



# Value capture in protected areas from the perspective of common-pool resource governance: A case study of Jiuzhai Valley National Park, China



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## ABSTRACT

Central government budgets are generally accepted as being a crucial source of financial support for most protected areas because the entire population is deemed to be the beneficiary of heritage protection. In value capture theory, however, the benefit redistribution (including value capture and compensation) inside protected areas also merits attention. In this paper, we first structure the value capture mechanism inside protected areas and compare four resource governance models (Leviathan, privatization, self-organized governance and self-organized governance in which local government intervenes) based on the capture approach, transaction cost and application condition. Theoretically, as a new resource governance model, self-organized governance in which local government intervenes is more suitable for the value capture of protected areas in developing authoritarian countries. We use Jiuzhai Valley National Park in China as an empirical case study. After reviewing the institutional changes and value capture mechanism, we evaluate the equity and benefit of value capture in Jiuzhai Valley National Park and argue that self-organized governance in which local government intervenes achieves the goals of social justice and heritage protection.

## 1. Introduction

Ensuring effective and sufficient financial resources for protected areas is essential for these areas to continuously provide benefits and fulfil their role in heritage conservation (Eagles, 2014; Eagles and Hillel, 2008). However, a consensus has emerged that current spending on protected areas is grossly inadequate (UNESCO, 2012). Inclusion on the World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2017) may endow protected areas with added leverage to attract funds due to the high status attributed to this list; nevertheless, experience suggests that many natural World Heritage sites still struggle from a lack of funds (Brosché et al., 2017; Caust et al., 2016). Traditional funding mechanisms primarily rely on central government budgets, which are the single largest source of protected-area financing in most countries (UNESCO, 2012). In the developing world overall, public national park budgets are estimated to amount to between US\$1.3 billion and US\$2.6 billion per year, but most national park systems are underfunded (Gravestock, 2002). The existing financing falls far short of the amount required to manage the world's existing protected areas, let alone to expand the system to meet urgent conservation priorities (Emerton et al., 2006). The funding gap

is particularly acute, resulting in a strong need to find new financial resources to supplement existing funding for protected areas.

In a recent dissertation, Wu (2018) reported that value capture could be useful for finance shortage in protected areas. According to the symmetry between windfalls and wipeouts, the finance resource should be captured from the beneficiaries who enjoy the benefits due to land regulation in protected areas, in other words, from those who receive the land value in the process of heritage conservation. In accordance with Dr. Wu's research, land value increments in protected areas can be divided into four categories (Fig. 1). Compared with the total population and residents in buffer zones, the residents in upzoned areas or along infrastructure routes who benefit from increased land value have seldom attracted the attention of scholars.

Based on our investigation, the difference in land value inside certain protected areas is substantial, which results in the dampening of certain aborigines' enthusiasm for heritage resource preservation and even for social justice (Wu and Song, 2018). The aborigines, whose land was restricted from development without any compensation, are also inclined to profit from heritage resource preservation. The cut-throat competition in heritage resource development can cause

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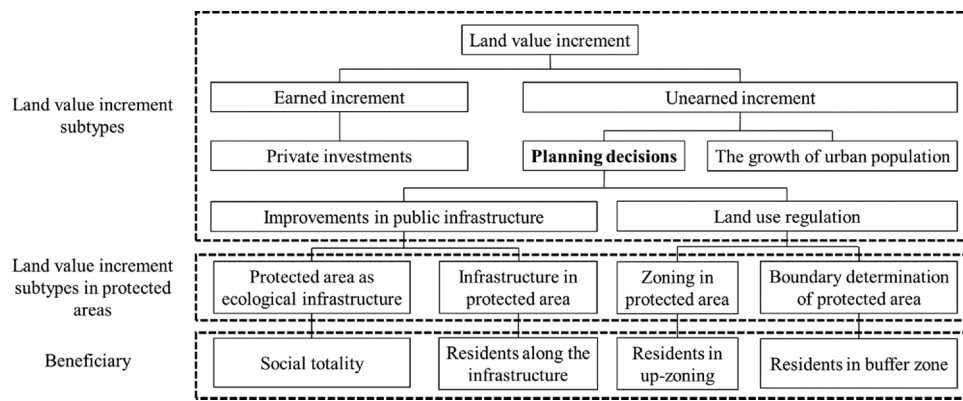


Fig. 1. Land value increments in protected areas.

environmental degradation in protected areas. Therefore, our study clarifies the benefit redistribution (including value capture and compensation) inside protected areas, especially the type of governance model that is most advantageous to efficiently realize the aim of heritage protection and social justice. Our article attempts to augment current research in three important aspects.

