

# Understanding tourists' policing attitudes and travel intentions towards a destination during an ongoing social movement

Policing  
attitudes and  
travel  
intentions

Michael T.H. Lai

*Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management,  
Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China*

Emmy Yeung

*Department of Marketing, Tourism and Destinations, University of Chester,  
Chester, UK, and*

Rosanna Leung

*Department of International Tourism and Hospitality, I-Shou University,  
Kaohsiung, Taiwan*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Policing activities aim to provide a safe environment for tourists. With the recent major protests that have erupted around the world, and the novel use of excessive police force against protestors, people may wonder if the policing deployment is for destination safety or to deter tourists from visiting. This paper aims to investigate anti-police and pro-police attitudes and tourists' behavioural responses towards a popular destination experiencing an ongoing social movement.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected between December 2019 and January 2020 (during the social movement). An online survey with a snowball sampling method was adopted to reach international tourists who were aware of the social movement in Hong Kong.

**Findings** – The results revealed that an individual with an anti-police attitude was found to be related to cognitive and affective destination images and perceived risks while those holding a pro-police attitude were more concerned with destination images only. No significant correlation was found between attitudes towards policing and travel intention.

**Originality/value** – This research presents a first attempt to investigate the relationship between tourists' policing attitudes and their behavioural responses during an ongoing social movement in a popular destination city.

**Keywords** Policing attitude, Social movement, Destination image, Travel risks, Hong Kong

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The increase in the excessive use of force by the police in various countries is raising concern across the world. It is not surprising that the physical injuries from police harassment and the use of excessive force against protesters have been highlighted in the media and in the scholarly literature. In the tourism industry, policing activities aim to provide a safe environment for tourists (Tarlow, 2019) and produce a positive destination image (Tyagi *et al.*, 2016). Tourists used to feel relieved when police were patrolling in their area (Pizam *et al.*, 1997). However, with the recent major protests that have erupted around the world, and the novel use of excessive police force against the protestors, people may wonder if the policing deployment is for



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destination safety or to deter tourists from visiting. Unlike the many cases where tourists are being targeted as the victims in crimes, policing deployment usually only targets the protestors, but sometimes tourists may be affected when they are at the destination. [The Progressive Scholars Group \(2020\)](#) reported that Hong Kong police officers were recorded hitting the head and neck of their targets, often from behind, who in many cases were passers-by and tourists, but not violent protesters. [New Statesman \(2019\)](#) also reported that tourists were sprayed with tear gas by the French police while they were passing by a protest area. Thus, the assumption that policing activities enhances destination safety image can be questioned.

The policing activities may potentially affect tourism since the tourists may be deterred from visiting certain destinations in their travel planning stage. However, prior research work provides little information about the possible effects on tourism of a police deployment, which itself was meant to bring a sense of security to the destination but that may have been jeopardised as a result of a crisis for the tourists. Moreover, most tourism researchers have studied the topic from a macro perspective by responding to a specific political crisis at a destination or country level (e.g. [Neumayer, 2004](#); [Perles-Ribes et al., 2019](#); [Saha and Yap, 2014](#)) rather than using a micro approach by understanding the tourists' behavioural responses in a crisis while making travel decisions. Though, existing tourism research work on political events has begun to adopt a more micro approach, such as focussing on the connection between tourists' perception towards a political crisis and their subsequent behaviour. [Alvarez and Campo \(2014\)](#) explored the effect of a political event on destination images and tourists' travel intentions. Using the 2019–2020 Hong Kong protests as a case study, [Kim et al. \(2020\)](#) studied tourists' decision-making processes with the use of the model of goal directed behaviour, while [Girish et al. \(2021\)](#) examined tourists' attitudes in relation to their future behaviour. More recently, [Poon and Koay \(2021\)](#) investigated the role of tourist trust and its importance towards the intention to revisit in the protest scenario. It appears that such research has given only very little attention to the relationship of tourists' policing attitudes and its impact on destinations, in particular, for those cities or countries with ongoing protests, and associated tourist behaviours. Although protests as a form of political event may be disrupted or sabotaged and end up affecting peace and stability ([Getz and Page, 2016](#)), it can be recognised as a new type of tourism which may attract those who look for an extraordinary experience and authenticity ([Shim et al., 2022](#)). This study argues that tourists' policing attitudes are considered to be indicators in explaining tourist behaviour in the context of protest tourism as it is commonly agreed that attitude leads to travel intentions ([Dash, 2020](#)), and serves as the basis for understanding this new tourism phenomenon. Against this backdrop, the current study aims to investigate anti-police and pro-police attitudes towards a destination that is experiencing an ongoing social movement, and to explore the relationships between anti/pro-police attitudes, destination images (cognitive and affective), risk perceptions and the likelihood of visiting a destination.

