



Governance of red tourism in China: Perspectives on power and guanxi



Shengnan (Nancy) Zhao^{*}, Dallen J. Timothy

School of Community Resources & Development, Arizona State University, 411 N. Central Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85004, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Heritage is heavily politicized through tourism development.
- The major roles that governments play in China's red tourism development are mapped along the political hierarchy.
- Power can shape the nature and manner of government involvement in tourism development.
- *Guanxi* has been the foundational social mechanism in Chinese society.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 April 2014

Accepted 10 August 2014

Available online

Keywords:

Red tourism

Politics

Communist heritage

Government involvement

Power

Guanxi

China

ABSTRACT

Because of its ability to harbor social values, norms, and beliefs, heritage is heavily politicized through tourism development. Despite the importance and universality of the politics of heritage in the tourism context, its political dimensions remain insufficiently explored. This study maps the major roles that governments play in China's red tourism development along a political hierarchy from the perspectives of power and *guanxi*, two decisive social concepts in China. The government's main roles are identified from both top-down (e.g. planner and designer, resource organizer and provider, and coordinator) and bottom-up (e.g. supporter, executor, and *guanxi* builder and maintainer) directions. Moreover, the underlying factors that shape these roles and associated issues are also discussed. Managerial implications with respect to public engagement and future research directions are recommended.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

As an inheritance, heritage represents fundamental attributes of a specific people and their associated values, norms, and beliefs (Sofield & Li, 2011; Timothy, 2011). Previous heritage studies have adopted perspectives on management (McKercher, Ho, & du Cros, 2005), sustainability (du Cros, 2001), consumer profiles and demand (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003), interpretation (Light, 2000), and authenticity (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003). The core political issues of heritage lie in authorship, power, meaning-making, and identity (Poria et al., 2003; Timothy, 2011). Given the inherent social, cultural, and political attributes of heritage, it is often used by various agents to achieve their interests and purposes, such as economic development, rural and urban regeneration, and

legitimization of power. Tourism is one of many uses of heritage, serving as an economic justification for preservation, offering opportunities to experience nostalgia, teaching about cultures and histories, contributing to social realities, and instilling political ideologies by the ruling classes (Hall, 1994; Henderson, 2007; Kim, Timothy, & Han, 2007). In fact, politicizing heritage to serve national ends is common all around the world and has been studied comprehensively in different contexts (Henderson, 2007; Timothy, 2011).

Timothy (2007b) outlined three types of political uses of the past: societal amnesia, promoting devotion to leaders and patriotism, and spreading propaganda to foreign visitors. One prominent example of the political use of heritage is Chinese red tourism, which is comprised of state-promoted tours to revolutionary memorial sites, such as museums, memorial halls and monuments commemorating significant and heroic revolutionary figures and victorious events related to the Red Army, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Li, Hu, & Zhang, 2010; Rioux, 2008). Red tourism is used to

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 480 735 9564.

E-mail addresses: szhao19@asu.edu, shengnan.zhao@asu.edu (S.(N.) Zhao), djtimothy@asu.edu (D.J. Timothy).

legitimize the leadership of the CCP and to reinforce and enhance Chinese national identity.

Despite the importance and universality of heritage politicization via tourism, this is insufficiently charted territory in academic research. There are many relevant studies in recent years, yet the political dimensions of tourism and heritage are still incidental to economic, social, or environmental considerations (Hall, 1994). This paper, however, contends that without an in-depth analysis of tourism politics, the dynamics of tourism development and related impacts cannot be well understood. The political dimensions of tourism lie in aspects of power, government roles, tourism policies, the political economy, and the ideological nature of tourism (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Hall, 1994).

At the core of tourism politics is power (Elliott, 1987). Choosing a particular development objective represents a set of vested interests and values, which are outcomes of the political wrestling process where multiple stakeholders struggle for power (Cox & Mair, 1988). Since power governs the interactions of individuals, organizations, and agencies, it is a vital construct for studying decision-making and tourism development. In the Chinese context, the central government possesses the most power in formulating red tourism policies and forging its practices nationwide.

To achieve the official goals set by the central government, administrative action needs to be taken by subordinate/regional governments. To understand how the goals of red tourism are realized from policy to practice, a closer look at how the government is involved in red tourism at various levels is needed. This paper focuses on the major roles that the government plays in red tourism development at both the meso and micro levels and the major influencing factors that shape its involvement.

