Tourism Research in China
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Tourism Research in China
Themes and Issues

Songshan (Sam) Huang and Ganghua Chen
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Preface

This book provides a selective review of tourism research in China. We intend to offer our readers insights into, and fine-grained analyses of, topics which we have been researching for years and in which we can thus claim a measure of expertise. The book contributes to the sum of tourism scholarship – alongside other scholarly books on China tourism – in its unique positioning which aims to reveal the current state of tourism research in China in selected research areas. China has a distinctive research tradition and tourism researchers in China are subject to the influences of such a tradition. Researchers in China tend to apply their own institutionalised lenses and paradigmatic approaches in studying tourism and tourism-related social and economic phenomena. Although the tourism research community in China is relatively large in terms of the number of researchers, only a small number of tourism researchers in China are able to publish their research output in English in international academic journals. Most of the tourism research output produced in China is published in Chinese academic journals and thus remains inaccessible to researchers in the international research community who cannot read Chinese. There therefore exists a form of information asymmetry between tourism researchers in China and their international counterparts outside China. Whereas tourism researchers in China can mostly read and access tourism literature in English produced by the international tourism research community, the reverse is not the case. Many researchers outside China cannot easily access the tourism literature created in China in the Chinese language.

Such an issue was actually flagged in some email exchanges on the Tourism Research Information Network (TRINET), an international tourism research community listserv group managed by the School of Travel Industry Management, University of Hawaii. A few TRINET members highlighted the need to ‘dig out’ those ‘hidden gems’ of tourism scholarship in languages other than English. Unfortunately, several years passed, and not much has been done to reveal the ‘hidden gems’.
This book may lay claim to being one of the few academic attempts to reveal these ‘hidden gems’ to the international tourism research community. Considering the preponderance of China tourism in the world and the increasing importance of China tourism research for tourism scholarship, perhaps it is needed even more urgently!

There are more hot topics in relation to China tourism that warrant being covered in the book but were not. These include the outbound tourism market from China, smart technology and tourism, the impact of social media on tourism, city and urban tourism, heritage and cultural tourism, red tourism, to name just a few. We look forward to seeing these topics covered in future books of this type.

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Songshan (Sam) Huang
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1 The Landscape of Tourism Research in China: An Overview

Introduction

Tourism research in China did not start until the end of the 1970s, when tourism development was encouraged by central government policies (Zhang, 2003). Tourism research has also developed in higher education institutes in China through the establishment of tourism programmes in universities (Huang, 2001). In 1979, in order to meet the industry’s need for more specialised tourism service staff, the first tourism higher learning institute – Shanghai Tourism College – was established under the auspices of the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), marking the beginning of China tourism higher education. In the following years CNTA collaborated with eight universities (e.g. Nankai University, Sun Yat-sen University, Northwest University and Hangzhou University) across the country to set up tourism undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes (Huang, 2001). With over 30 years of development, China’s tourism higher education has developed on a significant scale. According to the CNTA (2014), by the end of 2013 there were 544 universities providing tourism undergraduate degree (BA or equivalent) programmes and around 194,200 students enrolled in these programmes. At postgraduate level, there were 4300 students enrolled in postgraduate research masters (coursework plus thesis component) programmes and 800 enrolled in tourism-related PhD programmes. In addition, a total of 1067 universities had tertiary tourism diploma or associate degree (2–3 years) programmes with an enrolment of around 366,800 students in 2013 (CNTA, 2014). According to the China Tourism Education Association
(2012), by the end of 2011 there were at least 1100 supervisors for masters students and about 90 supervisors for doctoral students in tourism programmes. In China only qualified researchers (usually at associate professor and professor levels) can supervise masters or doctoral students (Bao et al., 2014), so the masters and doctoral student supervisors may provide a good representation for the number of active researchers on the faculties of Chinese universities.

Tourism higher education on this massive scale provides the basis for tourism research in China; however, as noted by some scholars (e.g. Zhang, 2003), tourism research has also been rendered by multiple institutions, and agencies and universities are just one of the many types of institutions involved in tourism research in China. Apart from some occasional papers and book chapters introducing and describing the terrain of tourism research in China (e.g. Bao et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2010; Huang & Hsu, 2008; Ryan & Huang, 2013b; Zhang, 2003) to researchers outside China, especially those who cannot access the Chinese literature, the overall picture of tourism research in China remains blurred. This chapter provides an overview of China’s tourism research. In so doing, the chapter also serves to provide fine-grained background information for readers to better understand the various issues covered in other chapters. Issues reviewed in this chapter include researchers, research institutions in China, tourism research themes and topics in China, methods and methodology. At the end of the introductory chapter, we also provide a brief preview of the chapters that follow.

Tourism Researchers in China

Tourism researchers in China are based in different types of institutions. Zhang (2003) classified the institutions and organisations involved in tourism research into the following six categories:

- government agencies;
- government-funded research institutes;
- universities;
- non-governmental organisations (mainly industry associations);
- industry (enterprises); and
- international organisations.

Among these different types of organisations, government bodies, government-funded research institutes and universities are believed to provide more academic research than the other three types of organisations and accordingly host more active researchers. The CNTA is the central
government agency in charge of tourism in China. The CNTA formulates tourism policies and oversees the implementation of tourism polices in China. It also takes responsibility for promoting China’s destination image among international tourist source markets, organising and implementing industry training and personnel certification. In its internal organisational structure, the CNTA has a department of policy and regulation and this department is closely engaged in tourism policy research at the national level. At the provincial and sub-provincial levels, tourism administrative bodies are commonly established as the government agencies taking charge of tourism development issues. Officers from the CNTA and provincial tourism administrations are expected to publish research, mostly in the form of opinion pieces, in publication outlets such as the China Tourism News, an official tourism industry newspaper affiliated to the CNTA itself. In the early 1990s many CNTA and provincial tourism officials published articles in the leading tourism research journal of the time, Tourism Tribune, and proved themselves to be a significant cohort of authors influencing tourism research in China (Huang & Hsu, 2008). Tourism officials mainly write articles based on the intellectual work they undertake in association with their office roles, addressing practical industry management and development issues. They rarely refer to research done by university-based researchers and the articles authored by government officials are heavily influenced by mainstream political and policy discourses.