In a review of the global environment, Hong Kong has experienced over 1,000 protests involving in excess of 14 million protesters since 2019. Here, protesters demanded the withdrawal of the Fugitive Offenders Bill from the legislative process ([Stott et al., 2020](#)), which intended to establish a mechanism for the transfer of fugitives – not only for Taiwan, but also for countries or cities with which it does not have an extradition treaty, including Mainland China and Macau. The introduction of the bill caused widespread criticism from the local citizens and foreign governments, who feared it would cause the erosion of Hong Kong's judicial system and its business climate; whilst also damaging to the “one country, two systems” policy ([Lo et al., 2020](#)). Hong Kong was the world's most visited city by travellers in 2018 ([Euromonitor International, 2019](#)). As continual social movements persist and mostly occur in the main tourist areas and downtown, visitor arrival growth has declined by nearly 15% year on year, from 65 million total visitors in 2018 to less than 56 million in 2019 ([Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2019](#)). The conflicts between the protestors and the police have gained widespread media coverage, from police simply being stationed alongside the protestors, to

battling with protestors in central business districts and university campuses, to the deployment of water cannons and firing rubber bullets and tear gas. Different degrees of protests have been on headline news broadcasts from different major international media such as CNN, BBC, New York Times and Reuters. The policing activities have received both support and criticism across the world (Lo *et al.*, 2020). It is appropriate to seek an understanding of the attitudes of international tourists to such policing and any changes to the destination inflicted by the ongoing social movement. With the ongoing social movement, continual policing activities in response to public gatherings, and as one of the most popular international travel destinations, Hong Kong is selected for the current study.

## Literature review

### *Pro-police and anti-police attitudes*

Attitude is a learnt predisposition to behave in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way with respect to a given object (Ajzen, 1991). It occurs within or is influenced by situational factors. A specific event, time or circumstance can change an individual's attitude if the existing attitude no longer fulfils the current state of belief (Li *et al.*, 2016). During a social movement, an individual might have mixed beliefs towards the police. Some are unfavourable to the police, they still believe police should exist in the community. Others show empathy and positive emotion towards police but may think that a police officer performed badly during the social movement, or they might be mad at police for using disproportionate force against the protestors. In this case, it is expected that if attitude is conceptualised as purely either a favourable or an unfavourable evaluation about the police, it is not feasible to fully capture policing attitudes because they are dynamic and multi-faceted phenomenon (Hu *et al.*, 2020), especially during social unrest.

In the police literature, there have been different approaches to the conceptualisation of policing attitudes. Some researchers (e.g. Dai and Jiang, 2014) define policing attitudes as satisfaction with the police, while others counter argue that policing attitude is not solely satisfaction, rather it also comprises elements of trust (e.g. Sun *et al.*, 2013) and confidence (e.g. Lee *et al.*, 2015). Cao (2015) made the first attempt to distinguish the policing attitude with the combination of those three concepts. He found that confidence in the police seems to be the most important concept amongst others. Hu *et al.* (2020) conducted a follow up study of Cao (2015) and found that those three concepts vary from context to context. In a broad sense, all of these studies highlighted the complexity of this concept. More recently, Italiano *et al.* (2021) conducted a qualitative study and found that policing attitude is considered a multi-faceted construct that includes two overarching themes, namely pro-police attitude and anti-police attitude.

Pro-police attitudes are defined as the general feelings of sympathy towards police, based on beliefs or sentiments originating in protests or political issues, where individuals see police as being vilified and assaulted by the protestors (Italiano *et al.*, 2021). One of the primary engines that produces and maintains this attitude is that people believe police are legitimate (Hinds and Murphy, 2007). Many people view the police as legitimate and are therefore entitled to maintain power over others. They believe that the police are law enforcement officers regardless of whether they use excessive force in stopping violence and curbing disorder. In other words, an individual with a pro-police attitude is not only fully supportive of legal authorities but also feels that they have a perceived obligation to obey. Tyler (2004) described this authorisation process as automatic justification. In addition, the police are an appropriate institution which should be fully supported in the use of force to reduce social disorder. With the idea of Tyler (2004), those with a pro-police attitude are dedicated to maintaining social and political stability by fully supporting police use of (excessive) force to end violence by protestors.

An anti-police attitude refers to a social group or an individual's psychological stance to respond in unfavourable evaluations against police behaviour (Reynolds-Stenson, 2018). Some studies have determined that the distrust of police is a major driver of the formation of

anti-police attitudes. Clark *et al.* (2017) found that anti-police attitudes are often associated with a strong mistrust of police because of the unpredictability of police behaviour, such as unreasonable or excessive use of force, misconduct, and abuse of authority by law enforcement personnel. If citizens believe the police are generally not held accountable for misconduct, are above the law, and/or are abusive, they are pushed to form an anti-police attitude, resulting in an unwillingness to cooperate with the police, develop a fear of police or even hate of police (Nancarrow, 2019). Moreover, existing police studies have pointed out that experience of being a crime victim and fear of crime also lead to the formation of anti-police attitudes (Chow, 2012). An individual who was the victim of a violent crime and who had a higher degree of fear of crime is more likely to exhibit negative attitudes towards the police.

*Anti/pro-police attitude and destination image.* Destination image is defined as the total set of expressions of a tourist's knowledge, impressions, prejudices and emotions towards a particular destination (Murphy *et al.*, 2000). In considering the multiplicity of definitions, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) suggested that destination image is a two-dimensional construct, including cognitive and affective elements. Cognitive destination image refers to beliefs and knowledge about a destination, such as tourist attractions and entertainment/outdoor activities, whereas affective image reflects an individual's emotional feelings towards a destination, e.g. relaxing atmosphere, pleasant surroundings (Afshardoost and Eshaghi, 2020). A particular image is often a subjective perception of tourist reality that has been shaped from various sources of external information, individual differences in past experiences, motivations and personal socio-demographic factors (Beerli and Martín, 2004). Thus, destination image can be seen as the reflection of tourists' attitudes or perceptions before visiting a destination.

