

# Direct and mediated intercultural contact: A study of attitudes towards North Korea

Dani Madrid-Morales & Bolin Cao, City University of  
Hong Kong

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# Outline

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# Contact Hypothesis

- The **contact hypothesis** (Allport, 1954) posits that intergroup contacts can facilitate improved attitudes towards the outgroup when certain conditions are achieved.
- The basic assumption is that lack of information about a group of people leads to misunderstandings, while acquaintance can lead to liking and improved evaluations.

# Contact Hypothesis

- Variations of the contact hypothesis theory include
  - **Extended contact effect** -- knowing about or observing some ingroup members who have interactions with outgroup friends (Wright et al. 1997).
  - **Mediated parasocial interaction** -- suggests that media audiences develop a one-sided relationship with the characters/people in the media (Horton & Wohl 1956).

# Contact Hypothesis and tourism

- The possible impact of direct contact through tourism on intercultural understanding has been tested extensively, but with inconclusive findings.
- Contact hypothesis research in tourism has largely ignored the impact of media consumption as either main or interaction effects.

# Imagining North Korea



Rural life in North Korea, October 2014

# Imagining North Korea



Outside Pyongyang Central Train Station, October 2014

# Imagining North Korea

Pyongyang street life, October 2014



North Korean countryside, October 2014





# Tourism in North Korea

- Tourism in North Korea, like all aspects of society, is imbued with politics. It is used as a tool to help sustain the regime.
- In recent years North Korea has sought to increase the flux of inbound tourists to boost foreign currency reserves and to attempt to manage overseas images/perceptions of the country.

# North Korean and the media

- North Korea's image globally is said to be among the most negative and media are prime contributors to it.
- There has been a substantive increase in foreign propaganda by the North Korean regime, mostly online, since the last years of Kim Jong Il and the first years of Kim Jong Un.

# Research design

- **Study #1** explores the impact of extended contact and mediated parasocial contact in attitudes towards North Korea.
- **Study #2** tests the contact hypothesis in the context of tourism, while controlling for extended and mediated parasocial contact.

# RQs | Study 1

**RQ1:** What is the impact of being exposed to content about North Korea from different media sources on individuals' attitudes towards North Korean people, the country as a tourist destination and the country in general?

**RQ2:** Which sources affect people's attitudes towards North Koreans, North Korea as a tourist destination, and North Korea in general?

# RQs | Study 2

**RQ3:** What is the impact of a visit to North Korea in individuals' attitudes towards North Korean people, towards the country as a tourist destination and towards the country in general?

**RQ4:** What factors predict attitudes towards North Korean people, towards the country as a tourist destination and towards the country in general among first time visitors?

# Method | Study 1

- Online survey (n = 249) posted on a North Korea related Hong Kong based Facebook group.
- Respondents were recruited through snowball sampling and an incentive was offered to increase responses.

# Method | Study 2

- Quasi-natural experiment among first-time visitors to North Korea. Pre-test and post-test questionnaires were distributed.
- Questionnaires were distributed through a Hong Kong based tourist agency specialized in organizing trips to North Korea.
- Two groups, baseline (n=40) and treatment (n = 37).

# Measures | Studies 1 & 2

- Independent variables
  - Traditional media consumption
  - New media consumption
  - Knowledge about North Korea
  - Interactions with previous visitors to North Korea
- Dependent variables (5 item Likert scale)
  - Attitudes towards NK people
  - Attitudes towards NK as a tourist destination
  - Attitudes towards NK in general



# Descriptive statistics | Studies 1 & 2

Table 1.

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas for all Variables*

	Study 1 (n = 249)		Study 2 (n = 77)		$\alpha$ (reliability)
	M	SD	M	SD	
Exposure to traditional media	.47	.44	.32	.35	.78
Exposure to N.K. new media	.34	.58	.59	.58	.80
Exposure to other media	.36	.50	.66	.55	.85
Extended friends' visits to NK	.72	.81	.73	.86	
Knowledge about NK	.35	.20	.33	.19	.61
Korean proficiency	.28	.53	.18	.39	
Travel experience	.16	.14	.18	.15	
Attitudes North Koreans	3.02	.57	3.05	.40	.73
Attitudes tourism	3.06	.62	2.94	.57	.76
Attitudes country in general	2.49	.62	2.46	.48	.87

# Findings | RQ1

## Impact of NK related content on attitudes

- Overall media exposure negatively predicted attitudes towards NK as a tourist destination ( $\beta = -.19, p < .05$ ) and towards the country in general ( $\beta = -.38, p < .01$ ).
- Respondents from Hong Kong, Mainland China and the rest of Asia hold more negative views, particularly of North Koreans, than non-Asian nationals.

# Findings | RQ2

Effect of different media sources on attitudes

- Frequency of exposure to official new media from NK was associated with more positive attitudes towards the country in general ( $\beta = .38, p < .01$ ).
- Knowledge was found to be negatively associated with attitudes towards NK in general ( $\beta = -.17, p < .05$ ).

# Findings | RQ3

## Impact of visiting NK on attitudes

- Since our quasi-experiment did not allow for random assignment of participants to treatment group, we included a baseline group in Study 2.
- Results show that our treatment group did not differ significantly from the baseline group.

# Baseline & treatment groups | Study 2

Table 2.

*Comparison between baseline group and treatment group on attitudes towards North Koreans, North Korea as tourist destination, and North Korea in general*

	Attitudes towards North Koreans		Attitudes towards North Korea as a tourist destination		Attitudes towards North Korea in general	
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
Treatment	36	3.08 (.37)	36	3.02 (.49)	36	2.51 (.43)
Baseline	40	3.03 (.43)	39	2.86 (.63)	39	2.42 (.53)
	t (74) = .54, n.s.		t (73) = 1.22, n.s.		t (73) = .74, n.s.	

# Findings | RQ3

Table 3.

*Repeated-measure ANOVA on pre-test and post-test attitudes towards North Korean people, towards the country as a tourist destination and towards North Korea in general*

	Attitudes towards North Koreans		Attitudes towards North Korea as a tourist destination		Attitudes towards North Korea in general	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Pre-test	3.09	.07	3.00	.09	2.51	.08
Post-test	3.37	.08	3.27	.07	2.80	.08
	Wilks' $\lambda = .70$ ; F (1, 28) = 12.22; $p = .002$ ; partial $\eta^2 = .30$		Wilks' $\lambda = .72$ ; F (1, 29) = 11.22; $p = .002$ ; partial $\eta^2 = .28$		Wilks' $\lambda = .58$ ; F (1, 29) = 20.94; $p = .000$ ; partial $\eta^2 = .42$	

# Findings | RQ4

Factors predicting attitudes towards NK

- When incorporating extended contact and mediated contact to a model predicting attitudes towards NK, no significant variables were found.

# Discussion

- In a context of generalised negative images of North Korea, this paper systematically analyzed people's attitudes towards the country.
  - Attitudes were found to be more neutral than expected.
  - Mediated contact appears is an important factor in attitude formation of North Korea.
  - Direct contact changed attitudes towards North Korea in the 3 dimensions measured.



# Thank you

[dani.madrid@my.cityu.edu.hk](mailto:dani.madrid@my.cityu.edu.hk)

[bocao2-c@my.cityu.edu.hk](mailto:bocao2-c@my.cityu.edu.hk)