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Research Paper

Tourism development and local borders in ancient villages in China

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ABSTRACT

Establishing gated scenic areas and charging entrance fees are the main forms of tourism development for Chinese ancient villages, and this can bring various consequences for local communities. This paper attempts to address this problem with the concept of border from political geography. Taking Hongcun, a typical ancient village and scenic area which borders the village of Jicun as an example, interviews and observation were conducted to explore how lower-level borders are produced and developed and what their impacts are. The results show that borders between Hongcun and Jicun can be understood from five perspectives. External capital and the implementation of UNESCO management system are the key forces behind the process of border formation, and local communities also participate in reinforcing these borders. The research contributes to both tourism studies with its findings on the impacts of scenic area on relationships of local communities, and to borders studies with its insight into the local bordering process. The study also recommends reflecting on the World Heritage management system in China.

1. Introduction

Establishing gated scenic areas with clear borders and charging entrance fees are the main forms of tourism development in China, separating scenic areas from the surrounding environment (Xiao, 2009). This development model has achieved some success but has also brought a lot of problems (Song, 2008). Although this kind of gated tourism development and its impacts on the surrounding environment has been addressed by some studies (Li & Jin, 2002; Liu, Liu, & Zheng, 2007; Sun & Su, 2004; Tian, Zhong, & Yang, 2016; Xiao, Guo, & Tang, 2007), many of them are descriptive and lack a conceptual framework to understand these phenomena in depth.

Furthermore, since the establishment of a gated scenic area in fact creates borders between communities, the concept of border analysis from political geography is therefore applied in this study. A border represents a social structure focusing on distinctions between 'us' and 'them', the 'included' and 'excluded' (Newman, 2006a). Timothy (2001) has identified three-dimensional scales of borders: international borders, sub-national borders and third-order, or lower-level borders. With the processes of globalization and marketization, more and more lower-level borders are developed and reinforced due to economic differentiation, affecting people's daily lives more directly, inevitably leading to the differences in resource allocation, status changes (Dzurek, 2000;

Sidaway, 2007) and a large number of contradictions regarding to senses of belonging and identity (Newman, 2003a, 2006a). As a result, the analyzing of borders developed by tourism in local communities can contribute to the understanding of impacts on individuals and social groups (Liao, 2016).

Nowadays, there is a growing body of literature on the importance of international borders and borderlands as tourist destinations (Gelbman & Timothy, 2011), but little information is presented in the literature to study borders developed at local scenic areas. Many researchers have called for a shift in research focus from the national scale to internal, regional, municipal, local and even neighborhood scales (Lebuhn, 2013; Lundén & Zalamans, 2001; Newman, 2006b). In the tourism development context, these lower-level borders are often caused by both external and internal forces and influence the daily lives of local people. Since there are many such borders, overall the magnitude and their impacts can be large as well as significant. Therefore, studies on the borders of these local scenic areas are worthwhile.

This paper attempts to apply the border concept derived from the study of political borders to analyze tourism's impacts on Hongcun and Jicun, two neighboring communities in China. The study aims to help understand the production and development of lower-level borders induced by tourism development and the heritage protection system, and their impacts on neighboring communities. The paper is structured

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as follows. The theoretical thread is developed to guide the analysis of the case. Then five perspectives on borders and their impacts are analyzed with regard to Hongcun and Jicun. Following is the discussions on the forces which lead to borders at the local scale. The paper concludes with potential contributions and policy suggestions.

2. Theoretical thread

2.1. Border studies

Borders are often regarded as a major topic in traditional political geography, and they are not only natural or man-made lines dividing political areas, administrative areas, or spatial structures (Heffner, 2013), but also understood as ongoing social processes of demarcation and delimitation of areas (Newman, 2006b; Paasi, 1998). Anderson (1996) initially defined borders as an institution, which only obtains social meaning as a result of political processes and their legitimization. However, the understanding of borders has gradually gone beyond this. Border studies as a field initially concentrated on types of national borders, descriptions of demarcations, the process of 'bordering', and their functions and impacts (disputes) (Newman, 2006b; Prescott, 2015), later on extended to borders at other scales (Lebuhn, 2013; Lundén & Zalams, 2001; Newman, 2006b). Furthermore, besides power relations and political feature, economic interests, social and cultural differences are also identified as key factors in determining how borders are constructed (Newman, 2003b, 2006b).

The functions of borders in different times and phases are another focus for border studies (Minghi, 1963). They constitute and represent differences in order to identify who are 'insiders' and who are 'outsiders', and imply control over inclusion and exclusion (Houtum, 2005; Newman & Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 1999; Southerton, 2002). The act of control, as a way of border construction and enforcement which may create huge differences and unequal distribution of resources, can increase instability and conflict, leading to bad neighbor relationships (Atzili, 2007), and exhibit inequalities of power, economics, and the human condition (Alvarez, 1995; Wonders, 2006). Inequality between neighboring countries or regions can make a destructive kind of relationship (Moré & Dominguez, 2014), which is not conducive to the cooperation between the two sides of a border, and will increase costs and restrict development (Spierings, 2012).

