

Residents' Social Relationships in Everyday Life in a Tourism Ancient Town

Hongxia Zhang
Jiangsu Normal University

Qin Su
Anhui Normal University

Yingsha Zhang
The University of Waikato

Chris Ryan
University of Waikato

Xiaoxiao Wu
Anhui Normal University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra>

Zhang, Hongxia; Su, Qin; Zhang, Yingsha; Ryan, Chris; and Wu, Xiaoxiao, "Residents' Social Relationships in Everyday Life in a Tourism Ancient Town" (2019). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 49.
https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra/2019/research_papers/49

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

Residents' Social Relationships in Everyday Life in a Tourism Ancient Town

Introduction

Tourism can have significant disruptive impacts on previously existing stable social relationships within destination communities. China's ancient towns traditionally possessed relatively stable social networks, but tourism is disrupting these as tourism developers, governmental authorities and migrant job-hunters seek opportunities, and as locally created business enterprises respond to tourism demand. This paper examines the impacts of tourism on residents' social relationships in the ancient water town of Zhouzhuang, and reports findings from a longitudinal study that has covered a period of some 16 years.

Literature Review

For several decades, the primary focus of social relationships in tourism research has been the relationship between tourists and residents (Cohen, 1984). Doxey's (1975) theory of visitor-resident irritants, Smith's (1978) paradigm of "the host and guest" and Butler's (1980) theory of tourism area life cycle provided a foundation for many such studies, including those of Bimonte & Punzo (2016) and McNaughton (2006). Recently, questions have been raised as to who are the "hosts" and "guests". Cohen and Cohen (2012) have suggested that "hosts" are frequently themselves "guests" in little-developed destinations, and equally tourism labor migrants engaged in tourist businesses may also assume the role of a host (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

Attention has also turned to the nature of relationships within the host community. It is recognized that tourism development has changed the nature of local economies in tourism destination communities (Crick, 1994). Studies have focused on the changes of the locals' family ties (Kousis, 1989) and interpersonal relationships (Yang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2013). Thus, recent work has begun to explore the tourism migrants' life status and daily interactions in tourism host communities including tourism labor migrations (McNaughton, 2006) and consumption-led tourism migrants (Haug, Dann, & Mehmetoglu, 2007).

When seeking to explain relationships between those community members engaged in tourism enterprise and those who are not, social exchange theory has, at times, been used (e.g., Chuang, 2010). Others have sought to use the framework of social network analysis (Kelliher, Reinl, Johnson, & Joppe, 2018). Thus far, however, such studies have been relatively infrequent.

To conclude, therefore, while significant research has been undertaken regarding the direct social influences of tourism development on destination communities, studies on inter-resident relationships remain few. This paper suggests that such relationships remain fundamental to any understanding of how communities respond to the disruptive impacts caused by tourism. This study selected the ancient water town of Zhouzhuang in China as the case. It aims to systematically explain the daily interaction between residents and tourists, within and between the various residents' groups, and to reveal the profound changes of the residents' life under the background of tourism development to provide an empirical basis for the sustainable development of tourism.

Methodology

Study Area

Zhouzhuang is one of the ancient towns that first developed tourism in China in the post reform period. It is located in the southeast of Suzhou, and is famous for its stone bridges, waterways, old houses and the lifestyles of the local people. However, after some 30 years the previously existing close social relationships between residents have been severely disrupted and many of the original residents have moved out. Today the ancient town has become a famous tourist destination, and in 2017 hosted an average of 14,795 tourists per day within its area of 0.47 km². In addition, a large number of migrants have been attracted to invest, work or live in Zhouzhuang. Consequently, Zhouzhuang has become a public space occupied by tourists and various resident groups. How these varying social groups interact with and between each other is the subject of this study.

Data Collection

The research team has tracked and researched the tourism development of Zhouzhuang for sixteen years from 2002. The accumulated data collected over that period was, in 2015, complemented by a process of interviews with 148 residents (50 of whom were locals and 98 were migrants) pertaining to their daily life and relationships with fellow residents and tourists. On this basis, the fieldwork included two steps. First, governmental agencies were visited to collect the latest data on Zhouzhuang's tourism development (from July 21th to 30th 2015). Subsequent investigations were completed in 2016 and 2017, mainly in the forms of semi-structured interview, informal conversation, and the non-participatory observation. A total of 38 residents (27 were locals and 11 were migrants) were interviewed in depth on different occasions and the materials of everyday life, interpersonal contacts, and residents' perceptions were collected, including interview notes, audio, recordings and photos. In addition, two of the authors took an active part in a compilation group entitled "Imaging Chronicles of Zhouzhuang Ancient Town". Finally, the research team maintained contact with these key informants by telephone or instant messaging tool (WeChat) for supplementary data and verification.