Prior studies have documented that political conflicts may lead to a negative destination image (Alvarez and Campo, 2014; Eid *et al.*, 2019). Policing activities and deployments, such as high visibility of police presence on the street and at tourist attractions may give tourists a negative impression of the destination and perceive it as unsafe and insecure (Jensen and Svendsen, 2016). Many studies have shown that there is a connection between tourist attitudes and destination image (e.g. Huang and van der Veen, 2019; Park *et al.*, 2017). This study argues that a positive (negative) attitude towards the police may emerge to induce positive (negative) destination images when a destination is experiencing ongoing social movements. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1a.* There is a negative relationship between anti-police attitudes and cognitive destination images during ongoing social movements;
- H1b.* There is a negative relationship between anti-police attitudes and affective destination images during ongoing social movements;
- H1c.* There is a positive relationship between pro-police attitudes and cognitive destination images during ongoing social movements; and
- H1d.* There is a positive relationship between pro-police attitudes and affective destination images during ongoing social movements.

#### *Anti/pro-police attitudes and perceived travel risks*

Perceived risk pertains primarily to tourist decision-making and information searches. It is also viewed as a context-specific variable and varies amongst the different backgrounds of tourists (Le and Arcodia, 2018). The literature concerning perceived risk shows that behavioural changes in response to risk are mainly caused by the probability of a loss and the subjective feeling of unfavourable consequences related to that (Deng and Ritchie, 2018). In other words, an individual is more likely to exhibit negative feelings and alter their

behaviour when they believe that they are exposed to danger and that the outcome differs from their expectations. Since perceived risk is considered involving probable loss and fear of unexpected outcomes, different tourism researchers have suggested that perceived risk arises from different types of potential loss and unanticipated consequence, such as performance risk, time risk, financial risk, human-induced risk and psychological risk (Fuchs and Reichel, 2006; Karamustafa *et al.*, 2013). As an anti-police attitude is an unfavourable evaluation of police behaviour, it is also seen as likely to have a higher risk at the destination during ongoing social movements. As an example, the more negative (positive) attitudes towards police associated with their behaviour are, such as using excessive force in stopping violence, firing rubber bullets and tear gas, the higher (lower) the perceived probability of a loss during travelling. Based on the above, two hypotheses are proposed:

- H2a.* There is a positive relationship between anti-police attitudes and perceived risks during ongoing social movements; and
- H2b.* There is a negative relationship between pro-police attitudes and perceived risks during ongoing social movements.

#### *Anti/pro-police attitudes and travel intention*

Jang *et al.* (2009) defines travel intention as an outcome of a mental state that represents a willingness to visit the destination in the future. Lam and Hsu (2004) claim that travel intention rests on an opportunity to travel and functions as a stimulus to future behaviour. Many prior studies on travel intention have been carried out using the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). According to TPB, behaviour is a function of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Attitude towards certain behaviour is the outcome or summation of a complete set of behavioural beliefs (Lam and Hsu, 2004). If a person's attitude towards visiting a destination is positive, and subsequently, that person intends to visit that destination, it is likely that he or she will perform the behaviour. In a similar vein, this study argues that a tourist who has positive (negative) feelings towards policing behaviour will form a pro-police (anti-police) attitude, thereby positively (negatively) leading to visit a destination during social movements. From a broader perspective, previous studies have shown that political instability at a destination leads to a reduction in tourist arrivals (Perles-Ribes *et al.*, 2019; Saha and Yap, 2014). Thus, we proposed the additional hypotheses as follows:

- H3a.* There is a negative relationship between anti-police attitudes and intention to visit a destination during ongoing social movements; and
- H3b.* There is a positive relationship between pro-police attitudes and intention to visit a destination during ongoing social movements.

## **Methodology**

### *Sampling procedure*

The target respondents were international tourists who had heard about the social movement in Hong Kong. The use of international participants was considered appropriate to obtain their latest perceptions and attitudes towards the social movement, for destination recovery purposes.

Data were collected between December 2019 and January 2020 (during the social movement). An online survey (JotForm.com) with a snowball sampling method was adopted to reach respondents from different parts of the world. Snowball sampling was undertaken because it can overcome the challenges in finding difficult-to-reach sampling populations and

expand the geographical location (Mayo, 2014). An invitation with an online survey was distributed by social messaging apps via researchers' personal networks in three locations (Japan, the United Kingdom and Taiwan). Each respondent was asked to nominate others for inclusion in the survey process. In terms of sample size, this study followed Hair *et al.*'s (2014) recommendation, suggesting that there should be five times per measurement item. Therefore, the minimum sample size was 160 cases.