2. Literature review

2.1. Communist heritage and red tourism

Since the downfall of state socialism in Europe, many Western tourists have visited the former communist countries (Caraba, 2011; Hall, 1999; Light, 2000), indicating a significant tourism market for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The major motives of Western Europeans visiting CEE are largely to satisfy curiosity and to experience communist heritage (Light, 2001). CEE tourists, however, travel within the region primarily for nostalgic reasons as they visit former communist historic sites (Light, 2001). These varying interests among different markets have resulted in dissonance in the process of developing communist heritage-based tourism. One major conflict is the desire to portray modern 'Europeanness' and return to mainstream Europe, and the need to keep the socialist past intact for the Western European gaze, which has been instrumental in transforming these 'unwanted' heritages into profitable tourism products (Light, 2000; Poria, Ivanov, & Webster, 2014).

Contrary to the situation in CEE, most red tourists in China are domestic. As one outcome of a nationwide education campaign about how to preserve the progressive nature of the Chinese Communist Party in 2003, the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) began to develop and promote 'Red Tourism' (Gu, Ryan, & Zhang, 2007). The first National Red Tourism Development Plan (NRTDP) was launched by the central government in 2004, and tremendous market growth has occurred since then (Li & Hu, 2008). Differing from communist heritage-based tourism in CEE, which is driven primarily by the free market and external demand by Western Europeans, China's so-called 'red tourism' is heavily driven by the Chinese central government. The National Red Tourism Coordination Executive Team (NRTCET) delineated 12 major red tourism regions with distinctive themes, 30

recommended routes, and 100 key red tourism sites (the National Red Tourism Coordination Executive Team, NRTCET, 2008). The NRTCET also offers support for red tourism development, such as special government funding for infrastructure development. As well, the central government has employed various strategies to boost demand, including school trips, subsidized excursions and organized workers' visits to red destinations (Yin, Zhu, & Gan, 2005), and offering considerable discounts for groups of teenagers, students, soldiers and the elderly (Caraba, 2011).

This form of communist heritage tourism is not new; it has existed since PR China was established in 1949. Distinct from traditional patriotic forms of tourism, however, red tourism (re) designed and (re)packaged communist heritage, making it more interactive, experiential and entertaining. For instance, tourists can rent or buy Red Army uniforms and hike the 'bumpy trail' at Jinggang Mountain, where Comrade Mao Zedong and Comrade Zhu De carried food on their shoulders, and thereby gain insight into life on the mountain (Gu et al., 2007). Experiencing the then harsh living conditions firsthand is much more persuasive and effective than textual or oral interpretation. Thus, red tourism is not simply a repeat of traditional patriotic tourism, but a more updated, modernized, and commercialized version that is much more customer-oriented.

A few studies on communist heritage and tourism have been undertaken in CEE and China. While in CEE, research focuses primarily on identity-building (Hall, 1999; Light, 2000, 2001; Young & Kaczmarek, 2008), heritage interpretation (Light, 2000), and the relations between tourism and communism's legacy (Light, 2001), red tourism research in China has focused largely on marketing strategies and development models (Yin et al., 2005). While the phenomenon in Europe concentrates more on the downfall of communist regimes, red tourism in China extols the virtues of the Chinese communist revolution. Despite these differences, both research streams are predominantly descriptive and speculative. With few exceptions (e.g. Poria et al., 2014), empirical research of stakeholders in communist heritage settings is lacking. To remedy this lacuna, this study emphasizes one key stakeholder, the government, to investigate its roles in red tourism at prefectural, township and village levels.

2.2. Government involvement in tourism

Although there are variations in the degrees and ways of government involvement in different countries, the necessity of its involvement is widely recognized. First, owing to the private sector's commercial attributes, conflicts abound between short-term benefits and long-term objectives (Jenkins & Henry, 1982). The tendency of tourism to overproduce external costs and underproduce benefits sometimes obliges governments to take responsibility for controlling and monitoring the scope and pace of tourism development (Bramwell & Alletorp, 2001). In addition, tourism is a highly fragmented sector with political, economic and social facets, where various organizations get involved, and issues and conflicts emerge and intertwine (Qin, Wall, & Liu, 2011). As the administrative entity with the legislative power and mandate to represent the broader interests of society, governments have the legitimacy and capacity to facilitate and coordinate multiple stakeholders to minimize negative impacts and lay the groundwork and enable macro-environmental conditions for development (Bramwell, 2011; Ruhanen, 2013).

Since government involvement in tourism is amorphous and can permeate many aspects of society, from deliberate legislative control to benign neglect (Choy, 1993; Elliott, 1987), this study explores the major roles that the government plays in red tourism development. The government's initial roles in tourism are

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7422274>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7422274>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)