

SUMMARY

This study aimed to explore the nature of conflict and the logic of peasant resistance over tourism in rural China. To understand conflict in tourism, three questions concerning “what, who, and why” were investigated. What issues cause conflict? Who are the parties to the conflict? Why does conflict happen? The logic of peasant resistance was investigated through two questions: what strategies do local peasants choose in resisting tourism, and what is the logic behind their choice? To answer these questions, a case-oriented qualitative comparative method was adopted in this study. Four tourist villages with different features were selected.

The findings illustrate that local government is the most important conflicting party with local peasants. Major issues include land expropriation, house demolition, house building, tourism management rights, ticket revenue distribution, vending rights, village elections, and entry restrictions. Among these, conflicts over house-building, ticket revenue distribution, and vending rights are particularly common and severe.

From the perspective of the peasants, infringement of their basic rights and interests, their economic motivation, and unfair treatment are the three main causes for conflict. Besides contractual thinking, comparative thinking among peasants plays an important role in the process of conflict. These two ways of thinking result in contractual deprivation, relative deprivation, and opportunity deprivation, all of which serve to trigger peasants’ anger and contribute to conflict.

A new classification was adopted to analyze peasant resistance which was divided into public-power resistance and self-help resistance. Petitioning is a common resistance form used by peasants though it often does not work, followed by traffic blockades in which women and old people sometimes stand at the forefront of conflict.

Lawsuits are rarely adopted due to a number of reasons, such as limited legal knowledge and a perceived lack of judicial independence in the courts. The emergence of peasant activists/leaders makes collective resistance happen relatively frequently but it does not mean that their resistance is illegal necessarily. Based on comparisons, this study also found that ethnicity is not strongly connected with the conflicts in an ethnic minority village. Finally, models were built based on the findings. All these activities contribute to peasant resistance theory. In practice, the results of the study discussed in this dissertation may urge higher authorities to issue constructive policies. Also, it may enlighten the UNESCO and be promoted as a way for that organization to perfect its property evaluation criteria.

Keywords: Conflict, resistance, peasants, tourism, thinking, deprivation, ethnicity, China

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore the nature of conflict and the logic of peasant resistance over tourism in rural China¹. This first chapter briefly describes the research background related to the impact of tourism on local communities. Then, the research objectives of this study are set out in section 1.3, where five research questions involving “what”, “who”, “why”, and “how” are presented, followed by the justification for this study. The research methods employed to fulfill the research objectives and answer the research questions of this study are discussed in section 1.5. The chapter ends with the structure of this dissertation.

1.2 Research Background

Tourism is regarded as the biggest industry in the world in the 21st century. This industry plays an important role in promoting economic development and creating jobs, and is even viewed as a pillar industry in national or regional economies. In addition to the positive economic impact on local people, tourism is credited for its favorable impacts on society, culture, and environment. Specifically, it can improve infrastructure (Bramwell, 2003), promote the appreciation and preservation of culture (Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002), and optimize environmental appearance and extend environmental awareness (Wall & Mathieson, 2006, p. 162).

¹ “Peasant” in this dissertation refers to rural residents, which is a legal category of Chinese people. In Chinese, it is called “nongmin”.

Besides these positive effects, tourism can also generate negative consequences in local communities, including economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts. There is a large body of literature on this topic. For instance, it can cause local price rises (Látková & Vogt, 2012), increased crime (Fujii & Mak, 1980; I. Kelly, 1993), traffic congestion (Saenz-de-Miera & Rosselló, 2012), parking problems (Lindberg & Johnson, 1997a), an increase in prostitution (Hesse & Tutenges, 2011), the degradation of traditional culture (Barker, Putra, & Wiranatha, 2006), and environmental pollution (Campbell et al., 2016).

Though many studies relating to tourism's negative effects have been conducted, as Leung, Li, Fong, Law, and Lo show in their study (2014), there is hardly any literature focusing on the conflict and resistance triggered by tourism development between local people and other parties: in particular, physical and serious conflict involving a large number of people. J. J. Yang, Ryan, and Zhang (2013, pp. 83-84) argue that social conflict has received attention from a variety of disciplines but conflict in tourism destinations has not been systematically investigated by tourism scholars. Though some scholars mention conflict when investigating tourism's impacts, it is not their research focus (e.g., X. M. Zhang, 2006). Furthermore, rural unrest is a sensitive topic in China and fieldwork is full of complications (O'Brien & Li, 2006), which leads to less research on this topic. This is a significant research gap and this study tries to explore it.