Data Analysis

This study uses a qualitative, interpretive research method (Marschall, 2017) to explain the social relationships of residents in the ancient town. This method can be described as a combination of a phenomenological and empirical analytical procedure. It starts from a pragmatic perspective that all available pertinent research methods should be used to understand the research problem (Creswell, 2009).

The data analysis includes three steps. First, residents were classified as locals and migrants, tourism and non-tourism practitioners. All the recordings were transcribed and coded thematically based on the residents' classification according to the research questions. Second, this study analyzes the relationship between residents and tourists, the relationship within and between the locals and migrants, and the relationship within and between tourism and non-tourism practitioners respectively. Multiple theories were used to explain them. Finally, a systematic framework summarizing all the mechanism behind these relationships was developed.

Results

Residents and Tourists

With tourism development, the core of Zhouzhuang's social life became a *mélange* of old residents, newer migrant residents and a large number of tourists. Among them, the locals are

mainly the elderly retired people and the young and middle-aged who are engaged in the tourism industry. Most long term locals have evidenced strong place attachment with the ancient town, but the actual number is small. For migrants, the ancient town is just a place to work or live. The tourists' attachment to the ancient town is the weakest. However, the vast numbers of tourists mean they occupy much of the space in the ancient town. Usage of the physical space in the ancient town became fragmented. Most of the core area of the old water-town comprises scenic spots and tourism businesses, continually occupied by tourists and tourism practitioners in everyday life. Spatially, just a few residences are interspersed between the scenic spots. The majority of the residential areas are now located outside the ancient town.

This is consistent with Lefebvre's theory of spatial production and framework of the spatial triad. The spatial evolution in the ancient town is the production of space under the background of tourism development. In this process, the government and the Zhouzhuang Tourism Development Corporate Ltd (ZTDC) possess the main means of space production and form key representations of space, which is tourists-centered. The residents' daily behaviors and the tourists' patterns of flow through the town form the representational space. The official, authoritative departments effectively lead the spatial practice through activities such as tourism planning and policies, while residents' have a little influence on such policies.

Locals and Migrants

Within Locals

As aforementioned, the locals who remain in the ancient town are mainly seniors with a high level of place attachment, supplemented by young and middle-aged residents, engaged in the tourism industry as employees or small business enterprisers. Results reveal that because many relatives and former neighbors have exited the ancient town, past intra-community relationships become truncated. The young and middle-aged who participate in tourism development rarely communicate with former friends for they are busy with their tourism business and so lack time, and even the relationships with former friends tend to be primarily with those who, like them, have engaged in tourism.

Interpersonal relationships can be divided into strong ties and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). It was found that the social relations between locals show a decrease in strong ties and the expansion of weak ties. According to weak ties theory, interpersonal ties' strength can be measured by four criteria: the amount of communication time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services (Granovetter, 1973). Among them, the amount of communication time is the most direct measure, and it is here that the changed relationships are most evident. With tourism development, communication time within locals has significantly decreased, which leads to the gradual erosion of former strong ties. For the seniors, some original strong ties may transform into weak ties, and they also establish weak ties with the new neighbors. The young and middle-aged also generally develop a wider network of weak ties through participating in tourism development aided by internet-based social media.

Within Migrants

The migrants in Zhouzhuang mainly include new workers and their accompanying family, as well as some consumption-led tourism migrants. When responding to questions such as "How did they come to work or live in Zhouzhuang?" most said they arrived with fellow workers or

relatives. Chain and family-oriented migration (Massey, 1994) are common, and they mainly communicate within these original networks in everyday life.