A total of 195 useable data records contributed to the data analysis. Out of the useable responses, 65% of the respondents indicated that they have visited Hong Kong while 43% were planning to visit Hong Kong. Nearly 10% of the respondents said they had lived in Hong Kong for more than 6 months. These respondents have different degrees of familiarity of Hong Kong as a tourist destination. Missing values are occasionally found in the data set, so the issue of nonresponse is a potential problem. To effectively handle missing values, an expectation-maximisation algorithm was performed using SPSS. This is a commonly applied method and can estimate the expected values of the missing data with maximum likelihood properties from the observed data (McLachlan, 2015).

#### *Research instruments*

Two screening questions were set at the beginning of the survey to ensure that the respondents were (1) non-Hong Kong residents, and (2) were aware of the social movement in Hong Kong. The questions that focussed on pro-and anti-police attitudes were modified from Sönmez and Tasci (2020), who had used this method to identify attitudes towards pro-and anti-gun laws in the USA. To fit the context of this study, the authors of the present paper changed the wording of some items. The resulting 12 questions aimed to measure whether respondents were deemed to be supportive or concerned over Hong Kong's policing activities. The scales were based on the premise that attitude is a dichotomous construct, which includes an individual's beliefs regarding positive and negative feelings towards policing activities. Policing-related attitudes were evaluated by a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The online survey consisted of questions regarding the behavioural responses of pro-and anti-police attitudes on destination images, perceived risks and the likelihood of visiting Hong Kong. Responses regarding the perceived destination image were measured on both cognitive and affective components. Perceived cognitive image items of Hong Kong were adapted from Choi *et al.* (1999), Huang and Hsu (2005), and Leung *et al.* (2010). By collating the three lists of image attributes of Hong Kong in those studies, seven questions were used to measure the perceived cognitive destination images. The affective image section included five bipolar scale items based on the results of Alvarez and Campo (2014) and Becken *et al.* (2017). These five items were revised to refer to the tourists' perspectives of the ongoing Hong Kong social movements. Although tourists' travel risk perceptions have been widely investigated, tourism researchers are struggling to keep pace with understanding travel risks, but have not yet reached a consensus on which measurement is better to describe tourists' perceived travel risks (Deng and Ritchie, 2018). To frame this study, five items were obtained from Fuchs and Reichel (2006), Karamustafa *et al.* (2013) and Sönmez and Tasci (2020) for evaluation of the perceived risks of Hong Kong during the social movement included perceived risk, which covered performance risk, time risk, financial risk, human-induced risk and psychological risk. Cognitive destination images, affective destination images and perceived risks were evaluated by a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Three items measuring the likelihood of visiting Hong Kong were adapted and modified from Poon and Koay (2021). The initial version of the questionnaire was pre-tested and reviewed by two academic experts in tourism and a small group of respondents. A revision was performed based on their feedback before sending out the final version.



## Results

### *Participant's profile*

Of the survey participants, 60% were female, and 40% were male. About 80% were aged below 44. Around 60% were from Asia and the remainder were from other continents. About 97% of them held a university degree with 66% having a postgraduate degree. The participants were from 34 different countries. [Table 1](#) lists the demographic statistics of all participants.

### *Validation of the measurement scale*

The AMOS 26.0 software was used to perform confirmatory factor analysis using a maximum likelihood estimation method on a total of 32 measurement items. The analysis results indicated a good fit as the model fit indices (TLI = 0.905, and CFI = 0.917) were above the suggested cut-off of 0.900 (Kline, 2015). Furthermore, the model fits indices that further support the appropriateness of the measurement model ( $\chi^2 = 805.318$ ,  $df = 433$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.860$ , RMSEA = 0.067) were within acceptable ranges, i.e.  $<3$  for  $\chi^2/df$ , and  $<0.08$  for RMSEA, respectively (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to examine the measurement scales. In general, a composite construct reliability value of 0.70 or higher indicates good reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2014). As indicated in [Table 2](#), all constructs were 0.70 or above, indicating that all of the items really do reflect the respective construct. This study

Variables	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	78	40.0
	Female	115	59.0
	Prefer not to answer	2	1.0
Age	18–24	59	30.3
	25–34	55	28.2
	35–44	36	18.5
	45–54	20	10.3
	55 or above	16	8.2
	Prefer not to answer	9	4.5
Nationality by region	Northeast Asia	69	35.4
	Europe	49	25.1
	Southeast Asia	37	19.0
	North America	14	7.2
	Others	12	6.1
	Prefer not to answer	14	7.2
Education level	Vocational school/associate degree or below	4	2.0
	University undergraduate	60	30.8
	University postgraduate	129	66.2
	Prefer not to answer	2	1.0
Monthly income	Below US\$ 650	47	24.1
	US\$651-1950	56	28.7
	US\$1,951-3,250	44	22.6
	US\$3,251-4,550	18	9.2
	Above US\$ 4,551	21	10.8
	Prefer not to answer	9	4.6
Prior experience in Hong Kong	Yes	127	65.1
	No	68	34.9

