Is World Heritage inscription a sustainable tourism option? Evidence from China

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Abstract. Since the 1990s, China has been enthusiastic about UNESCO World Heritage application, seeing a substantial rise of the associated tourism profits. It is rather questionable, however, if world heritage inscription is a sustainable option for heritage tourism. This study investigates a specific case of UNESCO World Heritage site in China -- Fujian Tulou -- from the perspective of stakeholder collaboration. Mixed research methods, including on-site observation, in-depth interview and questionnaire survey were used to facilitate the investigation. The findings indicate that various conflicts of interest exist among stakeholder groups involved in Tulou heritage tourism development. It is found that certain institutional barriers in current China may pose challenges to effective stakeholder collaboration which is considered crucial to sustainable heritage tourism development.

Keywords: conflicts; Fujian Tulou; stakeholder collaboration; sustainable tourism; world heritage inscription

Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (hereafter UNESCO) designates “World Heritage Site” (hereafter WHS) to encourage concrete actions from world nations in preserving threatened sites and endangered species. Once inscribed as UNESCO WHS, a place ideally becomes resource “of outstanding universal value” (UNESCO, 1972, p.2), and is given a high profile of conservation status according to the “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World’s Cultural and Natural Heritage” (hereafter Convention) (Leask & Fyall, 2006; Kaltenborn, Thomassen, Wold, Linnell, & Skar, 2013). In reality, however, some developing countries have regarded World Heritage inscription as catalyst for developing tourism (Sofield & Li, 1998; Herbert, 2001; Buckey, 2004; Hall, 2006; Poria, Reichel, & Cohen, 2010). Since China signed the Convention in 1985, the country has been enthusiastic about WHS inscription (Tao, 2001; C. Zhang, 2008), especially after 1994 when cultural relics were listed as national tourism development themes (Li, Wu & Cai, 2008).
China so far has had 45 items inscribed as WHSs (UNESCO, 2013), but the entitled World Heritage status has not always been beneficial to the actual heritage sites and the associated communities. Studies suggest that excessive use and unregulated development have entrapped some WHSs in danger (Leung, 2001; Li et al., 2008; Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009; Yang, Lin, & Han, 2010). Critics (Nuryanti, 1996; Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; C. Zhang, 2008) point out that China’s “fever” about WHS inscription has complicated various conflicts of interest and plagued local communities pertaining to the specific WHSs. Besides, this “fever” has raised some serious concerns from UNESCO, with regards to the effective protection of WHSs in China. This organization urges that China should defer any new WHS applications (L. Li, 2004). Given the fact that China is in the process of transformation from a centrally-planned economy to a market economy, tourism scholars are cautious about the high-yield market of tourism development at China’s WHSs (Tao, 2001; Li, et al, 2008; Leong & du Cros, 2008; Su, 2011). This study attempts to explore potential sustainable options for developing World Heritage tourism by a case study which focuses on Tulou - a WHS in China’s Fujian Province. The aims are threefold, namely, a) to question about the feasibility of sustainable tourism development in current China; b) to examine what specific social and economic issues exist, and must be resolved, in order to achieve sustainable tourism and; c) to generate useful insights about feasible options for China’s future WHS application, as well as the associated tourism development.

**Research Conceptualization**

Substantial discussions about sustainable tourism have appeared in the world tourism literature since the early 1990s, and those discussions have led to the notion that “sustainable tourism” is open to vigorous debate (e.g. Hunter, 1995; 1997; Clarke, 1997; Hardy, Beeton, & Pearson, 2002). The term is initially referred to, by some (Purvis & Grainger, 2004; Budeanu, 2005; Weaver, 2006), as a subclass of the broader concept of “sustainable development” that first appeared in the well-known Brundtland report (1987) as a token of human’s reflection on “limitless growth” after World War II (Liu, 2003). Accordingly, sustainable tourism is accepted as tourism “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987:43). But Wall (1996) points out such a definition may render the concept a form of ideology and a political catch phrase subject to a wide range of interpretations. Further in this line of concerns, Sharpley (2000) identifies two main categories. The first is the so-called “tourism-centric” focusing on sustaining tourism activities as response to Jafari’s “knowledge-based platform” (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Harris, Griffin, & Williams, 2002; Jafari, 2009) and, evolving from the alternative of mass tourism to the goal all tourism should strive for (Clarke, 1997). The second, based on the different levels of sustainability, is referred to as an “adaptive paradigm”,
attempting to legitimize different development pathways according to different circumstances (Hunter, 1997). Being the common ideal to minimize the negative impacts while striving to maximize the positive effects, sustainable tourism is widely regarded as a desirable objective in tourism development policy and practice with indefinable and dialectical meanings to parties of specific interests (Butler, 1999; Sharpley, 2000; Lu & Nepal, 2009).

