



# Border resident perceptions of sanctions and tourism: A case study of North Korea

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## ABSTRACT

Sanctions have been increasingly used as a diplomatic practice among international actors. Although sanctions have offered important insights into the global tourism system, relevant understandings require further research endeavour. This study explores border resident perceptions of sanctions and tourism in the case of North Korea. It involves an analysis of in-depth interviews with residents of Dandong - the largest Chinese border city facing North Korea. The findings reveal that the economic and tourism development of both North Korea and Dandong are considered to be disrupted by sanctions. In addition to the perceived negative impacts brought by sanctions, the study also uncovers relevant positive impacts. Furthermore, it suggests that sanctions tend to be interpreted and evaluated by residents through short- and long-term perspectives. The study advances the emerging interdisciplinary progress of tourism and sanctions through unpacking and highlighting the influences of sanctions on residents and tourism of border city.

## 1. Introduction

Sanctions are usually initiated by a single or a group or block of international actors for foreign policy purposes (Galtung, 1967; Hellquist, 2016). Their usual aim is to punish the targets (e.g., one or more other countries) that do not meet the policy objectives of nation-states and supranational actors, such as international treaty bodies (Galtung, 1967). Sanctions have been frequently utilized as a means of exercising foreign policy and economic pressure on targeted actors (Cortright & Lopez, 2018; Kaempfer & Lowenberg, 2007). In recent years, the nature of sanctioning measures imposed has changed from comprehensive sanctions regimens (e.g., against Iraq in the 1990s) to more 'targeted' sanctions including asset freezes, travel bans, arms embargoes and export bans (Happold & Eden, 2019). The imposition of sanctions worldwide has increased rapidly in the aftermath of the Cold War (Cortright & Lopez, 2018). Sanctions have been increasingly deployed as a cost-effective diplomatic approach that combines the use of reward and punishment to global trade and politics along with economic and technological development (Hall, 2005). In light of their wide range and different scales worldwide, sanctions imposed by international actors tend to have important implications for tourism, including direct and indirect impacts (e.g., restrictions on mobility and negative destination

image) (Seyfi & Hall, 2020a).

While sanctions and tourism have been touched upon through emerging research from various perspectives such as destination branding (Khodadadi, 2019) and revisit intention (Li, Wen, & Ying, 2018), the current transdisciplinary progress is still limited in a few ways. First, the impacts of sanctions have been predominantly studied from economic perspectives whereas relevant socio-cultural and environmental implications have been largely overlooked (e.g., Ivanov, Sypchenko, & Webster, 2017; Pratt & Alizadeh, 2018). Second, sanctions and tourism have been generally examined with a primary focus on sanctioned countries (e.g., Iran and Cuba) (e.g., Fisk, 2000; Seyfi & Hall, 2020a). However, few studies have paid attention to the potential impacts of sanctions on tourism destinations that are border on target nations, given the considerable influences of geopolitical dynamics on border tourism (Timothy, 2014). Third, previous literature is mainly conceptual in nature (e.g., Khodadadi, 2016; Seyfi & Hall, 2019a), offering future research more opportunities to make empirical contributions.

In response to the identified gaps above, the current research aims to explore relevant perceptions of sanctions and tourism by Dandong residents. Situated in south-eastern Liaoning province, Dandong is the largest Chinese border city facing Sinuiju of North Korea. Considering

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numerous sanctions against North Korea, the study sets out to explore residents’ perceived impacts of sanctions on tourism in both North Korea and Dandong, China. The study will further fill the gaps in existing literature associated with tourism in North Korea through providing relevant implications for the impacts of sanctions from a broader perspective. Furthermore, it will extend the existing knowledge on tourism and sanctions by offering empirical insights into the neighbouring nation of the sanctioned one and their relevant connections. The study also has practical value for tourism practitioners, especially those engaged in destination marketing and management. In the following sections, the paper first reviews sanctions and tourism in North Korea and border resident perceptions of tourism. It then introduces the research site, justifies the research approach and details the process of data collection and analysis. The research outcomes are discussed with existing studies, and theoretical and practical implications are highlighted in the conclusion.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sanctions and tourism in North Korea

Sanctions as a political tool has existed for a long time (e.g., Napoleon’s Continental System) (Salehi, Karimzadeh, & Paydarmanesh, 2017). Nevertheless, their role and use have constantly changed over time. According to Seyfi and Hall (2020b), the classic comprehensive sanctions, which date back to the 19th century, are often employed as an adjunct to warfare and aimed at economic constraints; In contrast, the ‘targeted’ and ‘smart’ sanctions nowadays tend to go after the targeted organizations and individuals directly while minimizing related collateral damage on third countries and the civilian population. Being a diplomatic means of punishing or forcing targeted states and organizations to serve the various interests of the imposing states and international organizations (Hufbauer, Schott, Elliott, & Oegg, 2009; Neuenkirch & Neumeier, 2016), sanctions have been increasingly deployed as an alternative to military intervention against the backdrop of economic and political globalization. The imposition and impacts of sanctions have drew increased public and academic attention during the Post-Cold War era, such as the increase of Russian tourist flows in Turkey associated with EU sanctions against Russia (Tekin, 2015) and the paralytic state of the Iranian tourism industry influenced by the relaxation and re-imposition of sanctions from US (Seyfi, Hall, & Vo-Thanh, 2020).

