

The Development of Tourism Industry and Its Impact to Dali Erhai Lake Region

Wei YANG, Sukanya Aimimtham Chuanchen BI

Abstract: Tourism, been regarded as one the most useful vehicle for the enhancing the local economic development worldwide. China, especially after President Xi announced the precision poverty alleviation policy in 2013, the contribution from tourism is outstanding. Tourism in Dali Erhai lake region, has been operated for over 40 years, however, from 2016, the tourism development has been decreased till now. This paper focus on the development of tourism industry, and its impact, especially why under national precision poverty alleviation policy, this area tourism development has been decreased. Specifically, this paper divided into three themes based on the focused topic. The first theme overviews the tourism development in China, and Dali Erhai lake. The second theme applied participatory observation, semi-structure interview and focus group technic to explore the impact, especially the impact from tourism policy towards Dai Erhai lake. The last theme for this paper offers the academic discussion for balancing the tourism development and environment conservation by using tourism policy

Key words: Tourism policy, Impact, Natural Based Tourism Destination, Ehai lake

I. INTRODUCTION

From the 1950s, with the rapid growth of the global economy, the world's tourism industry moved into a rapid period of growth. In 2013, based on the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the world tourism industry amounted to 1.087 billion tourists, with international tourism generating around US\$1.4 trillion in export earnings. The report of UNWTO indicated the tourism industry to be a large industrial sector maintaining rapid growth. UNWTO also predicted that the number of international tourists would be increased by 4%-5% over the next few years. Tourism development was also highlighted in China, with the 'open door' policy put in place by the Chinese central government, tourism in China achieved restructuring and development from being a 'tourism-resourced country' into an 'ASIAN-power in tourism'. According to the National Tourism Bureau's database in 2018, the number of inbound tourists and inbound tourism earnings for mainland China were both ranked at No.3 in the world.

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UNWTO has predicted that by the year 2020, China will have become the top tourist receiving country and the fourth highest tourist exporting country in the world. Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture (the paper will use 'Dali') is a world-class tourism destination, which is rich in both natural and cultural tourism resources and annually attracted 47.11 million tourists. Domestic tourism earnings amounted to around 79.5 billion Yuan 1(2018). Tourism development in Dali began in the late 1950s, while mass tourism appeared in the 2000s. Generally, when tourists visit Dali, they mainly focus on the ancient town of Dali, some high-level tourism attractions and also the Erhai Lake region. However, for the Erhai Lake region, during late 2016, both the increase in the rate of tourist numbers and the level of tourism income decreased. In order to stimulate tourism development in Dali and the Erhai Lake region, both the Provincial government and the Dali government announced policies to increase tourism development. In order to have a better understanding of the tourism industry in Dali, this paper attempts to explore the development of tourism in Dali, especially the Erhai lake region, and to identify the impact of tourism.

II. METHODOLOGY

Systematic literature review, secondary data collection and semi-structured interview were applied in order to achieve the research objectives mentioned above.

The secondary data mainly concerns annual tourism reports, governmental yearly reports, policy manuals, procedure statements, previous tourism planning and tourism reports from tourism associations at both local and provincial levels. The information collected from different sources were analyzed by documentary analysis methods for a better understanding of tourism in Dali, especially the Erhai Lake region.

III. RESULTS

A. Tourism industry in Dali

Dali is located in the north-west part of Yunnan province, in between Kunming and Shangri-La. Due to the perfect location of Dali, Dali also becomes the must visit place for the tourists who wishes to visit Lijiang and Shangri-La. Moreover, Dali is also known as the important port for the 'Tea-horse trading' facing South Asia. Dali is rich of both cultural resources and natural resources. Based on this situation, Dali government

<http://www.dali.gov.cn/dlrmzf/c101526/201902/18825769fa934ac5b4852ea4211ad1f.shtml>