Although a universally applicable definition of sustainable tourism is unlikely to achieve, explorations have been made to seek for possible ways in which the concept could be applied in appropriate situations. For instance, both studies of Butler (1999) and Hunter (1997) suggest that some underlying principles encompassed in various definitions should be clarified instead to facilitate the operationalization of the concept. The two principles proposed by Sharpley (2000), namely futurity (“the long-term capacity for continuance”), equity (“for all members of all societies, both in the present and future”); and the principle of “sustainability trinity” (integration of economic, social and environmental benefits) favored by both Farrell (1999) and Cole (2004) are central to varies definitions. An overall manifestation of the aforementioned opinions is found in the following (WTO, 1998:21):

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Sustainable tourism is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems.

Following these principles has emerged a list of sustainability indicators including “Environmental Impact Assessment”, “Life Cycle Assessment”, and “Ecological Footprints”. Schianetz et al (2007), however, point out the limitations of those to be mainly evaluating the sociocultural, economic and environmental sustainability in tourism destinations. In other words, they focus on the status quo of destinations by addressing the issue of “sustainability trinity”, while neglecting the issues of futurity and equity. Having a holistic awareness of all these issues is crucial to achieving any feasible measures for actualizing sustainable tourism. The recognition of different interests of all stakeholders is considered a key factor to realize the equity in sustainable tourism (Hardy and Beeton, 2001). Consensus seems to have been achieved, among scholars (Weaver, 2006; Beritelli, 2011; Bramwell, 2011; Albrecht, 2013), that cooperation among stakeholders is a prerequisite for ensuring the equally important three dimensions of sustainability (sociocultural, economic and environmental) and the long-term capacity of continuance. The key issue for operationalizing sustainable tourism is, therefore, to test the applicability of this stakeholder approach in specific tourism context, such as heritage tourism.

Heritage tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism market segments since it caters to both overseas and domestic visitors (Aas, et al., 2005; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Li, et al., 2008). Heritage tourism is a type of tourism built upon what we have
Inherited. It can mean anything from a historic building, a piece of art work, to beautiful scenery (Yale, 1991, p.21). There has been much controversy over tourism development and heritage preservation (Carter & Grimwade, 1997; Leask & Fyall, 2006). This controversy seems especially evident in sites that have been entitled as World Heritage (Garrod & Fyall, 2000; Buckey, 2004; Hall, 2006; Li, et al., 2008). On one hand, the inscription of a site, a process from identification and nomination by a nation-state to evaluation and declaration of the UNESCO (Leask, 2006), not only brings with its recognized quality (Leask & Fyall, 2006), but also increases its visibility (Winter, 2010). The increased tourist visitations corresponding with such brand effects (Hall and Piggin, 2001; Huang, Tsaur, & Yang, 2012), on the other hand, pose great threats to the integrity of WHSs, which are usually of irreplaceable values (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). The co-existence of great potential for tourism profits and high demand for heritage preservation within World Heritage tourism gives rise to the necessities for implementing sustainable approaches, namely, the desirable balance between preservation and consumption (Drost, 1996; Tao, 2001). Among rich proposals for achieving sustainable world heritage tourism (Li, et al., 2008; Borges, Carbone, Bushell, & Jaeger, 2011), stakeholder collaboration, is suggested as key to effective management and sustainable development in WHSs (Boyd, 2002; Aas, et al., 2005; Hawkins, 2008; Landorf, 2009; Borges, et al., 2011; Rahman, 2013).