1.3 Research Objectives

The chief principle in developing tourism should be to use it to benefit local people and enhance the preservation and conservation of tourism resources. Conflict, particularly between local peasants and other parties, can destroy a harmonious tourism environment and affect tourism's sustainable development. Therefore, it is necessary to

understand this situation by undertaking relevant research. This study therefore sought to investigate the nature of conflict and the logic of peasant resistance toward tourism development in rural China. More specifically, the research objectives were:

- To identify the major issues leading to conflict and clarify possible connections among them;
- To identify the conflicting parties and the roles they play in conflict;
- To investigate the causes of conflict;
- To identify peasants' strategies in resistance;
- To explore the causes behind the choice of resistance strategies;

To achieve the above research objectives, five research questions were proposed:

- (1) What issues cause conflict and are there any commonalities/connections among them?
- (2) Who are the major parties in the conflicts and what roles do they play?
- (3) Why does conflict happen?
- (4) What strategies do local peasants choose to defend their rights and interests?
- (5) How do they choose these resistance strategies?

1.4 Justification for the Study

1.4.1 Practical necessity and importance of this study

There have been constant media reports on conflict concerning local peasants in scenic spots (areas) of China over the past years, and some of these conflicts were full of violence.

In 2000, a series of conflicts happened in Hongcun Village and Xidi Village, two world cultural heritage sites in Anhui Province. The conflict was between local villagers and other parties, such as local government and tourism companies. Tourists were blocked and expelled by local villagers; old houses were left to deteriorate without maintenance; and fights between local peasants and tourism companies often happened (Zhai, 2002). To defend their rights and interests, local villagers lodged complaints with higher authorities and filed a claim against local government in the courts (X. M. Zhang, 2006). In 2008, Fujian *Tulou* was inscribed on the list of world cultural heritage. Since then, there have been conflicts according to Qu (2011) and X. L. Chen (2011). For example, the telephone lines of a tourism company were destroyed; local people were beaten; the village entrance or *tulou* was blocked, and tourists were stopped from visiting by local people; and a security booth was burned. Similarly, hundreds of local villagers living in Mount Emei Scenic Area, a mixed cultural and natural heritage site, blocked traffic to the mountain and did not allow tourists to enter in 2014 (S. L. Zhang, 2014).

Conflict between local people and other parties not only happened at world heritage sites but also occurred in ordinary tourist villages. To express their dissatisfaction with local government and a tourism company, villagers in Baishuiyang scenic spot protested by begging along the street in 2009 (X. W. Zhou & Lu, 2009). In Likeng Village, Wangkou Village, and Jiangwan Village of Jiangxi Province, physical conflict broke out and entrances were blocked (H. L. Wang, 2011; P. G. Wang & Qin, 2011). In 2015, a riot broke out in Zhaoxing Village of Guizhou Province, an ethnic minority village. After a series of conflicts, some people said with sadness that their life would be better without tourism (X. L. Chen, 2011).

From the above events, we find that: firstly, conflict happens both at world heritage sites and in ordinary tourist villages; secondly, this phenomenon has lasted for almost twenty years; thirdly, conflict is not limited in one area but appears in many provinces

of China, involving both ethnic majority and ethnic minority areas; fourthly, some of them are serious and full of violence, such as damage to facilities and people; and lastly, it may repeat at the same site.

As of 2017, 51 properties in Mainland China were inscribed on the list of world heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Most of these have been developed into famous scenic spots (areas), among which some sites are inhabited by villagers, such as Fujian *Tulou*, Hongcun, and Mount Wuyi. Furthermore, there are thousands of tourist villages in China. Tourism is often regarded as an important tool for alleviating poverty. For China's policymakers this is the case and a series of government documents has been issued to promote its development in rural areas, such as the *Notice on the Action Program of Rural Pro-poor Tourism Project* (No.: Lüfa [2016] 121)² issued jointly by ten ministerial departments and two banks. Local people's attitudes toward tourism are an important element if a community wants to achieve sustainable tourism development (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009; Látková & Vogt, 2012; Lepp, 2007). The prevalence and continuousness of conflict will affect the achievement of poverty reduction and may also cause damage to important heritage. Therefore, it is necessary to give much attention to this phenomenon. The findings of this study shed light on this complicated phenomenon, help to reduce conflict, and enhance sound tourism development in practice. In addition, the findings of this study may give some enlightenment to the UNESCO in terms of its property evaluation criteria.