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set tourism as their strategic pillar industry to be focused. In 2018, the tourism industry contributed 42.2% towards local GDP (Dali Tourism Administration). Based on this steady growth, local government has been largely characterized and recognized its development policies and heavy promotional campaigns and strategies to promote domestic and international tourism as a major source of foreign exchange earnings, employment, opportunities, and protect both natural resources and unique cultural resources; this industry is particularly benefit for the lower income groups, and rural community. Tourism sector is the attractive characteristic in Dali, also the 'name card' of it. Whether its success or not, it will directly affect the general development in Dali. Based on the literature review of previous researches, in recent years, the tourism flows in China mainly focus on the unpolluted nature environment, countryside, farm land, rural life and ethnic cultural scenery. Dali as the first group of tourism destinations in mainland China, with the unpolluted air quality, richness of aboriginal cultural, beautiful rainforest and border life, and variety of culture resources attracted 47.11 million tourists, with the domestic earnings around 79.5 billion(2018). With the development of tourism, Dali becomes one of the most popular tourism destinations nation-wide, also attract the tourists from neighboring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong SAR. The increasing of the tourists and earnings will contribute towards the local GDP, increasing the local infrastructure and improve the quality of life.

B. Tourism Resources

As indicated above, Dali is famous for the Bai ethnic cultural, Erhai lake, Buddhism pagoda, tea culture. With such a unique tourism resources in Dali, over 24 high-level tourism spots located in this area. Moreover, the tourists' interests in China mainly focus on the unpolluted nature environment, countryside, farmland, rural life and ethnic cultural scenery. Tourists who come to visit Dali mainly focus on traditional way of life of different ethnic groups, historical towns, high mountain discovery, Buddhism tourism, etc.

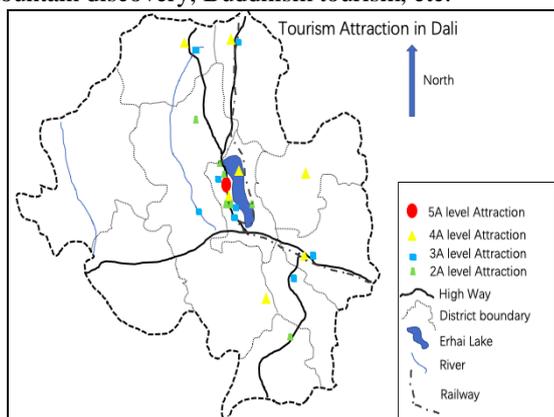


Fig 1 Tourism Attraction in Dali (created by author)

Combined with the tourists demand and current tourism spots in Dali, 2 matured tourism routes were automatically established (summarized by author).²

² Note: AAAAAA tourism spot is the top standard tourism spot in China, following by AAAA, AAA tourism spots. Those high standard tourism spots are evaluated by National tourism bureau. AA and A tourism spots could evaluate by local tourism bureau.

Dali city tourism zone: including Dali ancient town(4A), Chongsheng Pagoda (5A), butterfly spring (3A), Dali hot spring water (3A), Dali Zhang Garden (3A) Erhai Lake Region: which is natural based tourism attraction, with local fishermen tradition housing and way of life. Tourists can use cruise to explore Erhai lake, or even rent the local fishermen's boat for go sightseeing and self-drive around Erhai lake region.

C. Tourism Development Period in Dali

By reviewing the tourism development in Dali, the timeline of tourism development which started in the 1953 could be classified into four periods. (Luo, 2006; Tingbin, 2007; J. Wang, 2006)

1. 1953-1978 was the period of establishing the destination image. One famous romantic movie 'Five Golden Flowers' showed the aboriginal people lived in the butterfly spring, attracted the scholars, institutes who wanted to visit there.

2. 1978-1989 was the establishment of the tourism industry. Especially in 1982, Dali was announced as one of 24 cultural and historical city in China, attract more oversea tourist come and visit. Generally, during this period, Dali mainly received the foreign delegations while the domestic tourists, most of them are scholars from university and institutes.

