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Editorial

Illustrations of Chinese tourism research

HIGHLIGHTS

- Introduces and comments on themes in Chinese tourism research.
- Notes the issues arising from the comparative newness of social science research in China.
- Attributes concerns over classifications to a Maoist-Marxist scientific tradition.
- Identifies tensions over the need of the State to retain control over people's movements and the move to consumerism.

ABSTRACT

The paper serves as an introduction to this special issue reporting research findings previously published in China's leading tourism journal, *Tourism Tribune*. It describes the origins of the initial decision to undertake the project, the difficulties experienced, but more importantly comments on the papers. Such comments draw attention to the different traditions of tourism between the West and China, to the role of the Chinese government in the development of tourism, to the role of tourism itself in Chinese policy and the implicit challenges tourism presents as people increasingly see the taking of holidays as part of the 'new normal' of Chinese life under Xi's 'Chinese Dream'.

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Some two years ago, at a meeting hosted by Beijing Union University, the idea was proposed that the editorial team of China's leading tourism journal, *Tourism Tribune*, should select 10 'best' articles for a special internet volume of *Tourism Management*. The objectives were to bring about a closer alignment between the research worlds of the English language academics and that of China. One justification for such a notion was that even in the second decade of the 21st Century there remains a divide between the two despite the flow of increasing numbers of tourists and academics who visit each other's countries and despite the work of leading academics from both sides that seek to build bridges between the two groups. Among those academics one must recognize the pioneer work of people such as Geoff Wall, Margaret Swain, Trevor Sofield, Bob McKercher, Kaye Chon, Bao Jingang, Xu Honggang, Gu Huimin, Wu Bihu, Alastair Morrison – all of whom come to mind immediately because of the commitment of decades to exchange ideas and writings across the two academic worlds. In their footsteps have followed many others of what Bob Mckercher might call as the second generation such as Sam Huangshan, Noel Scott, Cai Liping, Clark Hu, and younger academics such as Yang Jingjing, Sun Minghui, Fang Meng and many many others who are forming a third generation of West-Sino research endeavor.

Nonetheless, many Chinese scholars still remain largely unknown to their western counterparts through a lack of institutional links, impediments of language and implicitly the constraints of time as they work mainly in a Chinese context and almost solely in Mandarin. One idea was therefore to bring their work to the attention of their western counterparts through this agreement, which is being initially tested over a three year period. Hence it was agreed that for each of three years from 2015 to 2017, three special internet volumes would appear, each of ten papers.

The intentions, hopes and expectations on both sides were high, but the very date of this delayed issue points to a series of problems that emerged. The first issue was that as editor of *Tourism Management* Chris Ryan had under-estimated his own work load and the work required in bring the papers to a level thought consistent with the style and remit of *Tourism Management*. It is stated that Winston Churchill had once commented of the United States and the United Kingdom that they were countries divided by a common language. To which one can only say, try coming to a common understanding between authors not speaking English, various translations of Mandarin and 'Chinglish', proof setters in India, and above all the realization that often the terms of references between Chinese tourism

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research and that of their western counterparts are not the same – all makes for a complicated set of arrangements. Add to that cultural differences and misunderstandings of the roles of professors in the respective universities involved – and, at least for this editorial team, it at times seems amazing that the issue has come into being. On their part it is suspected that colleagues at *Tourism Tribune* must have thought that nothing would eventuate from the process so long has it taken!

One issue has been that of translation. While the first editor has had past experiences of working with Chinese colleagues and translating Mandarin manuscripts, such work had been with reference to work not previously published. This permitted significant rewriting of the text to remain true to the spirit, by at times supplementing the original materials with additional research findings. In this instance, however, stricter requirements were imposed. As anyone who has been involved with such work will testify, it is not always easy. Small examples sometimes trip one up. For example Chinese colleagues would tend to an overuse of the word 'besides' which would often in the translation then be replaced with 'additionally' in the final manuscript (除了[chúle] 另外 [lingwai]), while at times it was necessary to make up a word – thus in the article by Li, Hu, Huang and Duan on smart tourism the term 'informatization' was used to convey the sense of the collection, analysis and dissemination of electronic data. It has, however, been an illuminating process, and hopefully one that will interest the world of English speaking academics who study and undertake research in tourism. Reading the papers will, it is suggested, bring home just how different are the political and cultural contexts of the West and China, and equally, how similarities are emerging as China sits in the gap between a market economy and centralized control.