The effectiveness of sanctions to the sanctioning agents is still open to debate (Allen, 2008; Early, 2011). Scholars so far have yet to reach a consensus on the determinants of successful sanctions at distinct imposition stages (Bapat, Heinrich, Kobayashi, & Morgan, 2013). In some cases, sanctions may not generate desired outcomes or even backfire, driving the targeted states to develop a more resilient economy and strengthen ties with other nations (e.g., the Russia-Iran relationship against Western sanctions) (Islamian, 2019). Tourism can be significantly disrupted by major sanctions ranging from diplomatic sanctions (e.g., cancellations of government visits) to aviation bans and mobility constraints (Seyfi & Hall, 2020b). Despite that mobility rights or the right to travel is concerned with the concept of individual freedom and mobile practices such as tourism and migration often provide a basis for the formation and transformation of societies and nations (Barenholdt, 2013), cross-border mobility can be severely limited through sanctions approved by government and legislation.

As sanctions have been primarily examined through previous studies from economic perspectives (Frye, 2018; Shin, Choi, & Luo, 2015), their influences on society, culture and environment require to be further scrutinized (Desombre, 1995; Grossman, Manekin, & Margalit, 2018). Particularly, Seyfi and Hall (2019b, p. 15) claim that ‘there is a significant need to better understand their (sanctions) implications for the tourism sector’. The significance of sanctions-tourism nexus to academics and practitioners is self-evident. This is supported by previous

literature investigating sanctions and tourism, with emphases on destination marketing and management (Seyfi & Hall, 2020a), coping strategies (Ivanov et al., 2017; Seyfi & Hall, 2019a), economic impacts (Pratt & Alizadeh, 2018) and tourist perceptions and experiences (Connell, 2017; Li & Ryan, 2018). Nevertheless, research in the intersection of tourism and sanctions is still rare (Hall, 2017). Furthermore, existing studies are mainly grounded on case studies examining sanctions in the sanctioned destinations whereas relevant impacts on tourism of third countries have been almost overlooked (Seyfi & Hall, 2019b). Specifically, international sanctions against North Korea may not only shape its tourism development but also that of neighbouring countries, including China, Russia, and South Korea.

North Korea has long been faced with international sanctions since the start of the Korean War (1950–1953). In recent years, many of these sanctions have been particularly imposed to address North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs, including its nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, 2013, 2016 and 2017. Table 1 presents major sanctions against North Korea undertaken at the multilateral, regional and single-state scales over the last two decades. Although a majority of sanctions imposed on North Korea are led by the United Nations, regional inter-governmental organizations and sovereign states have the flexibility to tighten or loosen their sanction policies in light of distinct political stance (e.g., EU’s autonomous sanctions on DPRK). Since 2006, North Korea has been increasingly subjected to various sanctions and restrictions, including those from China and Russia, which are often perceived as its close allies by Western media (e.g., BBC News, 2019; The New York Times, 2019). Nevertheless, these sanctions so far have seemed to fail to stop the country’s nuclear ambition or overthrow the Kim dynasty (Weissmann & Hagström, 2016). Moreover, some sanctions are criticized for holding back civilian economic growth and resulting in famine (Smith, 2020), though others are believed to play an important

Table 1 Major sanctions against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) (2000–2020).

Sanctioning actor	Year	Major sanction measures
United Nations	2006; 2009; 2013; 2016; 2017	Arms and related materiel embargo Assets freeze of named individuals and entities of DPRK Ban on related financial and transportation services and support provided by member states Travel bans and restrictions on named individuals and entities of DPRK Ban on related training and scientific cooperation Ban on DPRK workers abroad Ban on coal, fuel, minerals, refined petroleum products, natural gas, crude oil, machinery, electrical equipment, textile, wood, earth and stone, vessels, luxury goods, food and agricultural products
European Union	2006; 2009; 2013; 2016; 2017	Sanctions in accordance with UN sanctions Ban on EU investment
United States	2000; 2009; 2013; 2016; 2017	Sanctions on missile proliferation and transportation Sanctions in accordance with UN sanctions Extraterritorial secondary sanctions Sanctions on DPRK’s top officials, including Kim Jong-un Sanctions on related Chinese and Russian entities, individuals and banks Travel bans on US citizens
China	2006; 2009; 2013; 2016; 2017	Sanctions in accordance with UN sanctions Travel bans and restrictions on Chinese citizens
Russia	2006; 2009; 2010; 2013; 2016; 2017	Sanctions in accordance with UN sanctions

Source: Arms Control Association (2020); United Nations Security Council (2020).

role in curbing arms trade and illicit activities (Weissmann & Hagström, 2016).

Under the pressure of increasingly harsh sanctions, tourism has provided North Korea with a promising means to gain foreign currencies and promote propaganda (Connell, 2017; Kim, Timothy, & Han, 2007). While it is lacking reliable statistics on international tourist arrival and expenditure in North Korea, China is generally estimated to be its largest overseas tourism market (Li, Li, & Ryan, 2021; Weissmann & Hagström, 2016). Besides the pull factors such as proximity and relatively low cost, research suggests that many Chinese tourists visit North Korea due to push factors including satisfying curiosity and relaxation (Li & Ryan, 2015). In contrast, Western visitors are mainly driven by desires of 'unusual places of darkness and danger' (Buda & Shim, 2015, p. 1). While there has been an emerging trend examining tourism in North Korea influenced by international sanctions (e.g., Chung & Chen, 2019; Li et al., 2021), virtually no research has explored relevant implications from a border resident perspective, informing this research to move forward the current interdisciplinary progress further.