3. 1990-2010 was the rapidly growth period, particularly after the 'golden week' in 1999 and the Kunming Expo, Dali entered the mass tourism period. The tourism infrastructures were built and domestic airport were upgraded for more domestic flights, the tourists specialized train was built for attract more group tour to come and visit. The local government realized the importance of tourism industry for Dali. Tourism transformed from 'foreign reception' into 'economic industry'. Tourism industry announced by the local government as the strategic sector in Dali.³

4. 2010-2015 is the new period for Dali. During this period, more and more tourist come to visit, however, they visit Dali just as 'stop over', as their goal is to visit Lijiang and Shangri-La. In the same time, tourist move their 'stop over' accommodation from Dali ancient town to Erhai lake region, as Erhai lake region offer more attractive scenario for them to explore, they could go with the local fishermen for fishing, see the sun rise or sun set. During this period, the tourist focus changed.

5. 2015-till now is the most challenging period. As more tourists come and stay nearby the Erhai lake, more and more accommodations and restaurants were built, which this process is over the environment carrying capacity. In 2015, President XI came to visit Dali Erhai lake region, he said, we need to protect Erhai lake, just like to protect our eye. As his words, impress the local government, so from 2015 till now, all the accommodations and restaurants built near Erhai lake region were blocked and re-constructed for meeting the environment

³ <http://www.xsbnly.com/xsbnly/hyhx/989.jhtml>

friendly standard. Meanwhile, the number of tourists and tourism earning has been decreased.

D. Impact of tourism in general

After the development of tourism industry in Dali for over 60 years, especially after the beginning of mass tourism in 1999 in mainland China, the impact of tourism in Dali is obviously in both positive and negative sides. Though the tourism industry has always been regarded as the light pollution industry, it encouraged the most of the third world countries to develop and brought a lot of benefit to the host destinations. Compared with the previous GDP support, the contribution of tourism earning towards GDP increased rapidly.



Fig 2 Tourism earning from 2009-2018, created by author

Based on this steady growth, the local government has been largely characterized and recognized its development policies and heavy promotional campaigns and strategies to promote domestic and international tourism as a major source of foreign exchange earnings, employment, opportunities, and to protect both natural resources and unique cultural resources. Moreover, the road accessibility is increasing and all villages could be connected by the main road.

E. Impact to Erhai Lake Region

However, when facing the impact from tourism towards Erhai lake region, due to the booming of the establishment for the accommodation and restaurants nearby the Erhai lake, the local environment was extremely been challenged. As indicated above, Dali Erhai lake region is full of nature resource and cultural resources. However, the rate of resource utilization is not completed, the environment damage is still lack of supervise. The Erhai lake is the name card in Dali. Due to the lack of environment supervise accompany with the mass tourism involved into the eco-system in the Erhai lake area, the pollution area of Erhai lake is increasing ; with the human involved into the this area, the biodiversity is also decreasing; the dirty water been pull into the late, etc.