With the development of border studies, there has been a shifting of research attention from the national scale to third-order or lower-level borders like internal, regional, municipal, local and even neighborhood borders (Lebuhn, 2013; Lundén & Zalams, 2001; Newman, 2006b). Borders exist and "function as divisions between the cultural entities of commonly shared values, norms, languages and identities that signify an innate community" (Wachowiak, 2006, p. 159). For example, as a globally emergent phenomenon, intra-urban borders have separated a city into different compartments (e.g. gated communities), which have become the most remarkable borders in the cities and affected practices of people's daily lives (Karaman & Islam, 2012; Liao, 2016). Breitung (2011) argued that borders as social constructs must be interpreted as expressions of specific political, socio-economic and cultural circumstances and he had distinguished five aspects of borders in the intra-urban scale: physical, political, functional, socio-spatial and psychological. Physical borders are "visible in the landscape, both as physical structures such as fences and walls, and as discontinuities of land-use, building style, signage, vegetation, colours, or plot sizes"; political borders are "manifestations of political and administrative territoriality, and they demarcate spheres of influence and responsibility, and separate different governance spaces from each other"; functional borders are "discontinuities, barriers or filters of flows and networks"; socio-spatial borders "are both socio-economic and socio-cultural division lines"; psychological borders are represented in people's minds, marking the territories of groups of people with different spatial identities and senses of belonging (Breitung, 2011, p. 57–58).

Current studies on borders are still nevertheless focused on international borders, and research on lower-level borders is limited. Driven by globalization, local boundaries, for example those of gated communities, development zones and tourist resorts, have emerged and become more and more important (Sidaway, 2007). There should be some differences and similarities between international borders and lower-level borders, and the review of the above literature provides the basic framework to understand lower-level borders, which will enrich and deepen the understanding of border theory.

2.2. Borders and tourism

Nowadays, ongoing globalization has spurred tourism participation through opening countries to the outside world, facilitating border crossings and indicating the scope of the relationship between tourism and borders (Wachowiak, 2006). There is growing literature on the importance of international borders and borders as tourist destinations (Gelbman & Timothy, 2011), most of which focuses on the types, scales, functions of different borders, the social, economic, and environmental importance of border regions, and the politics of cross-border co-operation (Wachowiak, 2006).

Matznetter (1979) categorized the situations of international boundaries and tourist areas into three types: situations where the borderline is located between the two tourist areas but is a little far from each; situations where tourist areas touch only one side of a border; and situations where tourist areas are adjacent to a border on both sides. Based on this conceptual framework, Timothy, Saarinen, and Viken (2016) identified four obvious relationships between borders and tourism: barriers, attractions or destinations, modifiers of tourism landscape, and spaces of transit, which can consequently influence tourism development in a positive as well as negative manner.

In the context of tourism, borders (i.e. borderlines and borderlands) can become a kind of unique tourism attraction or destination. The former mostly refers to the boundary itself, including demarcation indicators, fences, walls, and remains of buildings or infrastructure as well as military activities and memorials (Gelbman, 2008; Wachowiak, 2006), while the latter refers to a series of activities and attractions formed at a geographical location adjacent to a border with unique policies and management, such as for shopping, prostitution, gambling/casinos, restaurants, bars and nightclubs, state/provincial welcome centers and liquor stores (Timothy, 1995; Wachowiak, 2006).

Apart from being a kind of attraction, borders can also create barriers for tourism development. Timothy (2001) pointed out that borders can be viewed as barriers from two perspectives: real and perceived. Barbed-wire fences, concrete walls, minefields, armed guards, strict immigration and customs policies may function as real barriers. Perceived borders are psychological barriers when it comes to perceived differences on opposite sides of a border (Wachowiak, 2006). As researchers now recognizing 'borders of the mind', the psychological effects of borders have been examined, and they have different meanings for different groups of people (Timothy, 2001). Also, the degree of barriers depends on the socio-cultural differences, political relationships, economic circumstances and the perceptions as well as experiences in contiguous areas (Timothy & Tosun, 2003).

With the increasing relevance of tourism as an economic activity, border disputes might also arise between adjacent regions due to desires for tourist spending and economic benefits, which can consequently negatively influence tourist landscape in the surrounding area and the spatial development of border regions (Wachowiak, 2006). However, border disputes can be overcome through co-operation in combining and sharing existing assets in order to create a single border destination capable of benefiting all participants (Wachowiak, 2006).

The above studies have shed light on tourism and borders, yet they have all been carried out based on national-level borders. In addition, the focus of these studies has often been on the impact of borders on tourism development rather than on borders developed by tourism. And

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