1.4.2 Theoretical contributions

² The full text of this notice is available on the website of http://www.cnta.gov.cn/zwgk/tzggnew/201609/t20160929_785056.shtml

This study contributes to tourism research by constructing a clear framework for understanding the conflict process and peasant resistance in tourism development in rural China, filling the gap relating to the lack of understanding of the conflict phenomenon. In addition, this study contributes to other areas of study, such as sociology and political science. As mentioned in the background section, rural unrest has been a sensitive topic in China, and relevant research in this field is still small. Based on the context of rural China, O'Brien and Li (2006) proposed the theory of rightful resistance, which helps to advance the understanding of peasant resistance in rural China, but several issues remain. The findings of this study contribute to the theory of peasant resistance.

1.5 Research Methodology

An approach using case-oriented qualitative comparative research was adopted in this study.

From the conflict events reported by the media, we know its prevalence in China. To have a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, four tourist villages were selected, including one main and three supplemental cases. The selection rationale included four criteria: both world heritage and non-world heritage sites should be included; they should be located in different provinces; both ethnic minority and non-ethnic minority villages should be covered; and conflict happened at these sites.

Both primary data and secondary data were collected in this study. In terms of primary data collection, two approaches were used: unstructured interviews and participant observation. Unstructured interview is a category of qualitative research methods (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), and is used as the main method of data collection in this study. Klenke (2016) notes that this approach is appropriate to probe more

complicated issues and sensitive information. Two rounds of field study were conducted, and a total of 61 people were formally interviewed. Participant observation is also a fundamental and important method for qualitative studies (Bryman, 2008), and can enhance the interpretation of collected data (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). In this study, casual interview and observation were used. Secondary data was mainly collected through official websites of government, newspapers, magazines, TV programs, and uploaded Internet videos. Based on collected data, the main case and the supplemental cases were analyzed, then a comparison and synthesis of the analyses was conducted.

1.6 The Structure of this Study

This dissertation is composed of seven chapters (Figure 1.1). Chapter two and three are literature review discussions, which present relevant concepts, theories, and background information. Chapter two explores tourism impacts on local communities. Chapter three provides theoretical knowledge of conflict and peasant resistance. Chapter four discusses the research methodology of this study, including research methods, research scope, data collection, and data analysis. Chapters five and six analyze the main case and the three supplemental cases from the aspects of conflict issues, conflicting parties, causes of conflict, resistance strategies, and the logic of conflict strategy choice. In addition, comparisons among the four cases are given in chapter six. Chapter seven concludes this dissertation with a summary of the findings, recommendations, research contributions, research limitations, and future research directions.