Firstly, we use value capture theory as a reference to explain the land issues in protected areas. As previously reported (Healy, 1994; Wu, 2018), the most serious problem in protected areas is overdevelopment that causes landscape recession and unreasonable benefit distribution, which results in stakeholder conflict. The involved individuals, however, have an incentive to protect landscape heritage resources as long as they receive a reasonable benefit allocation. Thus, our concern is value capture, which is usually discussed in the infrastructure investment literature. In our study, we dissect the value capture mechanisms in the process of spatial regulation in protected areas and establish a framework to evaluate the performance of these mechanisms that considers the aspects of both equality (who benefits and who bears the burden) and efficiency (low transaction costs and high benefits). Evaluating the equality and efficiency of protected area governance based on value capture theory addresses a gap in current studies.

Secondly, referring to common-pool resource governance, a new governance model, called self-organized governance in which local government intervenes, is introduced in both the theoretical and the empirical sections. This model differs from current policy prescriptions and Ostrom’s common-pool governance, which may apply to developing authoritarian countries. Then, we theoretically compare the four models of resource governance (Leviathan, privatization, self-organized governance and self-organized governance in which local government intervenes) based on heritage resource characteristics, transaction costs and local experiences. The new resource governance model enriches the current common-pool theory and international practice.

Thirdly, a case study of Jiuzhai Valley National Park is adopted to empirically test the theoretical framework by evaluating the equity and efficiency of value capture in self-organized governance in which local government strongly intervenes. Jiuzhai Valley National Park is locally known as “Nine Village Valley” in Chinese because it is home to nine Tibetan villages (Fig. 2). Jiuzhai Valley National Park has two special aspects:

- (1) It is one of the most developed national parks and located in the Min Shan mountain range (Biran et al., 2014) in Northern Sichuan in southwestern China (Fig. 2). Jiuzhai Valley National Park is best known for its fabled blue and green lakes, spectacular waterfalls, spire-like karst land forms and unique wildlife. The park was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1992, became part of the Man and Biosphere Conservation Network in 1997 and has also received IUCN status (Song et al., 2017).
- (2) The management modes of Jiuzhai Valley National Park can be

divided into three periods (Yao et al., 2016). The first period was the weak management period (1984–1992). To preserve these valued landscape heritage resources, the Jiuzhai Valley Administration Bureau was established in 1984. However, the bureau was unable to organize resource preservation and tourist development. Therefore, the aborigines initiated the establishment of family inns with Tibetan characteristics and used the family as a unit. This period could be summarized Privatization Governance. The second period was the self-organized governance period (1992–2000). To eliminate cutthroat competition, the aborigines established a self-organized affiliated company for unified management. A series of management reforms were implemented, which will be detailed in subsequent sections. The third period is self-organized governance in which local government intervenes (2000-present).

To summarize, Jiuzhai Valley National Park successively experienced privatization, self-organization, and self-organized governance in which local government intervenes in these decades, providing an extremely rare research sample. Our study focuses on and evaluates the equality and efficiency of these governance modes based on value capture theory.

To achieve these purposes, we performed fieldwork three times from 2014 to 2016 and conducted semistructured interviews with 5 academics, 4 planners, 4 local government officials, and 11 aborigines who directly or indirectly participated in national park reform, the planning of Jiuzhai Valley National Park and the value capture process. Major efforts were made to explore the protection assessment of Jiuzhai Valley National Park and the detailed process of value capture. Although our fieldwork intended to cover all stakeholders who participated in or were well informed regarding the institutional design and value capture issues, we could not achieve our goal because national park reform is executed by highly ranked central ministries with which it was too difficult to arrange and conduct interviews. Therefore, we made great efforts to acquire the relevant knowledge from alternative sources, such as press conferences, speeches, official government and news portal websites, academic journals and books, statistical yearbooks and personal contacts. Additionally, several interviews were conducted with academics, planners and other stakeholders. We supplemented the data that could not be retrieved from open sources and collected evidence for our findings and suggestions. Furthermore, we concealed the interviewees’ personal information to avoid political ramifications and maintain professional integrity. The historical information regarding Jiuzhai Valley National Park was extracted from previous articles, reports and photo albums.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 structures the analytical framework based on reviewing the theory of value capture, depicts the detailed mechanism of land increment or decrement in protected areas and explains the principle of value capture. In Section 3, we theoretically compare four common-pool governance models. The empirical

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