The flow and adaptation of migrants in Zhouzhuang conform to the theory of niche construction derived from biological studies (Odling-Smee, 1988). In this process, migrants do not just adapt to the environment passively but change the environment to make it more suitable for them to make a living. They always offer advice to their relatives or friends who follow them thereby constructing their own “niches” of space for activities and communications. This process of niche construction for incoming relatives or families ease their adaptation to life in Zhouzhuang and extend to other new comers. However, maintaining the current “niches” has restricted their circles of contact to the original social network of friends, relatives, and fellow workers as described next.

Between Locals and Migrants

The locals and migrants in Zhouzhuang each have their own contacts for daily life. Although there is no overt conflict or antagonism between the two groups, communication between them is relatively limited. There was evidence of a deeper-level segregation between the locals and migrants.

Huang (2016), applied Bogardus’s (1933) Social Distance Scale to measure the social distance between the locals and migrants in Zhouzhuang. The result shows that the social distance can be described as being at a “medium level.” Past research has suggested that differences as to social status, economic status, and cultural background can lead to social distance between groups. Additionally, with little chance of social interaction, the perceived inequity in the distribution of tourism revenues and the migrants’ sense of marginality further widens the social distance between the different groups.

Tourism and Non-Tourism Practitioners

Within Tourism Practitioners

Tourism practitioners in Zhouzhuang include tourism operators, suppliers, distributors, organizations, merchandisers, and other stakeholders. Cooperation and competition form the basis of tourism practitioners’ daily interactions. Cooperation includes that between government, ZTDC and small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs), the vertical cooperation in the industrial chain, and the horizontal cooperation among the SMTEs. Such cooperation is dominated by the government. Most other co-operative partnerships are based on the practitioners’ networks of relatives or friends. Competition is primarily reflected in the contest for the customers among the enterprises, while other conflicts appear between the government staff, the ZTDC and business operators.

All these together constitute a tourism business ecosystem for Zhouzhuang (Moore, 1993). In this system, tourism entities compete or cooperate with each other to grow sales and survive, creating a dynamic network relationship following the evolutionism like a biological ecosystem (Moore, 1993).

Within Non-Tourism Practitioners

The non-tourism practitioners in Zhouzhuang mainly include the retired locals, those residents working in non-tourism enterprises or institutions and some tourism consumption-led migrants. There are also some migrants’ accompanying parents. The interviews indicate that most are

living separately and share the space of ancient town with tourists based on temporal patterns where many within this group avoid sharing spaces with the tourists as and when they wish. They frequently communicate within subgroups but remain segregated between subgroups.

According to the theory of social group segregation theory (Schwab, 1992), there are three kinds of social segregation: ecological segregation, voluntary segregation, and involuntary segregation. In Zhouzhuang, voluntary segregation exists for the consumption-led tourism migrants who have the means as to when to, or not, relate to others. Involuntary segregation exists for family members such as parents of newcomers may have a limited choice to determine their relationships with others because of differences of culture and language (Schwab, 1992).

Between Tourism and Non-Tourism Practitioners

Tourism and non-tourism practitioners undertake different functions in the process of tourism development and have different demands and expectations for the limited physical space in the ancient town and have little direct contact in everyday life other than spatial proximity.

According to social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), tourism practitioners have gained additional income by engaging in tourism and thus most indicate little dissatisfaction when tourists intrude on their limited living and leisure space. Non-tourism practitioners, on the other hand, have received few benefits in the exchange, but instead, are faced with rising prices and more noise and space compression. Hence, they tend to express dissatisfaction with the impacts of tourism. This perception of unfairness in ways in which the benefits of tourism incomes are distributed forms a barrier and some non-tourism practitioners feel alienated from the other actors in the town.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study uses several theories to examine the relationship of residents in an ancient town from the perspective of daily interactions. Using Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and spatial triad, it is apparent that government authorities and agencies dictate the representation of space in which tourist demands are met, while the residents are in the weak position. This is also the basis of the relationships among the various resident groups. Weak ties theory is used to explain the relationship among the locals and shows that most locals' networks of strong ties have shrunk and the weak ties networks have expanded. The migrants mainly come to Zhouzhuang through business or family migration, and it is these business or family networks that shape their daily communication networks in the ancient town. The theory of niche construction is of great significance in explaining this situation. Using the theory of social distance to explain the daily interaction between locals and migrants, evidence exists of a middle level of social distance between the two primary groups. The levels of competition, cooperation, and conflict in Zhouzhuang tourism business ecosystem shape daily communications between tourism practitioners. The theory of social group segregation is used to explain the daily interaction within the non-tourism practitioners. Voluntary segregation and involuntary segregation exist between subgroups. Social exchange theory has been used to illustrate the relations between tourism practitioners and non-tourism practitioners. These patterns of interaction and segregation are illustrated in a *Theoretical Framework of Residents' Social Relationship in Everyday Life in a Tourism Ancient Town*, where each resident group occupies a specific differential communication zone despite spatial proximity.