## 2.2. Border resident perceptions of tourism

From a psychological point of view, perceptions usually denote how individuals recognize, manage, and interpret sensory information to get the human mind informed (Schacter, Gilbert, Nock, & Wegner, 2016). When it comes to tourism literature, resident perceptions of tourism have long been studied and overlapped with research topics such as resident attitudes (San Martín, García-de los Salmones, Herrero, & Pérez, 2018), opinions (Williams & Lawson, 2001) and views (Kuvan & Akan, 2012). However, most of these topics are mainly distinct from each in a semantic sense, and they are generally concerned with 'what residents think about (as opposed to how they respond to) tourism and its impacts' (Sharpley, 2014, p. 44). Knowledge on resident perceptions of tourism is important, given that tourism brings about diverse and dynamic interactions between tourists and the local hosts (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006), influencing and being influenced by relevant perceptions of the two sides (Sharpley, 2014).

Research on resident perceptions of tourism has been progressing over the last 30 years (Almeida-García, Balbuena-Vázquez, & Cortés-Macías, 2015). In terms of research themes, in contrast with early studies exploring the general economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions of tourism (e.g., Caneday & Zeiger, 1991; Ross, 1992), several recent studies have paid growing attention to hotspot issues and phenomena, including sustainable tourism (Choi & Murray, 2010), ecotourism (Ven, 2016), peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation (Suess, Woosnam, Mody, Dogru, & Sirakaya Turk, 2020) and overtourism (Adie, Falk, & Savioli, 2020). As for research methods, the previous trend of using quantitative surveys (e.g., Lindberg & Johnson, 1997; Mason & Cheyne, 2000) has started to slow down because of emerging research employing qualitative interviews (McCaughey, Mao, & Dowling, 2018), mixed methods (Gu & Ryan, 2010) and secondary data analysis (Uchinaka, Yoganathan, & Osburg, 2019).

Nevertheless, the current progress is still limited as many studies largely ignore the wider socio-cultural and historical contexts which may influence resident perceptions of tourism (Sharpley, 2014). Notably, the development of border tourism is primarily subjected to the influence of geopolitical dynamics (Timothy, 2014). Aside from its material existence which legitimizes geographic demarcation between political entities such as sovereign states, the mental dimension of the term 'border' often facilitates the differentiation of culture, identities, and religions between the people on the two sides (Sofield, 2006). Consequently, the borderline and its neighbouring regions can be extraordinary and enchanting tourism destinations in relatively open political environments (Timothy, Guia, & Berthet, 2014). In this sense, the complex relationship between tourism and the host communities of the borderland require further academic attention (Gelbman & Timothy,

2011), given that relevant research is still rare.

## 3. Research site

This study was conducted in Dandong, China. Dandong is a coastal prefecture-level city in south-eastern Liaoning province, which lies in the northeast of the People's Republic of China. It is the largest Chinese border city, facing North Korea across the Yalu River which demarcates the Sino-North Korean border. Dandong is important to North Korea in several ways. Particularly, China is North Korea's largest export (\$1.58B) and import (\$3.23B) destinations (OECD, 2020) and approximately 70% of China-North Korea trade flow through Dandong (Shima, 2018). Moreover, North Korea's tourism growth is inseparable from its Chinese market. It is estimated that 95% of international visitors to North Korea are from China (Crabtree, 2017), and Dandong is the most developed departure point among the three existing land crossings (i.e., Hunchun, Ji'an and Dandong) (Li & Ryan, 2015). Being a gateway way to North Korea, Dandong has become a popular border tourism destination in China. Many visitors regard their visit to Dandong as an extended tour prior to or following the formal tour to North Korea. In this sense, sanctions against North Korea tend to not only influence its tourism development but also that of Dandong, China.

## 4. Research methods

### 4.1. Data collection

Considering the lack of relevant studies, this research is exploratory in nature. It followed an interpretive paradigm which assumes 'a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and subject co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24). Ontologically, the interpretive paradigm believes that reality is subject, multiple and socially constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Epistemologically, the paradigm aims to characterize how people experience the world, the ways they interact together, and the settings in which these interactions take place (Packer, 2011). Given that this study aims to explore the perceived sanctions and tourism by border residents, the adoption of the interpretive paradigm contributed to multiple and in-depth understandings. An interpretive paradigm normally guides the use of qualitative research methods that allow research flexibility and permit emerging data to be iteratively incorporated into the analysis (O'Brien, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). In the current study, semi-structured interviews were employed to elicit rich data from which subsequent conceptualization can be developed (Hyde, Ryan, & Woodside, 2012).

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were utilized by the primary investigator who used to be a Dandong resident to recruit research participants. Before conducting the fieldwork, the primary investigator invited a total of five Dandong residents to participate in a pilot study based on their network using WeChat. WeChat is the most popular social networking app in China and has more than one billion monthly active users (Yu, Zhang, Lin, & Wu, 2020). The use of WeChat as a research medium, like other internet technologies in qualitative interviews, often brings benefits including ease of access, low costs, and proper handling of participants' personal space (Hanna, 2012).

