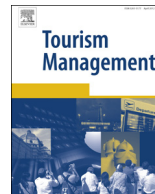




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Tourism Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tourman

The significance of the West Lake pattern and its heuristic implications for creating China's heritage tourism economics

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Describes West Lake, Hangzhou, as a not-for-profit management plan designed to protect heritage resources.
- Using West Lake the paper identifies challenge facing other Chinese heritage sites managed under a profit oriented system.
- It offers a normative look at Chinese management for cultural and heritage sites.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 March 2016

Accepted 7 March 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Heritage conservation

Heritage tourism

The tourist economy

West Lake pattern

ABSTRACT

West Lake's economic, social and cultural structure comprises six facets: (1) maintaining West Lake World Heritage Site as an open accessible tourist location; (2) ensuring the planning, management and tourism marketing of West Lake are culturally rather than purely economically oriented; therefore truly benefitting the preservation and conservation of West Lake; (3) selectively decreasing and mitigating the tourism pressure on West Lake, especially in those areas of high cultural, ecological and environmental vulnerability; (4) ensuring travellers adopt appropriate sustainable tourism values to enjoy a positive experience; (5) ensuring the marketing of West Lake tourism and the consequent distribution of incomes comply with legal and other appropriate standards; and (6) expanding and extending the social benefits of West Lake tourism. To aid the examination of West Lake in this paper, a comparison is made between the management policies of West Lake and Mt. Huangshan (Yellow Mountain) to illustrate a number of fundamental and organisational relationships involving tourism at heritage sites.

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1. Introduction

West Lake, one of China's world heritage sites, is located in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province in eastern China. Long a recreational zone for the city's residents, it also possesses a specific pattern of tourism that the Chinese travel industry refers to as the West Lake Pattern (WLP). This paper examines WLP's organisation and its significance to China's heritage tourism. The WLP is based on the concepts of one "free" and four "no's", in line with a basic Chinese concept of using numbers to characterize a general set of ideas. In short, the core area is open and free to the public, but with no increases in ticket prices, no transfer and rent for heritage-related land use, no disturbance of cultural properties, and no

commercial occupation of public resources and properties. In essence, the Lake is perceived as a public and non-profit oriented heritage services supply system. It also reflects the development of the tourism industry in China.

2. The system and significance of the WLP

2.1. The system

In essence, the West Lake is a public- and non-profit oriented heritage services supply system. Located in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, the management approach taken to the Lake was influenced by Zhejiang being the first province in China to adopt a conscious public cultural service. For example, Zhejiang museum sold year-long admission cards to customers as far back as 1998. The price of the year card is lower than a single ticket, being but 10 RMB for adults and 5 RMB for students (Chen, 2008). The Museum is also

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free to certain groups of people (Yang, 2011). In 2001 Zhejiang Museum tried to open the museum to all tourists in 2001 on a free entry basis. The success of this scheme led the Chinese central government to promote a policy of encouraging free entry to all museums. The West Lake site sustains this approach with its concepts of one “free” and four “no’s”. Only by first achieving the one “free” first, can the four “no’s” be achieved. The nature of the lake is shown in Figs. 1 and 2.

2.2. The significance of the WLP

The WLP’s economic, social and cultural significance is characterised by six factors:

2.2.1. Making the West Lake world heritage site serve as a global common good and provide universally accessible tourist opportunities

In order to earn more profit, heritage operators may distort the public nature of heritage attractions. For example, the heritage operators may require visitors to buy tickets to enter the tourist attractions, thereby introducing a market system and the concept of cultural commodification.

On the other hand, West Lake pursues an alternative policy whereby it is open to all – both local residents and tourists – free of charge.

2.2.2. Ensuring the planning, management and tourism marketing of West Lake are culturally oriented rather than purely economically oriented, thereby truly benefitting the preservation and conservation of West Lake

Under the for-profit management model, heritage planning, management and operation are led by economic considerations. In order to earn the maximum economic benefit, tourist attractions in China tend to become excessively focused on infrastructure construction. For-profit management models hence protect tourist attractions on a selective basis, often concentrating on the core of the heritage tourist attractions, thereby isolating it from its surroundings, including the social and natural as well as the cultural.

It is here contended that by being open and free to the public, the management model is changed from an economy-driven to one that is culturally-driven. Because there are no direct economic benefit conflicts in the West Lake, there is no point in improving

tourism GDP by harming the heritage and ecology through infrastructure construction.

2.2.3. Selectively decreasing and mitigating the tourism pressure on West Lake, especially in those areas of cultural, ecological and environmental vulnerability

Under the for-profit operation model, tourists tend to be drawn to visit “hot” tourist attractions, which in turn attract high prices that in themselves come to symbolise “importance”. These hot tourist attractions may then become exposed to cultural, ecological and environmental vulnerabilities. For example, open-air sites are sensitive to tourists’ trampling effects. Murals become sensitive to chemicals including those caused by the presence of high volumes of visitors and their breathing. Alternatively the high prices of tickets may lead tourists to visit some so-called ‘cold’ tourist attractions; thereby exceeding the environmental carrying capacity of such attractions.

It is suggested that being open and free to the public can get overcome this problem. One reason is that because a given site is open and free to the public, tourists can arrange their time to visit the tourist attractions based on their personal travel preferences and time schedules, thereby overcoming the cultural, ecological and environmental pressures that are associated with tour bus operations that are prevalent in China.

2.2.4. Ensuring travellers turn to the appropriate values of tourism and enjoy a healthy tourism experience

The For-profit management model results in high ticket prices for a tourist attraction. It is suggested this affects behaviour as high prices induce tourists to visit as many of the attractions as is possible within their stay at a site. This, especially in summer, will create physical discomfort, induce tiredness and thereby reduce the satisfaction that may otherwise be derived from the trip. Being both open and free to the public provides a form of tourism that allows tourists to visit at their leisure, pursue an increase in knowledge and enjoy the experience. High frequency repeat tourists may even come feel that they are the owner of the heritage tourist attraction. They not only appreciate the heritage, but also tend to protect the environment.



Fig. 1. Waiting for a boat at West Lake.

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