

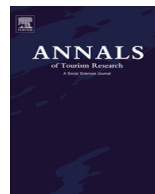


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Tourism development and resistance in China



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ABSTRACT

In 2013, the Dong villagers of Zhaoxing in Guizhou province expelled a Han-managed tourism company from their community and from their tourist enterprises. Far from being passive and homogeneous, ethnographic data reveal ethnic populations negotiate tourism development in a variety of ways. Using concepts of livelihood, resistance, agency and ethnicity, this article reveals: villagers responded to tourism development differently according to their livelihood strategies; villagers sided with local authorities of their own ethnic group in order to resist Han-led higher levels of government and villagers responded to non-local stakeholders' infringement rather than to the presence of tourists. These findings point to the necessity of detailed ethnographic case studies to understand the context within which tourism development occurs in China.

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Introduction

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), as elsewhere in the world, tourism is introduced in remote, rural and ethnic regions as a modernizing tool that can promote economic and cultural development and can better integrate minority populations within the nation-state (Oakes, 1997; Walsh & Swain, 2004; Yan & Santos, 2009; Yang & Wall, 2009; Yang, Wall, & Smith, 2008; Yea, 2002). Such developments bring both constraints and opportunities to targeted populations who rarely stand by passively and attempt instead to appropriate, control and shape local changes. As tourism development evolves, the perspectives and roles of different stakeholders (villagers, promoters, government officials) change

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and different forms of responses, including resistance emerge. Although there is more and more research pertaining to tourism development in the PRC (Bao, Chen, & Ma, 2014), limited research has been devoted to revealing the evolving local complexity and heterogeneity of ethnic villagers in facing tourism development. Taking a Dong village of southeast Guizhou as a case study, this paper examines the shape, presence or absence of resistance villagers expressed toward tourism development in their village over a period of more than 10 years. It suggests that different livelihood strategies adopted by villagers determine the type of response, as well as their agency in facing tourism development.

Theoretical background

The hosts' response to tourism has been analyzed in multiple countries and contexts and a few studies offer widely applicable conceptual frameworks to assess the social impacts of tourism (Brown & Giles, 1994; Butler, 1980; Doğan, 1989). For example, Doğan (1989) suggests there are five cultural strategies developed by people whose lives and spaces are impacted upon by tourism development. These include resistance, retreatism, boundary maintenance, revitalization and adoption. Doğan moreover notes that these responses exist individually or coexist and may change over time. Other similar models were presented by Ap and Crompton (1993) and Brown and Giles (1994) also provide a framework of responses along a continuum, where hosts first embrace tourism, then tolerate it, then adjust their lives around it and finally they may withdraw and avoid tourists (Wall & Mathieson, 2006, p. 230). These are all "macro-destination level" studies researching multiple destinations (Wall & Mathieson, 2006, p. 229).

However, as the PRC has only recently opened to tourism (in the 1980s – cf. Sofield & Li, 1998, p. 377), detailed, ethnographically rooted studies are essential to locally assess its impacts on ethnic and rural populations, before applying macro-level models. Although greatly useful in analysing and comparing the impacts of tourism development on host populations, these large models do not sufficiently focus on the local economic, social, cultural and political context within which tourism development arises. Responses and adjustments to the introduction of a new livelihood strategy such as tourism indeed depend on the existing context defined by the structure and policies of the state, the pre-existing field of interethnic relations, and the particular features of the tourism industry (Doğan, 1989, p. 217). What is more, the "level of heterogeneity of the local population and the power structure within it may determine the differentiation of responses to tourism and the forms of strategies adopted" (Ibid.: p. 225).

In order to grasp the local context and its role on tourism responses by villagers in the PRC, I draw on four core concepts, which I present below, namely livelihoods, resistance, agency and ethnicity. The paper is then divided into four parts: first, the case study is presented. Second, the different stages of tourism development in the village are considered. Third, the two main spheres of debate that arose locally are discussed. Finally, two main points are demonstrated: first, the way villagers respond to new economic opportunities and constraints brought by tourism development, is largely dictated by their own livelihood strategies. Second, villagers reacted much more to the increasing infringement of outside stakeholders in local affairs than to the presence of tourists. These two points are discussed in light of the tourism models mentioned above.

Livelihoods

As defined by Ellis (2000, p. 10), livelihood is "the assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or household". Recent livelihood approaches (Arce & Long, 2000; Bebbington, 1999, 2000; Long, 2000) advocate the necessity to consider how access to resources and the decision to pursue new livelihood strategies are dependent on contextually rooted cultural, historical, gendered, and spatial dynamics of livelihoods, alongside broader structural forces. To consider these aspects, as well as the agency of individuals or groups in response to new economic opportunities, requires, according to Long (2004), taking an actor-oriented analysis of social change. Methodologically, he states, "this calls for a detailed ethnographic

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