourish the positive economical impact of conventions to their communities.

As this study contains all meeting planners' segments, it would be better to classify or allocate them into different segments such as corporate, association, social, military, education, religion, and fraternal (SMERF), independent/individual, and professional convention organization (PCO) in order to observe each segment's meeting planners' perception specifically.

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