During the pilot study, the participants were mainly asked to discuss their perceived impacts of sanctions on North Korea and Dandong and recommend others who are likely to meet the criteria for the qualified research participants. Particularly, the qualified participants should be Chinese citizens who have lived in Dandong for at least ten years and have a certain level of understanding of sanctions against North Korea. The pilot study was useful and helped finalize the interview schedule. Specifically, as topics related to short- and long-term impacts of sanctions were frequently mentioned by participants during the pilot study, they have been incorporated as major foci into the interview schedule

(see the translated interview schedule and its original Chinese form in Appendix A).

The primary investigator conducted a total of 30 interviews using WeChat from January to April 2020. Table 2 presents demographic information of the participants. The interviews ranged from 45 to 60 min. All the interviews were digitally recorded with the verbal consent of participants and information that was deemed to be important were noted down for further analysis. During the interviews, follow-up probes

**Table 2**  
Summary profile of interview participants ( $n = 30$ ).

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Years of living in Dandong
1	Male	67	High school	Retired	50
2	Female	56	Technical secondary school	Retired	35
3	Female	42	High school	In full-time employment	42
4	Female	38	College	In full-time employment	18
5	Male	52	No formal qualifications	Not in employment	52
6	Female	55	No formal qualifications	Retired	55
7	Female	32	University	In full-time employment	26
8	Male	21	College	In full-time education	21
9	Female	41	High school	In full-time employment	28
10	Male	65	No formal qualifications	Retired	40
11	Female	39	Technical secondary school	In full-time employment	28
12	Male	62	No formal qualifications	Retired	43
13	Male	33	University	In full-time employment	16
14	Female	45	University	In full-time employment	13
15	Male	47	University	In full-time employment	25
16	Male	35	University	In full-time employment	12
17	Female	52	No formal qualifications	Retired	33
18	Male	27	Postgraduate	In full-time education	18
19	Female	68	No formal qualifications	Retired	32
20	Female	44	High school	In full-time employment	44
21	Male	35	Technical secondary school	In full-time employment	35
22	Female	72	No formal qualifications	Retired	40
23	Female	42	High school	In full-time employment	42
24	Female	47	High school	In full-time employment	47
25	Male	24	Postgraduate	In full-time education	24
26	Female	36	University	In full-time employment	36
27	Female	45	High school	In full-time employment	45
28	Male	22	University	In full-time education	22
29	Female	46	High school	Not in employment	28
30	Male	56	High school	Not in employment	25

were utilized flexibly to ensure the overall research direction and minimize the influence of the researcher (Rabionet, 2009). Particularly, the primary investigator followed the principle of ‘good questioning’ (Yin, 2010, p. 27) and took advantage of the generic nature of the questions, namely ‘what happened?’, ‘how did it happen?’, ‘why did it happen?’, and ‘what did you think about what happened?’. The interviews stopped after the researcher felt a sense of data saturation and richness (Kelly, 1963). Data saturation provides a guideline for sample size in qualitative research (Morse, 2015). It is primarily concerned with the question of ‘how much data (usually number of interviews) is needed until nothing new is apparent.’ (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1895). For this study, redundancy in data analysis was noted approximately after the 25th interview and the last five interviews hardly offered any new insights into the analysis.

#### 4.2. Data analysis

The interview recordings and notes taken were then transcribed verbatim into texts. To avoid distorting information that may occur during the transcription and translation, transcripts in Mandarin Chinese were used for data analysis. Particularly, data were interpreted using content analysis, which is a careful, detailed and systematic way to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings in social science (Berg, 2001). While qualitative content analysis is sometimes overlapped with thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 98), the technique ‘tends to focus at a more micro level’ and ‘allows for quantitative analyses of initially qualitative data’. In this research, content analysis was conducted in light of the procedures proposed by Luborsky (1994), including theme identification, repetition and central meaning. Specifically, after repeatedly reading the transcripts and being familiar with the data, the primary investigator interpreted the data using NVivo 12 and followed a two-step coding process which involves initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). Table 3 presents an example of the codebook, showing relevant codes and themes that were identified according to the frequency of meaningful units and existing literature.

This research used multiple strategies to enhance trustworthiness. For example, the technique of member checking was adopted to improve research credibility (Cho & Trent, 2006). Specifically, the accuracy of the primary investigator’s initial interpretations and thoughts related to the research questions and interview transcripts were further verified through receiving support from a total of five participants who were invited to provide relevant feedback during and after the interviews (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, a second bilingual speaker had proofread the translation of related themes and quotations in English. Furthermore, the primary investigator had kept evaluating the research and recording emerging theories associated with the data through a reflective commentary (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Given that the design and conduct of qualitative research are inevitably influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher (Schwandt, 1994), the reliability of the findings needs to be guaranteed via the process of reflexivity (Jennings, 2001). Reflexivity often involves ‘the act of making oneself the object of one’s own observation, in an attempt to bring to the fore the assumptions embedded in our perspectives and descriptions of the world’ (Feighery, 2006, p. 269). In this research, the initial data analysis and theory building have been influenced by the primary investigator who had lived in Dandong for over 20 years and believed that sanctions have been the main constraint on the overall development of North Korea and Dandong. Nonetheless, the research outcomes were further verified through an agreement between the primary investigator and other researchers via multiple discussion. For example, the perceived positive impacts associated with sanctions had received more attention during the second round of data analysis.