**Table 1.**  
Participants  
demographic  
statistics (*n* = 195)

Measured variable	Standardised factor loading	<i>t</i> – value	CR	AVE
Pro-police attitude			0.914	0.643
I feel safe in the knowledge that the police can stop the Hong Kong protests	0.706	NA		
I feel safe in the knowledge that the police can deter criminals in Hong Kong	0.679	9.095		
I feel positive about the presence of police in Hong Kong	0.841	11.252		
I believe that the police can achieve good outcomes in the pursuit of justice in Hong Kong	0.838	11.810		
I believe that the police can make Hong Kong a safe city	0.960	12.777		
I would feel safer if the police are present at tourist attractions in Hong Kong	0.753	10.619		
Anti-police attitude			0.881	0.556
I am scared of recent police brutality in Hong Kong	0.645	NA		
I am scared of witnessing police brutality in Hong Kong	0.727	12.255		
I am scared of being a victim of police brutality in Hong Kong	0.793	9.378		
I am scared of being attacked by the police in Hong Kong	0.910	10.209		
I am concerned with the police using excessive force in Hong Kong	0.660	5.880		
I am worried that the police will show up at tourist attractions in Hong Kong	0.707	8.545		
Cognitive destination images			0.882	0.526
Transportation, service, facilities remain available as usual	0.703	7.023		
A safe place to visit	0.892	13.700		
An international tourist city	0.506	7.920		
Hong Kong citizens have high moral standards	0.855	13.054		
Full of violence due to the protests	0.654	9.416		
The attractions in Hong Kong have been seriously damaged	0.602	8.557		
Politically stable	0.784	NA		
Affective destination images			0.901	0.652
Unpleasant – Pleasant	0.741	NA		
Sad – Cheerful	0.720	11.191		
Unpeaceful – Peaceful	0.870	12.316		
Frightened – Reassured	0.913	12.882		
Out of Control – Under Control	0.775	10.867		
Perceived risks			0.875	0.586
I worry that I will have a bad quality travel experience during my stay in Hong Kong	0.893	NA		
I worry that I will waste my valuable vacation time	0.801	14.148		
I think I will receive good value for my money	0.587	8.898		
I worry that I will be exposed to danger due to possible protests	0.754	12.842		
I think I will receive personal satisfaction from the trip to Hong Kong	0.761	11.378		
Intention to visit a destination			0.801	0.586
Likelihood to visit HK next 12 months	0.835	NA		
Interest to travel now	0.792	11.425		
Desire to visit protest area	0.658	9.238		

**Table 2.**  
Results of the confirmatory factor analysis

**Note(s):** NA = not available because the item was used as a reference variable

combines AVE and factor loading score as a measure of convergent validity. The factor loading of each item was above the cut-off point of 0.50 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and AVEs were also above 0.50, which is the lower bound of establishing convergent validity. Therefore, convergent validity was not an issue. Moreover, all corresponding AVE values were greater than each of



the square correlation between any two constructs (see Table 3). This confirmed that there is a high degree of discriminant validity between each construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

*Policing attitude towards destination image during the social movement*

The Pearson correlations were run using the factorial scores of pro-police attitude and anti-police attitude against the perceptions of cognitive destination images of Hong Kong during the social movement. The results showed that an anti-police attitude is negatively and significantly correlated with Hong Kong political stability ( $r = -0.262; p < 0.01$ ) and destination safety ( $r = -0.230; p < 0.01$ ). When tourists' anti-police attitudes increase, the image of Hong Kong decreases in terms of political stability and safety at the destination. These two statements revealed contrasting meanings of pro-police attitudes. Pro-police attitudes were significantly and positively correlated with the statement "Hong Kong is politically stable" ( $r = 0.217; p < 0.01$ ) and "Hong Kong is a safe place to visit" ( $r = 0.205; p < 0.01$ ). Correlations of Hong Kong citizens' moral standards with both pro-police and anti-police attitudes were significant and showed the strongest relationship amongst all the cognitive statements. However, Hong Kong citizens' moral standards was positively correlated with anti-police attitudes ( $r = 0.391; p < 0.01$ ) but negatively correlated with pro-police attitudes ( $r = -0.277; p < 0.01$ ). As hypothesised, H1a and H1c are partially supported.

Table 4 illustrates the levels of relationship between policing attitudes and destination affective image. Anti-police attitude is negatively and significantly correlated with all the

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6
1						
2	-0.534					
3	0.212	-0.534				
4	0.189	-0.271	0.238			
5	-0.045	0.055	0.350	0.342		
6	0.048	0.035	0.340	0.414	0.286	
AVE	0.634	0.556	0.526	0.652	0.586	0.586

**Note(s):** 1. Pro-police attitude; 2. Anti-police attitude; 3. Cognitive destination images; 4. Affective destination images; 5. Perceived risks; 6. Intention to visit a destination

**Table 3.** Squared correlations and AVE for the measurement model

	Correlation coefficient	
	Pro-police	Anti-police
<i>Cognitive destination image</i>		
Transportation, service, facilities remain available as usual	0.097	0.011
A safe place to visit	0.205**	-0.230**
An international tourist city	0.129	-0.009
Hong Kong citizens have high moral standards	-0.277**	0.391**
Full of violence due to the protests	0.028	-0.012
The attractions in Hong Kong have been seriously damaged	0.046	0.065
Politically stable	0.217**	-0.262**
<i>Affective destination image</i>		
Unpleasant – Pleasant	0.125	-0.160*
Sad – Cheerful	0.110	-0.213**
Unpeaceful – Peaceful	0.140	-0.241**
Frightened – Reassured	0.201**	-0.341**
Out of Control – Under Control	0.182*	-0.192**

**Note(s):** Significant. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table 4.** Correlations between anti-police/pro-police attitudes and destination images during the social movement ( $n = 195$ )

affective image attributes. With that said, as tourists' anti-police attitudes increase, their affection towards Hong Kong decreases and moves towards the negative aspects of the bipolar attributes in every criterion. Therefore, H1b is fully supported. Conversely, the pro-police attitude was positively correlated with two items, out of control – under control ( $r = 0.182; p < 0.01$ ) and frightened – reassured ( $r = 0.201; p < 0.01$ ). As the tendency towards pro-police attitude increases, so do the feelings of being reassured and under control. H1d is also partially supported.