This study provides insight into understanding relationships among those occupying a tourism space. The results indicate that all have gradually formed their inherent daily life routines and communication spaces through continuous competition and consultation in the process of tourism development in Zhouzhuang. These patterns illustrate typical partitioning and time-sharing in space occupation by the various actors. Although all are working, living and interacting in the same space, the resident groups are broadly isolated from each other in daily life. On the surface, economic contracts with commercial interests have played a core role in the people's daily interactions in Zhouzhuang. In fact, most economic ties are still established based on consanguineous and geographical relationships. This accords with the characteristics of Chinese people's relationships that consanguineous ties are the foundation of all other relations.

References

- Bimonte, S., & Punzo, L. F. (2016). Tourist development and host–guest interaction: An economic exchange theory. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 58, 128-139.
- Bogardus, E. S. (1933). A social distance scale. *Sociology & Social Research*, 17, 265-271.
- Butler, R. W. (1980). The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: implications for management of resources. *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 24(1), 5-12.
- Chuang, S.-T. (2010). Rural tourism: Perspectives from social exchange theory. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 38(10), 1313.
- Cohen, E. (1984). The sociology of tourism: Approaches, issues, and findings. *Annual review of sociology*, 10(1), 373-392.
- Cohen, E., & Cohen, S. A. (2012). Current sociological theories and issues in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(4), 2177-2202.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.
- Crick, M. (1994). *Resplendent sites, discordant voices: Sri Lankans and international tourism*. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Douglas S. Massey, J. A., Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, J. Edward Taylor. (1994). An evaluation of international migration theory: The North American case. *Population and Development Review*, 20(4), 699-751.
- Doxey, G. V. (1975). A causation theory of visitor-resident irritants: Methodology and research inferences. Paper presented at the Travel and tourism research associations sixth annual conference proceedings.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380.
- Gustafson, P. (2002). Tourism and seasonal retirement migration. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(4), 899-918.
- Haug, B., Dann, G. M., & Mehmetoglu, M. (2007). Little Norway in Spain: From tourism to migration. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(1), 202-222.

- Homans, G. C. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(6), 597-606.
- Huang, C. (2016). A Study on social network, distance and integration of residents of ancient town tourist destination: A case study in ZhouZhuang. Anhui Normal University.
- Huang, Y. H., & Stewart, W. P. (1996). Rural tourism development: Shifting basis of community solidarity. *Journal of Travel Research*, 34(4), 26-31.
- Kelliher, F., Reinl, L., Johnson, T. G., & Joppe, M. (2018). The role of trust in building rural tourism micro firm network engagement: A multi-case study. *Tourism Management*, 68, 1-12.
- Kousis, M. (1989). Tourism and the family in a rural Cretan community. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 16(3), 318-332.
- Marschall, S. (2017). Transnational migrant home visits as identity practice: The case of African migrants in South Africa. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 63, 140-150.
- McNaughton, D. (2006). The “host” as uninvited “guest”: Hospitality, violence and tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(3), 645-665.
- Moore, J. F. (1993). Predators and prey: A new ecology of competition. *Harvard business review*, 71(3), 75-86.
- Odling-Smee, F. (Ed.) (1988). *Niche-constructing phenotypes*. Cambridge, MA, US: The MIT Press.
- Schwab, W. A. (1992). *The sociology of cities*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Smith, V. L. (1978). *Hosts and guests: The anthropology of tourism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Yang, J., Ryan, C., & Zhang, L. (2013). Social conflict in communities impacted by tourism. *Tourism Management*, 35, 82-93.

Acknowledgements

This study is funded by the Philosophy and Social Science Research Program in Colleges and Universities of Jiangsu Education Department (Grant No: 2015SJB403) and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No: 41701147).