#### 5. Results and discussion

Although findings of this research revealed that the impacts of



**Table 3**  
Example of codebook.

Themes	Categories	Codes (example)	Number of references
Short-term impacts of sanctions on North Korea	Relevant economic impacts	Ruin economic development; Economic loss; Diplomatic restriction; Travel ban; Commodity restriction; Aviation and shipping restriction; Decreased trade	55
Short-term impacts of sanctions against North Korea on Dandong	Relevant economic impacts	A boom in Dandong's tourism industry; Increasing number of domestic and international visitors	12
Long-term impacts of sanctions on North Korea	Relevant economic impacts	Economic recession; Slow economic development	58
	Relevant socio-cultural impacts	Few opportunities for contacting the outside world; Cutting off the connections between North Korea and the outside world; Simple people; A united country	21
Long-term impacts of sanctions against North Korea on Dandong	Relevant environmental impacts	Protect North Korea's natural environment; Beautiful natural landscape; High-quality air	16
	Relevant socio-cultural impacts	An ageing city; A hopeless city for young people	17

sanctions are consistently perceived to be negative to the overall development and tourism of North Korea and Dandong, it also identified related positive impacts in the short- and long terms. In the following sections, major findings are first detailed and discussed according to four identified overarching themes, namely 'short-term impacts of sanctions on North Korea', 'short-term impacts of sanctions against North Korea on Dandong', 'long-term impacts of sanctions on North Korea', and 'long-term impacts of sanctions against North Korea on Dandong'. Afterwards, the research summarized Dandong residents perceived sanctions-tourism nexus in the case of North Korea and Dandong, China.

**5.1. Short-term impacts of sanctions on North Korea**

Not surprisingly, almost all interviewees argued that sanctions against North Korea have negative impacts on its economic development in the short term. Furthermore, it was found that whether China is involved in relevant sanctions against North Korea tends to significantly shape the resident perceived short-term impacts of sanctions on the economy and tourism in North Korea. Specifically, given that North Korea has been economically suffered from sanctions imposed by international actors such as the United States and European Union for more than a decade (Weissmann & Hagström, 2016), the majority of interviewees argued that North Korea has been gradually used to nullify the negative influences of sanctions on its economy with the support from China. In this sense, Dandong residents' relevant perceptions partly echoed the concept of resistive economy.

Grounded on an analysis of sanctions against Iran, Seyfi and Hall (2019a, p. 165) consider resistive economy as 'an overt policy response toward sanctioning countries'. Despite differences in related policy

responses, the authors (2019a, p. 164) identify 'leveraging available international relations' as a central dimension of the resistive economy. In the case of North Korea, a long-standing trade partnership with China was mainly perceived to be vital to North Korea's responses toward sanctions imposed by other countries:

*'North Korea has suffered from sanctions from other countries all the time. This is not new to the North Korean government. In fact, North Korea's development and economy rely on China instead of other countries. Even though the sanctions from other countries still have negative impacts on North Korea's economy, the impacts are very limited in the short term in my eyes.'* (Interviewee No. 12).

More importantly, the notion of resistive economy offers important insights into the tourism development partly because the sanctioned countries tend to attract overseas tourists from countries that are less influenced by the sanctioning ones (Seyfi & Hall, 2019a). When it comes to North Korea, the Chinese tourism market was largely considered to be a salient contributor to its economic development by Dandong residents. Thus, sanctions from China, including diplomatic restriction, travel bans, commodity, aviation and shipping restriction were believed to be far more harmful to North Korea's economic and tourism growth than those from other countries in the short term.

The export of North Korean labour has become an important revenue stream for the regime and people's livelihood under the influences of sanctions. There have been at least 20,000 North Koreans working in the Chinese border region since the mid-2000s (Weissmann & Hagström, 2016). Many restaurants in Dandong are jointly owned and managed by the Chinese and North Korean governments. While located in China, these restaurants usually utilize North Korean culture as a primary marketing strategy, such as the promotion of traditional cultural shows and waiters being good-looking and well-educated North Korean females (Zhou, 2020).

According to many participants of this research, the temporary shutdowns of these restaurants signalled the occasional diplomatic tensions between China and North Korea. In the worst case, sanctions imposed by China, especially diplomatic restriction were thought to severely damage the financial and tourism revenue of North Korea through permanently closing the restaurants that are jointly owned and deporting the North Korean labour. As Interviewee No. 3 noted:

*'There are a lot of North Korean restaurants in Dandong. I found that the restaurants were closed sometimes. Even though North Korea is our friendly neighbour, North Korea's nuclear tests have damaged the relationship. The Chinese government set diplomatic restrictions on North Korea due to the nuclear crisis. I believe that these restaurants were closed due to diplomatic restrictions.'*

Aside from diplomatic restriction, the travel bans were also perceived to be an important feature of sanctions imposed by China. The impacts of government on tourists' international destination choice have attracted increased academic attention. Nevertheless, Seyfi and Hall (2019b, p. 9) notice that travel bans have been rarely addressed as 'a result of sanctions policy' among existing literature. Our study found that travel bans enacted by China were considered to be devastating to North Korea's tourism development in the short term by the majority of residents.