*Policing attitude towards perceived risk during the social movement*

Table 5 presents the findings of the relationship between anti/pro-police attitudes and the five perceived risks. The results indicate that four of the correlations were significantly associated with anti-police attitude, where “good value for my money” (financial risk) ( $r = -0.151; p < 0.05$ ), “bad quality travel experience” (performance risk) ( $r = 0.179; p < 0.05$ ), “expose to danger due to possible protests” (human-induced risk) ( $r = 0.160; p < 0.05$ ), and “personal satisfaction of a trip” (psychological risk) ( $r = -0.151; p < 0.05$ ) were found to have a liner relationship with anti-police attitudes. As tourists' anti-police attitudes increase, so do their perceptions that these four risks would be experienced in Hong Kong. This result supports the hypothesised positive relationship between anti-police attitude and perceived risks while visiting a destination during a social movement, so H2a is partially supported. Conversely, pro-police attitude and perceived risks were shown not to be significantly related. Of the five correlations, none of them were found to be statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Thus, H2b is rejected.

*Policing attitude towards travel intention during the social movement*

Table 6 shows that all correlations between policing attitudes and the likelihood of visiting Hong Kong were insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Interestingly, regardless of whether respondents are holding a pro-police or anti-policing attitude, their policing attitude was not significantly associated with their travel intention towards Hong Kong during and after the social movement. International tourists did not necessarily consider policing attitudes in relation to travel intention. Therefore, H3a and 3b are rejected.

**Table 5.**  
Correlations between anti-police/pro-police attitudes and perceived risk during the social movement ( $n = 195$ )

	Correlation coefficient	
	Pro-police	Anti-police
<i>Perceived risks</i>		
I worry that I will have a bad quality travel experience during my stay in Hong Kong	-0.093	0.179*
I worry that I will waste my valuable vacation time	0.114	0.045
I think I will receive good value for my money	0.064	-0.151*
I worry that I will be exposed to danger due to possible protests	-0.094	0.160*
I think I will receive personal satisfaction from the trip to Hong Kong	0.103	-0.151*

**Note(s):** Significant: \*  $p < 0.05$

**Table 6.**  
Correlations between anti-police/pro-police attitudes and future travel intention ( $n = 195$ )

	Correlation coefficient	
	Pro-police	Anti-police
<i>Intention to visit a destination</i>		
Likelihood to visit HK next 12 months	-0.070	0.051
Interest to travel now	0.008	0.030
Desire to visit protest area	-0.097	0.075

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## Discussion

This research presents the first attempt to investigate the relationship between international tourists' policing attitudes and their behavioural responses during an ongoing social movement in a popular destination city. This study echoes the call for more attention to be directed to the relationships amongst political instability, protests, and tourism (Eid *et al.*, 2019; Saha and Yap, 2014; Shim *et al.*, 2022). More specifically, the relationship between policing attitudes and behavioural responses provides an interesting platform to help our understanding of the dynamics of tourist behaviour at the pre-visit stage.

First, the results revealed that the anti/pro-police attitudes were found to be partially correlated with cognitive destination images during ongoing social movements. These findings suggest that negative and positive cognitive images regarding a destination may co-exist. International tourists with an anti-police attitude have negative impressions about food and political situations, while those holding a pro-police attitude show positive perceptions concerning Hong Kong's image in international tourism markets. The use of excessive force at protest sites by Hong Kong police was comprehensively covered by media all around the world. These incidents could have created apprehension in the minds of potential international tourists about Hong Kong's political situation.

An interesting result was found in the relationship between policing attitude and Hong Kong citizen's perceived moral standard, where moral standard was positively correlated with an anti-police attitude but negatively correlated with a pro-police attitude. One possible reason for this is that the definition of "moral standard" amongst those pro-police and anti-police respondents was quite different. Even though some of the protests that took place in Hong Kong were not without fault, those who were holding anti-police attitudes may have had a feeling of sympathy towards Hong Kong residents, who claimed that they were fighting for freedom, based on the belief that this is what they supposed to do even if their behaviour conflicts with the law. On the other hand, those with a pro-police attitude may view ongoing social movements as riots, and disturbing everyday life where protesters were deliberately attacking police, throwing petrol bombs, blocking roads and railways and assaulting civilians who hold different political views.