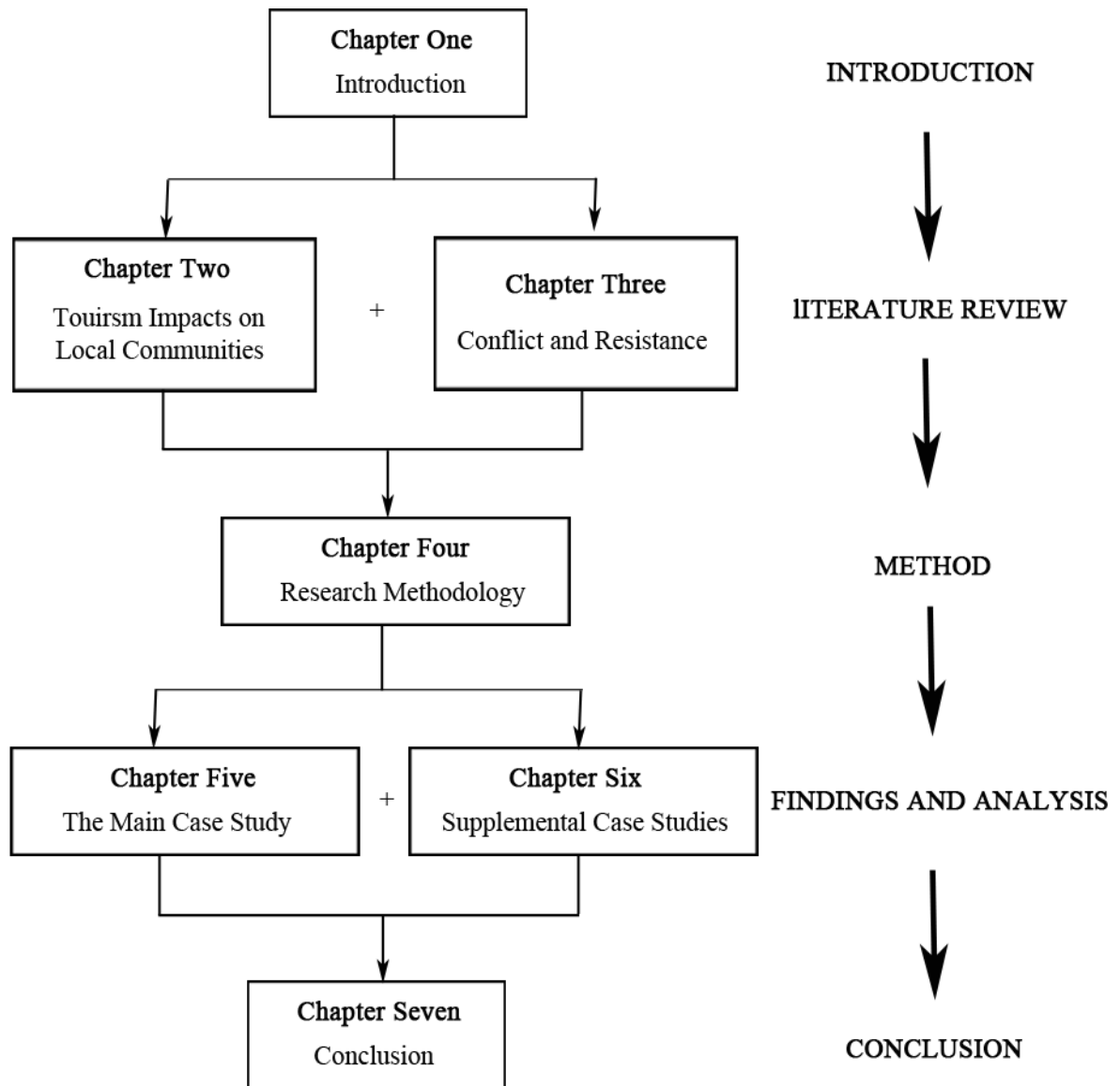


Figure 1.1 Flow chart of this dissertation

Source: the author.

1.7 Summary

This chapter gave a brief introduction to this study. The research background was presented first which described the impacts of tourism on conflict situations briefly. Then, research objectives and research questions were proposed to guide the research direction, followed by the justification for this study from both practical and theoretical

standpoints. The research methodology adopted in this study was then discussed briefly. Finally, the structure of this dissertation and the main contents of each chapter were introduced. Following this structure, chapter two provides a review of the literature on tourism impacts on local communities.

CHAPTER 2

TOURISM IMPACTS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

2.1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world in the twenty-first century. Its influence on local communities is broad and huge. It brings both positive (e.g., the creation of jobs) and negative effects (e.g., increases in living cost, prostitution and crime) to destination communities. Conflict between local people and other parties is an important composition of tourism impact. This phenomenon has often been mentioned under the domain of tourism impact by scholars. Therefore, it is necessary to review the relevant literature to have a good understanding of this research topic. Meanwhile, there are many media reports on conflict in tourism in China. A review of these reports is also necessary because it can help to create a basic understanding of conflict in China. This chapter therefore includes two sections: the first is a general overview of tourism impact on local people, reviewed from three aspects; economic impact, socio-cultural impact, and environmental impact. The second section is specific to the context of China and describes tourism conflict in rural China briefly.

CHAPTER 3 CONFLICT AND RESISTANCE

3.1 Introduction

Conflict and resistance are the two most important keywords of this study which run through the whole research process. This chapter presents an overview of literature on conflict and resistance, including concept, theory, and context. The main body consists of three sections: Section 3.2 introduces the concept of conflict and three major theoretical orientations of conflict, i.e., Marxian, Parsonian, and Coser's conflict theories; Section 3.3 involves institutional issues of conflict in rural China. To have a good understanding of major conflicts in rural China, laws concerning land, regulations on China's evaluation and promotion system for officials, and policies on China's ethnic minorities are introduced in this section; and Section 3.4 discusses relevant theories of peasant resistance, including everyday forms of peasant resistance and rightful resistance.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the research methodology employed in this study. Section 4.2 explains the choice of research methods. Section 4.3 outlines the principles used in selecting the study sites. Section 4.4 describes the data collection methods. Specific data collection procedures and tactics are also discussed in this section. Section 4.5 introduces the methods of data analysis and procedures, and the final section discusses the challenges encountered in the process of data collection.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: THE MAIN CASE STUDY