*'Tourism is North Korea's pillar industry. Chinese government stopped Chinese visitors from visiting North Korea several times in the last ten years due to North Korea's nuclear tests. North Korea is a poor country. The travel ban made its economy worse.'* (Interviewee No. 2).

*'As I am working in the travel agency, I can feel the influence of travel ban directly. North Korea tour group is one of the most important businesses for our agency. After the travel ban, there was decreased number of customers contacting us and consulting the tour group to North Korea. I*

believe that North Korea's economy has suffered from the travel ban a lot.' (Interviewee No. 9).

Sanctions are suggested to bring direct impacts on the tourism sector and one of them is relevant aviation and shipping ban (Seyfi & Hall, 2019b). Collectively, commodity, aviation and shipping restriction imposed by China were believed to be a serious hindrance to North Korea's overall economic growth. This is mainly because China has been a major import partner of North Korea and many commodities were shipped through the Yalu River Bridge (Shepherd & Zhou, 2020). Based on their observation, many residents in Dandong admitted that there were fewer trains and trucks entering North Korea during the period of commodity, aviation and shipping restriction:

*'I observed that fewer trains and trucks entered North Korea from Dandong due to the commodity and shipping restriction. North Korea's basic supplies really rely on China. I believe that the sanctions have made North Korea's economic development and people's life harder.'* (Interviewee No. 15).

### 5.2. Short-term impacts of sanctions against North Korea on Dandong

Considering Dandong is inextricably linked with North Korea, many residents admitted that the sanctions imposed on North Korea have undoubtedly held back Dandong's overall economic development. The local economy in Dandong has shown 'signs of severe stress' since 2017 when a series of sanctions against North Korea were implemented as a global response to its latest nuclear test (Rivers & Jiang, 2018, para.3). Interestingly, when it comes to tourism development in Dandong, most of the residents argued that sanctions imposed on North Korea also fuelled a short-term boom in domestic and international tourist arrival. These curious visitors were likely to be attracted by North Korea's mysterious destination image which had been deepened through the fever of sanctions (Li & Ryan, 2015). Nonetheless, when taking safety and convenience into consideration (Avraham & Ketter, 2017), they tended to first pick up Dandong as a gazebo.

*'A large number of visitors visited Dandong after North Korea's nuclear tests in the last decade. They were all eager to know what was happening in North Korea through visiting Dandong.'* (Interviewee No. 5).

*'Visitors to Dandong increased a lot after the sanctions on North Korea based on my experience. A lot of visitors tended to visit Dandong and participate in some tourism activities to know the real North Korea.'* (Interviewee No. 11).

With the increased tourist arrival, many residents emphasized the contribution that tourism made to local business development in Dandong. In many cases, residents attributed the good business of souvenir shops and restaurants to the short-term increased tourist arrival against the backdrop of sanctions imposed on North Korea.

*'There are many souvenir shops beside the Yalu River Broken Bridge. I observed that the souvenir shops were always full of people when new sanctions have been imposed on North Korea. Many visitors visited Dandong for being curious about the impacts of sanctions on North Korea. They tended to buy some souvenirs before leaving Dandong.'* (Interviewee No. 23).

*'As many visitors tended to taste local food, the good restaurants were fully booked by the visitors.'* (Interviewee No. 26).

### 5.3. Long-term impacts of sanctions on North Korea

Not unlike their perceived impacts of sanctions on North Korea in the short-term, the residents in Dandong collectively tended to impute North Korea's economic stagnation to the long-term impacts of

sanctions. In this sense, the ongoing governmental assistance provided by China and its tourist market were regarded to be conducive to North Korea's countermeasures for sanctions imposed by other countries in the long run. Recent statistics (Young Pioneer Tours, 2020) shows that there have been only around 5000 Western visitors to North Korea annually, in contrast with approximately 125,000 Chinese visitors. Nevertheless, it is unclear to what extent these visitors have contributed to tourism expenditure in North Korea.

*'China has provided a great deal of assistance for North Korea to deal with the impacts of sanctions. China is North Korea's most important trading partner. North Korea's economy depends on China heavily. Many trains and trucks exporting products to North Korea enter North Korea from Dandong. Based on my observation, there has been an increased number of Dandong travel agents promoting North Korea's tourism.'* (Interviewee No. 18).

Aside from the economic recession which was perceived to be brought and/or aggravated by the long-term sanctions against North Korea, many interviewees also mentioned relevant socio-cultural and environmental impacts. In view of North Korea's *Juche* political ideology and restrictions on travel and mobility resulted from long-term sanctions (Seyfi & Hall, 2019b), many residents believed that the opportunities for average North Korean to communicate with the outside world are severely limited. While this aspect was considered to go against the individual welfare and rights of the Korean people, some of the residents also recognized its seemingly positive side. Specifically, the residents tended to link the honesty and simplicity of North Koreans with the assumptions that they know little about the outside world. In this sense, some argued that the simple and honest host image of North Korean has partly shaped by relevant long-term sanctions. These findings echoed the previous study of Li and Ryan (2018), who found that Chinese tourists were impressed by simple North Korean tour guides and souvenir sellers who were more willing to offer travel tips and recommendations rather than aggressively selling and promoting tourism products and souvenirs.

*'I visited North Korea three years ago. I felt that North Korean people are still very simple, given the impacts of long-term sanctions on North Korea. The majority of North Korean citizens almost knew nothing about what is happening outside North Korea.'* (Interviewee No. 28).