**Stakeholder collaboration**

Initially proposed in business management (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman & McVea, 2001), stakeholder theory has been increasingly applied to tourism planning (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; de Araujo & Bramwel, 1999; Byrd & Gustke, 2007). As is claimed, all stakeholders have their rights to participate if they have interest in an organization including tourism development process (Hardy & Beeton, 2001). So stakeholder collaboration is referred to as “a process of joint decision making among autonomous, key stakeholders of a community tourism domain to resolve planning problems of the domain and/or manage issues related to the planning and development of the domain” (Jamal & Getz 1995, p.188). Stakeholder analysis is considered a useful tool; and the approaches of it are various (Byrd, 2007; Hardy, Wickham, & Gretzel, 2013). But most agree with these four steps: “clarifying the issue or purpose; identifying the stakeholders; determining relevancy; and work with the stakeholders to accomplish the desired tasks” (Sousa, 2012, p.29). Some (Buckley, 2004; Li, 2004; Borges, et al., 2011) argue the undesirable stakeholder collaboration, or even worse its manifestation as various conflicts of interest, is the major obstacle to achieving sustainable world heritage tourism in China. The main issues to be resolved may be the associated conflicts in the process of World Heritage tourism development under China’s social and cultural context (1st step). Similar to other areas, a World Heritage tourism stakeholder model must be constructed (2nd step). The relevance of stakeholders to the issues needs to be explored. In other words, the different interests
of them should be clarified (3rd step). Finally, the roles of stakeholders, as well as their relationships, tend to be clarified with the help of some analysis techniques such as stakeholder mapping (4th step). Based on the above-listed four steps, a conceptual framework is pictured in Figure 1, which highlights five hypotheses for facilitating this research.

Figure1. The conceptual framework

Hypothesis 1 (H1) postulates that “the stakeholder collaboration can be achieved when the conflicts are solved in a World Heritage tourism site”. Hypothesis 2 (H2) addresses the fact that “the stakeholder model in World Heritage tourism is complex, adding difficulties to stakeholder collaboration”. Hypothesis 3 (H3) sees “the World Heritage status as a factor that complicates the interests of stakeholders, thus a stumbling block to stakeholder collaboration”. Hypothesis 4 (H4) expects “the current situation of stakeholder relationships can be improved to actualize collaboration”. The final hypothesis (H5) suggests “sustainable World Heritage tourism is achievable. Therefore China should not defer world heritage sites application. H1 and H5, both of which are directly positively related to H4, are interdependent. Otherwise, H2 and H3, negatively related to H1, are conducive to generating comprehensive insights into sustainable World Heritage tourism, as well as robust and cautious conclusion towards H1 and H5.
Research Location and Methods

China’s Fujian Tulou is a form of residential architecture made of raw earth. It appears in very large scale with communal and defensive functions, and locates in northern and southern parts of Fujian Province. A typical round tulou building is over 1000 square meters, of 3 to 5 stories. Of the 3000 existing tulou buildings, 46 are located in Yongding County; four in Nanjing County and; one in Hua’an County (Figure 2). They were all inscribed as WHSs on July 6, 2008. Their value can be understood from two perspectives: the material landscape, as an extraordinary example of large raw earth architecture and technology; the intangible culture core, as a testimony of Chinese tradition of clans living in compact communities, in harmony with nature (UNESCO, 2008).

Fujian Tulou is selected for study because firstly, it shows significant branding effects of World Heritage on tourism development. Secondly, tourist visitation and revenue in Tulou increased by 30.16% and 21.10% respectively in 2008 (Lin, 2012). Thirdly, the growing market benefits the local people with increasing income and better living conditions, as a typical case of poverty alleviation project (Lin, 2012). Nevertheless, the sustainability of Tulou is challenged by entanglement and conflicts of key stakeholders after the successful WHS inscription (Chen, 2009; Sun, Guo, & Lü, 2009; Meng, 2013).
Three research trips were made for investigation. A 3-day pilot study was undertaken in December 2011 to observe tourist experience and understand characteristics of Tulou tourism. It was followed by a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews to tourists and local residents. Supplementary investigations were conducted to both Nanjing and Yongding Counties in June 2013. Field study trips covered both high and low seasons with a total of 54 interviews to 8 local government officials (numbered as G1 to G8) and 21 local residents (numbered as L1 to L21). The interview topics included the process of world heritage application, the fund and objectives for cultural conservation, the local tourism exploitation process, constraints and prospects, residents’ attitudes and knowledge of Tulou culture and history. Besides, 7 scholars and planners (numbered as O1-O7) were interviewed for acquiring professional points of view. In addition, 10 domestic tourists and 10 inbound tourists (e.g. international, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan tourists, numbered as IT1-IT10) were interviewed as an extension of the questionnaires survey. The questionnaire survey lasted for a whole week, enabling the researchers to observe differences of tourist flows between weekdays and weekends. A non-probability quota sampling technique was employed to randomly target respondents by the exit and parking space. Overall, 310 samples were acquired, of which 95.8 per cent was considered valid (n=297). On-site observation was also employed for capturing a live image of local lives. Secondary data from relevant websites and government documents were collected to supplement the data sources. The survey result was analyzed by SPSS.16.0, and content analysis was applied towards the interviews, observations and secondary data.