Similar findings occur with the affective destination image of Hong Kong. With a higher anti-police attitude, the perceived affective destination image would tend towards the negative side. The findings confirm the assumption that the policing activities against protestors were making potential tourists worry about a visit to Hong Kong. The results further support the studies of Alvarez and Campo (2014) who suggest that the negative influence of a political incident on destination image occurs through the affective component. This finding leads the researchers to believe that anti-police attitudes are an obstacle to creating positive destination images. On the other hand, respondents with pro-police attitudes perceived Hong Kong as pleasant, peaceful, reassured and under control during the social movement. This implies that a pro-police attitude may benefit a destination's image. In other words, a pro-police attitude may be a critical factor in forming a positive destination image. The more pro-police-related a tourist's attitudes are, the more positive their destination images are likely to be.

Prior research confirmed that tourists prefer to travel to a safe and politically stable place (George, 2010; Neumayer, 2004). With the increase in anti-police attitudes, the risk perception of possible bad travel experience and perceived physical harm would be increased. Tourists have mostly been associated with human-induced risk (Fuchs and Reichel, 2006). However, perceived risks entail more than just human-induced risk. Tourists with an anti-police attitude are more likely to worry that the destination will not perform as expected. This could be explained by Kim *et al.*'s study (2020), who found that tourists are more worried about the destination's performance not meeting their expectations. Hong Kong is usually positioned as part of Asia's World; however, the perceived performance risk for tourists is getting higher

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since some public transport services are occasionally changed or cancelled due to the protest. Hong Kong International Airport also applies extra measures at the entrance to stop protestors from going in. These measures may require extra time from tourists or cause them to change their onsite plans. The policing activity and the protests block the road and may deter the tourists from going out to the night markets or see the night view of the harbour, which were two popular activities for tourists. Tourists may find the trip far from their expectations due to these limitations. On the other hand, the pro-police attitude did not have any correlation to perceived risk. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that tourists with a pro-police attitude hold a high level of confidence in the security system, they believe that Hong Kong is a safe and risk-free destination even during social movements. Hong Kong police have long been known as “Asia’s finest” ([The New York Times, 2019](#)). Although the force is struggling to salvage a reputation blighted by their behaviour during the social movement, the image of “Asia’s finest” remains deeply embedded in tourists’ consciences. Thus, a high level of confidence in the Hong Kong police for protecting tourists’ safety during social movements may account for the fact that no relationship exists between pro-police attitudes and perceived risks.

The current research asks whether there is a relationship between the policing attitude that visitors uphold and their travel intention. However, the results show that there is no relationship between these two variables. The insignificant result between safety and policing attitude may shed some light on the reasons. Travel constraints such as language, time, cost and safety prohibit or alter the actual travel decision ([Bonn et al., 2016](#)). Visitors may consider the policing attitudes and destination safety separately, i.e. negative police attitude does not mean an unsafe destination, while positive police attitude may not correspond to a safe destination. Faced with continual social movements, potential tourists may not necessarily think Hong Kong is as dangerous as some other destinations during high political tension. Second, whether tourists visit a place will depend on many variables rather than thinking only about their policing attitude during social movements. [Jang et al. \(2009\)](#) pointed out that a decision to travel is triggered by an internal desire to satisfy a need, while previous studies showed that perceived value is a good predictor of travel intention other than satisfaction or destination image ([Song et al., 2013](#)).

#### *Theoretical contributions*

First, this study contributes to the literature by clarifying tourist attitudes towards the police. Our data show that the policing attitude is bitterly divided, into anti-police and pro-police attitudes. Most prior studies measure the attitude towards police by only one measurement item. Moreover, scholars interchangeably used satisfaction with the police, confidence in the police, or trust in the police to reflect attitudes towards the police but ignored other aspects. [Hu et al. \(2020\)](#) point out that policing attitudes might be different to satisfaction, confidence and trust, and a single item measurement cannot easily make a solid conclusion regarding reliability and validity. The findings of this study provide a new arena to understand the composition of attitudes towards the police. Moreover, this research demonstrates that continuous social movements nurtures tourists’ positive/negative feelings towards the police, which can reach levels close to polarisation. This finding generates new research questions: on how media shapes influential information, how people perceive police activities and whether it is possible to reconcile these two types of policing attitude via social media.

Second, the present study is pioneering in its application of the concept of policing attitude to the tourism context. It contributes to the extant politics-related tourism research by focussing on the particular effects of a recent social movement against government and the police force in a popular destination city. Specifically, this study extended the knowledge of the impact of tourists’ police-related attitudes on destination image, perceived risks and travel

intention. The concurrent results indicate that tourists' policing attitude has had various degrees of association on tourist behaviour, especially regarding the affective destination images. This stresses the need for a more complex conceptualisation and empirical support of policing attitudes in the tourism literature. When people plan to visit a destination during an ongoing social movement, policing attitude appears to be unimportant. While this finding is disappointing, it is still interesting for tourism theory and practice.

### *Practical implications*

Regarding the insufficiently investigated role of policing attitude in perceived risk and destination image, this study reveals that the different attitudes to policing have contributed to different perceived destination images. To cope with tourism crises, and the negative images resulting from social movements, those responsible for tourism promotional strategies should formulate different short- and long-term strategies. In the short-term, destination management organisations (DMOs) have an obligation to introduce different image making campaigns and emphasise the qualities and unique characteristics of the destination to overcome the anti-police attitude. Furthermore, DMOs may communicate content that includes positive messages associated with international tourists who are holding an anti-police attitude. In the long run, the police force needs to work closely with DMOs to repair their image. The police are recommended to show greater transparency and clarity to the media and the public. Meanwhile, DMOs should provide different kind of contents in their promotional materials. This is important to the destination with high dependence on tourism.