Moreover, considering that many sanctions against North Korea were enacted by the United States and its political image in China tends to be 'strong but aggressive, democratic but hypocritical' (Zhou, Chen, & Wu, 2012, p. 676), some interviewees admitted that they were attracted by the unity of North Korean people in fighting against various sanctions in the long run, especially those imposed by the United States.

*'The long-term sanctions made North Korean people hate the United States. They attributed North Korea's poor economic development to the long-term sanctions from the United States. They believed that the long-term sanctions from the United States made their life hard.'* (Interviewee No. 21).

With the long-term sanctions being perceived as a hindrance to North Korea's overall economic development, some residents pointed out that its natural environment including beautiful natural landscape and fresh air may have benefited from less development of heavy industries. These findings are consistent with existing research which indicate that the relatively pristine natural environment is one of the major reasons for Chinese visitors travelling to North Korea (Li & Ryan, 2015).

*'North Korea's natural environment is much better than those of China in my eyes. Manufacture industry in North Korea is not developed due to the long-term sanctions. Therefore, North Korea's natural scenery is beautiful due to a lack of air pollution.'* (Interviewee No. 6).

‘There are few heavy industries in North Korea, given the long-term sanctions. As a result, North Korea has protected its natural environment very well. As Dandong is facing North Korea, it is common to see the blue sky in Dandong and North Korea. The blue sky is rare in other Chinese cities.’ (Interviewee No. 19).

5.4. Long-term impacts of sanctions against North Korea on Dandong

Almost all the Dandong residents claimed that the local economic decline is inextricably tied up with the long-term influences of sanctions against North Korea. Particularly, it is found that the removal of state-owned enterprises, reduction in business investment and decline in both numbers and quality of public services and infrastructure were collectively considered to be major results of long-term sanctions imposed on North Korea, offering valuable insights into the challenges confronting tourism development in Dandong. In consideration of potential sanction-related threats to asset security (Seyfi & Hall, 2019b), there has been an increased number of Chinese government-owned enterprises moved out from Dandong during the last two decades. This has been noticed by many residents and believed to be devastating to local economic growth.

‘Dandong and North Korea are too close. War is still likely to break out here. In order to protect state-owned assets, the Chinese government decided to move many important state-owned companies out of Dandong after the Open Door Policy. Therefore, Dandong’s economic development is slow’. (Interviewee No.13).

According to Seyfi and Hall (2019a), the attractiveness of overseas investment in sanctioned countries can be significantly reduced through sanctions enacted by major international actors. The findings of this research go beyond this argument by uncovering that business investment in the third countries’ border cities is perceived by their residents to be considerably disrupted by long-term sanctions imposed on relevant neighbouring countries. In the case of Dandong, many residents insisted that the local economy has long been suffered from a lack of investment led by relevant sanctions against North Korea. Some of these opinions may be one-sided and exaggerated, given that the overall investment environment of Northeast China seems less attractive and friendly when being compared with those of Eastern and Southern China (Guo, 2019). Nonetheless, the lack of investment in Dandong might have been amplified through the long-term sanctions against North Korea, raising a challenge to local economic and tourism growth.

‘Different from other Chinese cities, only a few successful businessmen have invested in Dandong over the last two decades. North Korea’s political instability is a big reason.’ (Interviewee No.17).

Arguably, steady development of tourism and sound quality of public service (e.g., transportation service) and infrastructure (e.g., toilet facilities) often go hand in hand (Priskin, 2001; Sinclair-Maragh, Gursoy, & Vieregge, 2015). With the long-term sanctions against North Korea being regarded as a major barrier to Dandong’s urbanization and economic development, many residents acknowledged that Dandong has become a less developed Chinese city with public services and infrastructures which have declined in both numbers and quality.

‘Dandong is not a developed city in China. Though Dandong has improved a lot over the last two decades, there is still a big gap between Dandong and other developed cities in terms of public services and infrastructure development.’ (Interviewee No.22).

In fact, under the long-term influence of sanctions against North Korea, the age structure of Dandong’s urban communities was believed by the interviewees to have changed. This research uncovered that many residents tend to attribute the decline in employment and average low wages to the long-term sanctions imposed on North Korea and despair at

Dandong gradually becoming an ageing city.

‘After the long-term sanctions on North Korea, there are few young people in Dandong now. Few young people who have a bachelor’s degree would come back. The salary is too low for them.’ (Interviewee No.20).

‘The majority of young people left Dandong gradually. It is hard for them to find a good job in Dandong due to the long-term sanctions on North Korea. They left Dandong to pursue a better life.’ (Interviewee No. 26).

5.5. The perceived sanctions and tourism by Dandong residents

Grounded on empirical evidence and informed by existing literature (Seyfi & Hall, 2019b), Table 4 summarizes the perceived impacts of sanctions on tourism in North Korea and Dandong among Dandong residents. Overall, sanctions against North Korea are considered by Dandong residents to significantly impede economic and tourism growth and jeopardize societal progress and people’s welfare in both North Korea and Dandong. However, given that sanctions tend to be assessed by the residents from both the short- and long-term perspectives, they are perceived to also bring limited positive influences on tourism of the sanctioned country (i.e., North Korea) and the border city of the third country (i.e., Dandong, China). These relevant perceptions are believed to be essentially derived from residents’ remaining optimism about global geopolitics that is usually out of their control. Nevertheless, none of the residents in this research was found to positively link sanctions against North Korea with the efforts in global peace-making (Seyfi et al., 2020). Furthermore, in view of the perceived significance of the Chinese tourism market to North Korea, whether and to what extent China is involved in relevant sanctions against North Korea are likely to significantly shape residents’ perceptions of economic and tourism development in North Korea and Dandong.