Research Findings

Conflicts of interest arise in Tulou tourism development

Tulou tourism in Fujian originated from visitations to the well-known Hakka tulou sites in Yongding County. As dwelling buildings of Hakka people - a mass southern migrant population in Chinese historical development process - Tulou has attracted both architects and photographers since the 1960s for its unique landscape and cultural traditions. Subsequently, more typical Tulou buildings were discovered in southern Fujian, mainly referring to Nanjing County and Hua’an County. It is not until the beginning of the twenty-first century that the two regions started to recognize the market potential of Tulou. Inspired by Yongding County’s efforts to obtain the UNESCO World Heritage status for Tulou, Fujian Provincial Government decided to integrate the most outstanding buildings of the three counties, and apply for a joint nomination as World Heritage in 2000. It took 8 years to get successfully inscribed as a World Heritage item, but application process did have boosted tourism in association with Tulou. By 2012, tourism had generated 16.3% of GDP in Yongding County and is considered the county’s main future development direction. Like many
other WHSs in China, Tulou encountered a series of issues while enjoying economic growth.

The inherent contradictions between heritage protection and tourism development aggravate in WHSs. To facilitate tourism development, new roads are linked to Tulou buildings directly; public toilets and guest hotels are built inside the core heritage protection area which violates the principles of Cultural Relics Bureau and the UNESCO for heritage preservation. The joint nomination led to scrambles of different regions for the shared brand. To capture the target markets, Yongding County has claimed itself as the cradle of Tulou with an argument that “Fujian Tulou Rooted in Yongding”, while Nanjing and Hua’an counties insist that Tulou originated in southern Fujian as the historical product of Kangwo struggles during Qing Dynasty. Consequently, the image of Tulou as a regional brand is fragmented, and damaged by reports of related events such as “Fujian Tulou’s inscription as WHS induces conflicts among stakeholders” (Sun, et al., 2009). The competing development attracts visitors of short tours only. The questionnaire survey reports that 81.9% of group tourists and 48.4% of independent tourists would stay fewer than 6 hours in a part of Tulou, due to lack of differences among the three regions. The unbalanced interest distribution induced conflicts among stakeholders, especially among the community residents, the governments, and the tourism corporations. The residents are not satisfied with their share of the 8% of the ticket revenue as cash bonus at the sacrifice of their living space. In July 2011, some residents gathered to prevent tourists from entering the attractions, in order to express their discontent. The tensions hindered sustainable tourism development, and triggered other issues including visitation pressures on heritages and degradation of traditional culture. The conflicts can be ascribed to lack of coordination among key stakeholders.

*Overlapping stakeholders’ roles complicate tourism development*

Government, residents, tourists, tourism entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, mass media, scholars and planners are identified as key stakeholder groups within Tulou tourism context. China national state organization - State Cultural Relics Bureau - holds the dominant control of policies pertaining to WHS application, namely, nominating candidates to the UNESCO every year. One interviewee echoes: One government official from Beijing assured us China had never failed in WHS application before. He told us, “we trust you and do not want to see the first failure happen in Fujian”. His words really got me thinking and I had had slight insomnia issues back then [G2].