5.1 Introduction to Hongkeng Village and Fujian *Tulou*

Hongkeng Village is in Yongding County, Southwestern Fujian Province, 45 kilometers away from the county seat, Fengcheng Town. Figure 5.1 gives its specific location in China. There were 2,992 residents in 2015³, and all of them belong to the Lin patriarchal clan of the Han Chinese. Local villagers are called *Hakka people*, literally meaning “guest families”. Their ancestors were said to have moved here from what is today’s Central and Eastern China hundreds of years ago (Mogi, 1991). A small stream (Hongchuan Stream) passes through the village, along which are situated the villagers’ traditional residences in their unique construction style, *tulou* (Figure 5.2).

In this study, conflict is defined as a behavior rather than an attitude. The behavior includes disruptive protests between conflicting parties, such as traffic blockades. Non-disruptive actions such as petitions are also viewed as signs of conflict in this study. In addition, this study focuses on the conflict between local peasants and other parties, so intra-party conflict is not discussed in this study except where it can help us to understand inter-party conflict.

Since the establishment of the Yongding Tourism Administration and the involvement of local government, there have been a series of conflicts between local peasants and other parties. This chapter seeks to answer the following five research questions,

³ The population of 2015 is from a notice post on the wall of Hongkeng Village.

taking Hongkeng as the main case study. The initial answers to the five questions with a brief analysis are presented in section 5.2. To understand peasant resistance, their perception of other conflicting parties is explored in section 5.3. In-depth analysis and discussion based on the data presented in sections 5.2 and 5.3 is conducted in section 5.4 covering the following aspects: the evolution of conflict, the identification of the core conflicting party, causal analysis, and the logic of peasant resistance.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: SUPPLEMENTAL CASE STUDIES

6.1 Introduction

This chapter mainly focuses on three supplemental cases with different features: the villages of Likeng, Hongcun, and Zhaoxing. Likeng Village is a non-world heritage site in which resistance activities happen frequently according to media reports. Hongcun Village is a world cultural heritage site, and taking legal action is its typical feature that is rarely found at other sites. Zhaoxing Village, a non-world heritage site, is in an ethnic minority area, and almost all the peasants in the village are Dong people, one of China's fifty-five officially recognized minority groups. In 2015, a big riot happened in that village. This chapter aims to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the major conflict issues at these sites?
- (2) Why do resistance activities happen frequently and last relatively long in Likeng?
- (3) Why do peasants in Hongcun choose to take legal action to defend their rights and interests? Do peasants at other sites use this strategy?
- (4) Why did a riot happen in Zhaoxing?

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In rural China, tourism development is often accompanied by conflict. Some peasants even said with sadness that their life would be better without tourism (X. L. Chen, 2011). To defend their rights and interests, different forms of resistance were adopted by peasants, including violent ones. Though some scholars mentioned this phenomenon, it has not been investigated in depth. This study aims to explore this complex phenomenon in rural China. To achieve this, five research questions were raised:

- (1) What issues cause conflict and are there any commonalities/connections among them?
- (2) Who are the major parties in the conflicts and what roles do they play?
- (3) Why does conflict happen?
- (4) What strategies do local peasants choose to defend their rights and interests?
- (5) How do they choose these resistance strategies?

To answer these questions, a case-oriented comparative research method was adopted in this study. Four different cases were selected, including one major and three supplemental cases. In this study, Hongkeng in Fujian Province was selected as the main case, and Likeng in Jiangxi Province, Hongcun in Anhui Province, and Zhaoxing in Guizhou Province were selected as supplemental cases. The detailed discussion on selection rationale is in the chapter on research methodology.

Based on the detailed description and analysis on conflict phenomenon in the previous chapters, this chapter concludes this study. Firstly, the primary findings of this study are summarized. Then, the principles for recommendations and the specific recommendations themselves are provided. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical and practical contributions of this study. Subsequently, the limitations of the study are discussed. Finally, future research directions are suggested.