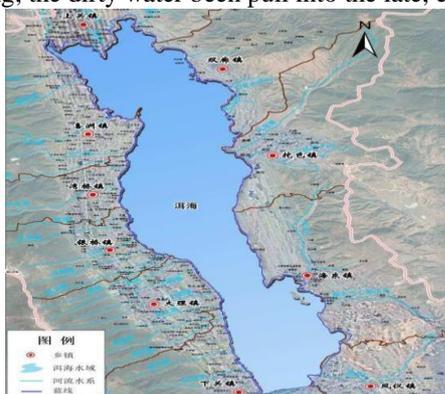


Fig 3 Map of Erhai Lake region, quote from Dali Erhai Management Bureau

Moreover, as Erhai lake is the mother lake for the Dali region, 3.56 million local residents rely mainly on it for their drinking water. If the lake is polluted, their living conditions will be challenged. After President Xi visited Erhai lake in 2015, all construction of accommodation and restaurants was cut off, regardless if the rules had been satisfied or not, for the prevention of damage to the local environment. Under the central requirement of protection, a series of measures have been taken to implement central requirements in Dali. In 2018, the construction of a pollution control project took place and a check on permits led to more than 2,000 restaurants and guesthouses being closed down. This movement seems good for preventing damage to the environment; however, some negative voices are also maintained 'we earn some benefit from the restaurant, and our restaurant has been here over 20 years, when this 'cut off' comes, we will have no income' ---- interview from local villager, male, 53 years 'we support to protect the environment, but could the 'cut off' movement care for us a little bit?' ---- interview from local villager, male, 41 years 'I come back from Shanghai (modern and big city in China), because my parents want me to handle the family business (restaurant), maybe I have to go back to Shanghai to find a part time job to earn the money for getting married' ---- interview from local villager, male, 25 years From the interviews, most of the local villagers who live nearby Erhai lake support the environment protection movement, but they are still arguing about the ways of 'Cut Off'. At the same time, some people near to the lake changed their careers, reluctantly. Since the 1970s, most of the native fish in Erhai Lake have been endangered, and the water quality of the lake has declined. In order to effectively protect the ecological environment of the water, the local government began to close the lake to fishing every six months in 2004. Cormorant fishing is not only the basic source of life for Dali people, but also the embodiment of an intangible cultural heritage. After the closing of the fishing, almost all local people have changed their career. When the tourism started blooming in the area, they changed to become local chef's in traditional houses near the lake. They were influenced by way of the "Cut Off" again. 'The customers are decreasing in this year, there are no traffic jams in this road comparing with last year. We are influenced by the "Cut Off", but I know the government want to protect the lake, I want to also. I don't worry about my restaurant, because this is my house and hometown. If the lake is not clean and beautiful, no one will come' ---- interview from local restaurant owner, male, 41 years⁴

F. Sustainable tourism development

Sustainable tourism development should be seen as an adaptive paradigm, a part of the parental concepts of development and sustainable development. It should aim at contributing to the objectives of sustainable development and development in general by determining species principles in the light of its parental concepts.

⁴ All the interview made by author on 8 of June 2019

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That is to say, sustainable tourism development should be, also accepted as all kinds of tourism developments that make a notable contribution to or, at least, do not contradict the maintenance of the principles of development in an indefinite time without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs and desires' (Tosun, 1998). In recent decades, sustainable development for the tourism industry has spread successfully in other countries, especially the developing countries such as Turkey, Thailand, Philippines, etc. (Chuanchen, Yongvanit, & Thawornwiriyastrakul, 2016). They have witnessed that the sustainable approach could increase the benefits from tourism without damaging the environment. Consideration of the resources used for the next generation could also be seen from the empirical, contemporary evidence. In China, the trend of sustainable tourism development comes with a sustainable development policy, central government has also announced that sustainable tourism development in very important. Tourism has developed for almost 60 years in Dali: the negative impacts from tourism, such as damage to the natural environment; the lack of a suitable policy to guide environmental protection is obvious, in Dali To date, sustainable tourism development theory and its dimensions are not only the theory for support of tourism development, but also for the direction in following a tourism plan or policy towards Dali and the whole of mainland China.

IV. CONCLUSION

The tourism industry is a strategic pillar industry, whether its successful or not, it will directly affect the general development in Dali. In 2016, the central and local government set a 'Cut Off' policy to prevent tourism development from damaging the Erhai lake environment. This seems to be a good way; however, the cut off policy also seems too centralized. For the academic view, we need to find a suitable way to handle the damage caused by tourism upon natural based destinations, such as the Erhai lake region. Local participation, with suitable guidelines for making policy in order to stimulate tourism development while protecting the local environment should be focused. The development of a tourism plan in accordance with the Erhai Lake area management and construction, should achieve a balance in tourism, economy and environment. Providing an effective and timely supervision mechanism can be set up by relevant institutions to provide monitoring. Clean and beautiful environment must be a made by both local government and local residents for a natural based tourist destination as an ultimate purpose of this paper.

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