In the government-funded research institutes, tourism research is undertaken at both the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), China’s national research institutes specialising in the social sciences and the natural sciences, respectively. In 2000 CASS set up a tourism research centre under its Institute of Finance and Trade Economics (now the National Academy of Economic Strategy, CASS), in response to the central government’s call to make tourism a pillar industry in the national economy (Zhang, 2003). The tourism research centre (also the Research Division for Tourism and Leisure) at CASS hosts a number of full-time researchers and receives funding from a private industry group to conduct independent tourism research (Zhang, 2003). Other CASS-affiliated institutes include the Institutes of Economics, Rural Development, Urban Development, History and Sociology, which also host researchers undertaking tourism-related studies (Zhang, 2003).

As most of the tourism resources are nature-based, CAS undertook many tourism planning projects in the early days of tourism development in the 1980s and 1990s. Accordingly, a substantial amount of tourism research output was produced by CAS, mostly through its Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research (Huang & Hsu, 2008; Zhang, 2003).
In June 2008 the CNTA set up its specialised research arm, the China Tourism Academy (CTA). As a statutory research agency directly affiliated to the CNTA, the CTA has four research institutes, namely the Institutes of Tourism Policy and Strategy Studies, the Institute of Tourism Industry and Enterprise Development, the Institute of Regional Tourism Planning and Development, the Institute of International Tourism Development, plus a number of collaborative research centres with some universities (see http://www.ctaweb.org). It currently employs around 30 full-time researchers who hold PhD degrees in relevant disciplines such as management, economics, geography or ethnology.

It should be noted that researchers at government-funded research institutes like CASS, CAS and CTA carry out their full-time work as research fellows on a different basis. Unlike university-based researchers, they don’t undertake teaching as a normal part of work except for supervising research students. On the other hand, as these research institutes receive government funding, the research activities undertaken by their researchers are determined by government research concerns and are directed by government policy research agendas. As a result, researchers based in government-funded research institutes are less independent in selecting their research topics and activities than university-based researchers.

Researchers in Chinese universities are the major constituents of the tourism research community in China. These researchers seem to be more institutionalised in the Chinese higher education system than those researchers stationed in government agencies and government-funded research institutes. To most of them, teaching is a prescribed job expectation in parallel with research. Pure research positions in Chinese universities are not common. Those who do not teach are usually senior academics who take university leadership roles or are heavily involved in administrative responsibilities.

University academics in China, especially junior academics, are not paid as well as academics in Western countries. It is not unusual to see university academics in China taking extra paid work in the industry in addition to their salary from the university. Many tourism academics would also like to take on planning projects or consultancy projects from the industry in order to subsidise their relatively low-paid jobs. Such extra work from outside the university could be a major source of income for tourism academics and some academics may become relatively wealthy through taking on such external work. In most cases, planning projects are industry-oriented and are prescribed to resolve practical development issues at a particular destination. Although some good case studies with clearly defined research problems might be published from data collected from planning projects, in reality
very few research articles are generated from tourism planning projects. Nevertheless, tourism academics in China should be acknowledged for their contribution to the development of the tourism industry in China through their involvement in regional tourism planning and the preparation of hotel benchmarking policies (Bao et al., 2014; Zhong et al., 2013).

Very few studies have been undertaken profiling tourism researchers in China. Huang and Hsu (2008), on the basis of author information from 500 research articles published in *Tourism Tribune* from 2000 to 2005, found that the number of male authors was nearly double the number of female authors, and the authors’ ages ranged from 21 to 82 with a mean of 37.8 years. Among the 604 authors, 23.5% had a doctoral degree, 22.5% were doctoral students and 30.0% were masters students at the time of publishing their articles. Of the authors, 55.5% were university faculty members, while 30.7% were students, 9.4% were government officials and 3.6% were industry practitioners. In a later study reviewing 1511 research articles published in *Tourism Tribune* and *Tourism Science* from 2000 to 2008, conducted by Hsu et al. (2010), it was found that the percentage of female researchers in the younger age groups was progressively increasing. Recently, Bao et al. (2014) explored the motivations for choosing tourism research among a small number of early-generation tourism scholars in China who started their tourism research studies in the 1980s. The reasons identified by these pioneer tourism researchers for picking tourism as their dedicated research field included both the need for teaching, faculty development and personal interests, as well as the need for an academic career. Somehow these reasons do not seem to be any different from those identified with forerunner tourism academics outside China (e.g. Pearce, 2011; Pizam, 2011).

The Research Institution (System) in China

China has a very different political establishment from that of Western countries. Certainly, researchers’ activities and behaviours tend to be institutionalised in the specific political environment. Except for a small number of scholars (e.g. Bao, 2009; Chen & Bao, 2011), very few tourism researchers in China seem to be reflective of, or even aware of, the institutional constraints they face in conducting tourism research (Huang, 2012; Ryan & Huang, 2013a).

There are many institutional factors that may affect researchers’ behaviour, including the research activities they undertake and the research topics they choose to work on. These factors include the national or provincial research funding system, university research incentives, the quality