As agencies of the central government, Fujian Province and the prefectural level administrations, referred to as Longyan City (administrative city of Yongding County) and Zhangzhou City (administrative city of Nanjing and Hua’an Counties), showed their authorities in decision-making about joint nomination in the application process.
Little operational guidance, however, was offered to World Heritage tourism development after the successful inscription, except the once-and-for-all monitoring conducted by the provincial Cultural Relics Bureau. As the predominant administrations of Tulou, the three counties worked separately and set up varieties of sectors to show their high attentions paid to the WHSs. Yongding County has not only established the first county-level Cultural Relics Bureau with subsidiary institutions of townships to handle conservation related affairs, but also founded a county wide state-owned “Fujian Hakka Tulou Tourism Limited Corporation” for tourism development. By 2009, to better balance heritage preservation and tourism development, a temporary institution, named “Yongding Tourism Development Committee”, had been constituted by a series of county-level departments, including County Tourism Bureau, County Cultural and Sports Bureau, within which the subdivisions are confusing and their roles and responsibilities seem to have considerable overlaps. As for Nanjing County, “Nanjing Tulou World Heritage Application Office” has been maintained since inscription, with its duties turning to guiding and supervising the protection of heritages. Meanwhile, the “Nanjing Tulou Administration Committee”, subsided with Relics Protection, Planning and Construction, Promoting and Tourism Management Sectors, was set up. The newly founded “Nanjing County Tulou Tourism Corporation” was led by the Committee. Furthermore, a “Leading Group for Protection and Development of Nanjing Tulou” consisting of main county directors has the power to coordinate all related affairs. With only one site inscribed, Hua’an County’s administrative reform seems simpler. A “World Heritage Application Office” has been re-organized into a “Hua’an Tulou Administration Office” after designation. Its “Fujian Esselte Tulou Tourism Development Limited Corporation” was brought in to manage the tourism business. Although the governments have intended to better promote tourism by setting up sectors of different functions, it turns out the varied bureaucratic structures and the overlapping roles are complicating the existing difficulties to daily management of Tulou. One interviewee complains:

Seeing increasing business opportunities in Tulou scenic area, residents start to build new houses and stores inside the protected area. This violates rules of heritage conservation. It is not clear, however, who should act to stop the violations. Should County Cultural Relics Bureau have the rights to tear down the squatter settlements? If this were considered the duty of Department of Land and Urban Construction, then questions could be raised as to what specific basis, regulations or laws to follow in order to execute such a duty? [G2]

World Heritage inscription has changed the life of the local community by an unintentional division of the residents into two groups: residents inside or outside the WHSs. Such division means different economic benefits. People who live inside the inscribed buildings receive rent paid by the local governments, from 30,000 to 100,000 RMB per year for one Tulou building, and 8% ticket proceeds as share out bonus. Residents who live inside the scenic area but outside inscribed Tulou buildings only gain the share out bonus of entrance ticket proceeds while having to sacrifice
their living space for increasing tourist visitation [IT7]. The three Counties, as mentioned above, have set up their own tourism enterprises after inscription. They have provided fund supports for inviting planners - usually from urban design institutes and universities - to complete a series of tourism and heritage protection planning projects respectively in the three Counties. These planners, therefore, should be added to the stakeholder model of Tulou. Against the fact that non-government organization is absent in the tourism context of China, a different situation may be expected with regards to the WHSs. The UNESCO, as an authoritative body to design a site, offers professional insights and guidance into heritage conservation once a site is inscribed. It has no authority to intervene local sites’ heritage management but may disqualify sites WHS status through UNESCO routine examination every five years [O4]. In addition, mass media plays an important role in signifying the publicity of the UNESCO label. Tulou has gained extensive attention from the mass media, which acts as both the “propagator” and the “monitor”. News reports have not only revealed the conflicts in Tulou (Meng, 2013), but also spoken out voices of the less powerful stakeholder groups (Chen, 2011). The mass media thus helps raise public concerns about heritage conservation, and to some degree, influences decision making.

To sum up, World Heritage title, corresponding with its brand effect; has drawn attentions of different interest groups, which may help facilitate the protection of WHSs. This reality to a larger extent has made the stakeholders constitution of Tulou complex, manifesting overlapping roles and responsibilities. World Heritage inscription adds difficulties to stakeholder collaboration in managing Tulou heritage tourism, due to the even more complex stakeholder model. So Hypothesis 2 should be accepted as reasonable.

The power/interests matrix of stakeholders

To better present the stakeholders’ interests profile of Tulou tourism, the Power/Interest Matrix is adopted, which is widely used to provide suggestions for interest management in business area. World Heritage tourism, inherent with the need of preservation, is not supposed to be profits driven. Hence, the matrix is modified with the one-way interest extending to two-ways: heritage preservation and tourism benefits.
According to the interest distribution of stakeholders and the power they possess to influence the development of world heritage tourism (Figure 3), six groups of stakeholders are identified in Tulou tourism. The first refers to China national state institution: Fujian Provincial Bureau of Cultural Relics and the inbound tourists, which are highly concerned about heritage preservation, thus being able to influence Tulou tourism. The former, however, has focused mainly on WHS application process, giving macro guidance, such as the Fujian Tulou World Cultural Heritage Protection Regulation adopted in 2011 and World Cultural Heritage Fujian Tulou Master Plan launched in 2012. These documents have not yet generated significant effects due to overdue completion. As an important market that WHSs cater to, inbound tourists have shown great enthusiasm about the authentic culture of Tulou. This is reflected in the following comments:

I have never seen this! The houses are so beautiful and surrounded by tea plantation and mountains. There are chicken and ducks walking leisurely in the yard. This is THE PLACE TO BE IN CHINA!? [IT 6].