6. Conclusion

Sanctions have increasingly become popular diplomatic means on today’s international stage, having profound implications for the global tourism system (Seyfi & Hall, 2020b). North Korea has long been politically, economically and socially handicapped by sanctions imposed by major international actors. The recent disruption of COVID-19 and border closure have further devastated the nation’s trade and people’s welfare (Lee, 2020). Tourism development in North Korea, including those targeted at Chinese tourists, have the potential to improve its people’s livelihood and foster communications with the

Table 4  
The perceived impacts of sanctions on tourism.

	North Korea (DPRK)	Dandong, China (PRC)
Relevant negative impacts of sanctions on tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic stagnation</li> <li>• Limited opportunities for communication with the outside world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic stagnation</li> <li>• Removal of state-owned enterprises</li> <li>• Reduction of business investment</li> <li>• Decline in numbers and quality of public services</li> <li>• Decline in numbers and quality of infrastructure</li> <li>• Decline in employment</li> <li>• Lower wages</li> <li>• Ageing of resident population</li> </ul>
Relevant positive impacts of sanctions on tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive host image to Chinese people</li> <li>• Beautiful natural landscape</li> <li>• High quality of air</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short-term boom in tourist arrival</li> <li>• Short-term boom in tourism-related business</li> </ul>



wider world (Connell, 2017; Li et al., 2021), especially when the pandemic is over or better controlled. In this sense, the tourism-sanctions nexus requires to be further understood in the case of North Korea and the Chinese border city of Dandong.

Following a qualitative and interpretative paradigm, the current research explored Dandong residents' perceived impacts of sanctions on North Korea and Dandong and considered implications for their tourism development. Our findings uncovered that the sanctions against North Korea were perceived to hinder not only the economic and tourism growth of North Korea but also those of Dandong, China. While some impacts brought by the sanctions were considered to be positive in short- or long terms among the residents, sanctions generally represent a major disruption to the economic and societal progress of both destinations. Thus, the research has several theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretically, this research supports existing literature that highlights the obstacles brought by sanctions to targeted nations' economic and tourism development (Gordon, 2016; Seyfi & Hall, 2020a). The research empirically indicates the perceived significant influences of sanctions on North Korea and encourages future studies to carefully consider them when examining tourism in North Korea. More importantly, given that the case study design in this research is essentially driven by the curiosity in multiple meanings attached to a relatively new phenomenon, its theoretical contribution mainly lies in 'building concrete, context-dependent knowledge.' (Ridder, 2017, p. 296). In particular, the research findings emphasize the perceived economic and social-cultural disruptions brought by sanctions against the target nations (i.e., North Korea) to the tourism destinations and residents of the neighbouring ones (i.e., China). The research therefore contributes to new understandings on sanctions and global tourism (Seyfi & Hall, 2020b) through casting light on the wider impacts of sanctions on destinations that are beyond the sanctioned ones.

As for practical implications, considering residents' perceived hardships brought by sanctions to North Korea and Dandong, the research urges major international actors to re-evaluate the pros and cons of sanctions as a diplomatic means through perspectives which better embrace the human rights and welfare of residents in both targeted nations and neighbouring ones. For example, it is recently reported that the UN security council including countries such as China, Germany, United Kingdom, and Russia have rejected the 'snapback' of sanctions on Iran demanded by the Trump administration of the United States (Borger, 2020). Furthermore, given that sanctions tend to psychologically enhance tourists' perceived risks of travelling and result in negative destination image (Seyfi & Hall, 2019b), this research empirically suggests that the marketing and management of destinations should take relevant geopolitical dynamics and sanctions into account. These destinations include not only the ones that are directly subjecting to sanctions but also the ones that are under indirect influences.

As with all studies, this research is not without limitation. Given the use of a case study approach (Yin, 2014), the research findings are subject to Dandong resident perceptions. Accordingly, valuable insights are likely to be further achieved through studies examining perceptions of sanctions by residents in North and South Korea. Furthermore, considering the qualitative nature of this research, research design and data interpretation are inevitably influenced by the subjectivities of the researchers (Jennings, 2001). In this vein, the research findings must be tested and complemented through future research using a quantitative survey or analysing user-generated content. Last but not least, while research on tourism and sanctions are encouraged to be better connected with temporal and spatial dimensions of wider geopolitical and international relations (Seyfi & Hall, 2019b), the research findings are limited in more comprehensive integration with the historical and global contexts of sanctions against North Korea. This is largely attributed to the exploratory research purpose as well as Dandong residents limited knowledge of relevant aspects. Thus, it may be promising for future studies to provide research participants with more detailed information on relevant contexts of sanctions in light of their research

interests. Nonetheless, the current study took the emerging trans-disciplinary progress of tourism and sanctions one step further by analysing empirical evidence derived from a border resident perspective.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Fangxuan (Sam) Li:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Guojie Zhang:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Project administration.

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#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

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