Results revealing that international tourists with an anti-police attitude were more concerned with the threats of physical harm and the fear of travel experience not reflecting their expectations. DMOs are advised to offer greater incentives with flexible travel insurance policies for international tourists, for example, handle claim procedures and cover all medical expenses associated with hospitalisation due to the intervention of police deployments and the protest events they are controlling. By doing so, tourists should not have to worry about paying additional fees and possibly higher prices for hospitalisation. The local government of a destination with ongoing social movements should offer updated travel advisories and alerts to encourage tourists avoid areas or regions where a social movement is taking place or police force action is in progress. DMOs should also provide recent, up-to-date, and accurate information about the destination. By highlighting factual information, the gap between tourists' expectations and the actual specification of the tourism experience will be minimised.

Although the results of this study do not identify any relationships between policing-related attitudes and the intention to travel to a destination during social movements, the ongoing social movement against government and the police force has led to a significant fall-off in the flow of inbound tourists. More effort should be placed into promoting and developing new tourism products, such as green tourism, agritourism and geotourism, that were neglected in the past. It is expected that such types of tourism products are relatively unaffected by social movements, as these products largely take place in rural areas.

### **Conclusion and limitations**

This study contributes to the existing body of tourism knowledge by confirming the relationship between policing-related attitudes and destination images and perceived risks, but suggests that these do not influence the intention to travel to a destination during social movements. The results of this study provide the first attempt to understand the influence of a political psychology variable (attitudes to policing) on tourist behaviour, thereby developing a better understanding of the relevant literature. The findings also provide

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directions for the government and DMOs in relation to social movements in their destinations and how to handle recovery strategies.

Political issues led to the outbreak of widespread anti-government and anti-police brutality protests, which are still ongoing not only in Hong Kong but also in other places in the world. Unfortunately, the hospitality and tourism industries have been an inseparable part of modern politics. There is no doubt that the negative effects resulting from political conflicts on the hospitality and tourism industries are obvious to the tourist. Thus, the importance of reconciliation between the government and the protesters, and the formulation of suitable tourism strategies need to be addressed. These are difficult but necessary actions that need to take place not only for the travel and tourism industry, but to encourage political stability. Tourism researchers need to strive to develop possible strategies and action plans for DMOs that are currently unavailable.

Some limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. The first limitation is about the sample. With a relatively small sample size, it is possible that these results may underestimate the role of policing attitudes associated with tourists' behaviour responses. Also, the respondents to this study were a population with relatively high education level and they were young. Therefore, the respondents may not be "typical" tourists. Therefore, a further study with a larger sample size and a nearly equal distribution of age groups is suggested. Second, the use of snowball sampling for the main survey is not without problems. Perhaps the most serious potential limitation is that researchers make little effort to control sample composition. Respondents are more likely to share the survey to those who have similar demographic features as the researchers. In future investigations, it might be possible to use other sampling strategies. Third, given that attitudes to policing could well be culturally and historically bound (Cao, 2015), caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to other social and cultural settings, where policing is very different than it is in the Hong Kong context. It will be interesting to conduct comparative studies to see if the findings presented in other contexts are in accord with the present study. In addition, one should note that several cognitive destination images were not significantly related to policing, and this may be caused by the overwhelming coverage of protest activities. Longitudinal research is suggested for future research to study the effects of attitudes on policing over time and minimise the effects of overloaded information. Future research may also include how the political systems of the tourists' country of origin and political values affect their attitudes towards policing and destination image. This study is exploratory in nature and focusses on the role of policing attitude and its impact on tourist behaviours. This paper aims to develop a foundation for future studies. Therefore, future studies could also look for other possible constructs that can predict tourist behaviour during an ongoing social movement. Although Pearson correlation provides a measure of the strength of the linear association between two variables, it does not imply causality. It may show that two variables are strongly correlated; however, it does not mean that they are responsible for each other. If necessary, future studies may focus on the consequences of tourist attitudes towards the police with the use of multivariate analysis, such as structural equation modelling. Finally, this study does not examine how the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists, e.g. prior experience and purpose of visit, affect their travel decision during an ongoing social movement. However, it has been recognised that tourists with different demographic characteristics might have different opinions regarding the importance of their travel decision. Subsequent studies should conduct similar studies to address this research gap.

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**About the authors**

Dr. Michael T.H. Lai is the assistant professor at the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management at The Macau University of Science and Technology. His research interests include tourist behaviour, tourism experience and community-based tourism.

Emmy Yeung is a lecturer at University of Chester. Her research interests cover authenticity, cultural heritage and events management.

Dr. Rosanna Leung is the associate professor at the Department of International Tourism and Hospitality at I Shou University, Taiwan. Her research interests are smart hospitality, e-Marketing, information system management and consumer behaviour. Rosanna Leung is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [rosannaleung@isu.edu.tw](mailto:rosannaleung@isu.edu.tw)

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