First, to briefly reiterate what is well known, while western tourism traces its contemporary history back to the Grand Tour of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then its burgeoning growth during the period of the industrial revolution to the emergence of mass tourism and packaged holidays in the 1960s, no such history exists in China. The nineteenth century industrial revolution barely happened in China, and China's history of being invaded and of civil war was (obviously) not conducive to the growth of tourism in the first half of the twentieth century, The Maoist years of the New China were equally unhappy times for many as China struggled to form a new State on principles generally untested elsewhere, especially after the break from Moscow in 1961 when Mao denounced the Russians as 'revisionist traitors'. In consequence mass tourism in China is new – and while its antecedents lie in the reforms of Deng Xiaoping, it is almost simply within the last decade that mass tourism has emerged in China.

And what a mass it is! As evidenced by press reports of congestion each Golden Weekend, such holiday periods and the movements of millions within such short time periods are almost without precedent. But outside of these government ordained holiday periods, domestic and outbound Chinese tourism is on the rise, and travel agencies buy and sell holidays and flights as their counterparts do in the west.

So, the first of many differences between the West and China is the relative recent development of Chinese tourism, and this phenomenon is a common refrain in many of the papers found within this collection. Driven by China's double digit growth in GDP for much of the last twenty years, tourism has become part of the 'new normal' economic life of China and part of the modest prosperity that Xi (2014) has called for in his 'Chinese Dream'. It must be remembered when reading these papers that Chinese scholars are dealing with a new development on a massive scale – something that is self-evident – but perhaps often forgotten as we tourism scholars deal with the issues on a daily basis and take these changes for granted.

A second factor is that the growth of tourism in China is tied closely with the role of the Chinese government and its policies. As Xiaoyun Tang notes in this collection of papers, Chinese social and economic priorities have gone through various stages – from the almost non-recognition of tourism as a consumerist experience under Mao, to tourism then being seen as a valuable source of foreign exchange, to subsequently becoming a means of driving economic growth through domestic tourism taking a role in the current policies of consumer expenditure as the engine of economic growth in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. The crisis highlighted for the Chinese authorities the vulnerability of being dependent on export led growth, a policy which in any case caused its own strains as balance of payments surpluses threatened a growing value of the Chinese yuan. While western based authors have made similar observations, Tang provides significant detail as to the statements derived a sample of 379 policy statements and regulations over the period since 1949 and the founding of the New China. What emerges from the article is not simply description of changing policies and priorities, but the nature of a continuing tension between a desire for the innovation and change that can emerge from a freer market subject to competition, and a desire for yet more regulation to avoid 'disorderly and chaotic competition'.

This concern about the control of the unruly elements of the market reflects the concerns of the present administration. As Xi (2014, p.83) comments, China's market places is 'a socialist market economy' but 'there are still many problems. The market lacks order, and many people seek economic benefits through unjustified means' and he goes on to list some of those problems. Those problems are also manifest in tourism, and the October 2013 *Tourism Law* was passed to combat some of the worst excesses involved in package tours based on shopping commissions. As Tang notes, there has been an imbalance in China's policies in that the numbers of laws and regulations relating to travel agencies, tour operators and tour guides have accounted for a large proportion of all tourist related regulations – but equally it is a sign of greater recognition of the consumer rights of Chinese tourists.

Of course this concern about unruly competition is not wholly unique to China. The West has now to deal with a post-market system characterized by the power of corporations that pay little tax and subject to the whims of not shareholders but a managerial class. Many members of this executive, corporate managerial class may invoke the claim of looking after shareholder interests, but who in addition to receiving salaries that represent many multiples of the average salaries paid in the company, also receive significant stock options. The divorce between ownership and managerial self-interest (often of a short-term nature) poses just as great a challenge to the organization of tourism in the context of hotels, airlines, digital communications and investment as anything experienced in China. It might be said that in the west the unruliness lies in the boardrooms, but equally China too has its issues with corruption as state sponsored tourism corporations begin to exercise on the ground political and economic power in the emerging tourism destinations (Bao & Zuo, 2013).

The role of regulation is thus a *lei-motif* in several papers. Of particular interest perhaps is the paper by Dai Bin and his colleagues. Dai Bin requires little introduction to those familiar with the development of tourism in China. Formerly an academic at Beijing International Studies University and holding the

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