The demands of inbound tourists for exotic culture and architectures have great potential to propel the tourism development towards protection of authentic heritages in future rather than at present, as they account only for 5 percent among all the tourists at the moment. This means the most powerful groups that can assist heritage conservation have not yet shown their influence in Fujian Tulou tourism. By contrast, the second group, as the biggest beneficiaries with great power in Fujian Tulou tourism, includes the County governments and the tourism corporations. The local governments directly control all the resources and thus play the most decisive role in directing tourism development and formulating future strategies. As a subsidiary agency of the local government body, the tourism corporations in Yongding and Nanjing Counties show their profit-driven ambitions. And for Hua’an County, the shared interests in tourism benefits helped form the partnership between the government and the private enterprises which, however, is not conducive to balancing heritage preservation and tourism development, as complained by a resident and a planner:
I am not optimistic. This scenic area would not last long. The government and entrepreneurs just want to make more money. The scenic area looks like a mess and the atmosphere is foul. They do not really put efforts into long-term development. (L15)

It is a pity that the government is always so short-sighted. The main economic benefits of this site come from entrance tickets. This is harmful to the long-term development of Tulou. (O2)

The third group includes the Yongding County Bureau of Cultural Relics, the Nanjing World Heritage Office and the UNESCO. They are supporters of heritage preservation but have little power of influence. Subsided by the County governments, the two sectors in charge of heritage protection in county level have limited discursive power as the Counties are concerned more about tourism profits. What they actually can perform are renovating buildings and approving projects that the Counties have designed and proposed [G3, G4]. Furthermore, the Nanjing World Heritage Office is still a temporary institution that has limited real power, especially after the inscription (Fujian Tulou Master Plan, 2012). The UNESCO intends to preserve heritages of significant importance, while it has no power to intervene the local tourism development of WHSs.

There is a special group who seeks for both tourism profits and heritage preservation with little influence -- Local residents. They are owners of Tulou, and meanwhile the most important human capital in Tulou tourism. They will be motivated to protect and inherit their own tradition and culture if they can be involved actively and get more benefits from tourism development. So they are supposed to carry the discursive power in the decision-making process but the reality shows a rather contrary scenario. The other members of this group include scholars and tourism planners, who serve the governments in most cases. The professional insights of them to protect the heritages would give way to economic interests and ambition of the officials.

Governments are our clients. They have their own concerns and demand a lot. Some even have already pictured future development before our cooperation. Planners' work is like dancing with shackles, binding our feet. Tourism planning is a power game with a series of latent rules [O3]. Sometimes we were just technicians who put leaders'decisions together into words and models [O4].

The fifth and sixth groups refer to domestic tourists and mass media respectively. According to the questionnaire survey, 84.5% of domestic tourists come to Fujian Tulou through package tours. As the dominant market, their demands for more enjoyment with least cost on tickets and catering services, as well as least time, would guide the future tourism development directions. The influence of media on the public is increasing, while it is still under control of the Chinese nation state. Moreover, the intentions of the mass media may be more of the click rate, rather than the heritage conservation, as indicated in the content of the google news reports from 2009 to
2013, such as “Key stakeholders conflict about tourism brand of Fujian Tulou” (Chen, 2009), “Entanglement and conflicts at Fujian Tulou as a WH site” (Meng, 2013). Figure 3 illustrates that the inscription has induced more demands for tourism profits in terms of the three counties, tourism enterprises and residents, while increased concerns about heritage preservation. This complicates the interest distribution, resulting in more conflicts of interest. The imbalanced power distribution between the two-way interest groups has made it relatively ineffective for stakeholders in support of heritage conservation to voice out their concerns. Hence, a fruitful collaboration between the tourism development sectors and the heritage protection sectors is difficult to achieve, which suggests that Hypothesis 3 should be accepted as reasonable.

**Stakeholder mapping**

Both the stakeholders’ constitution and the Power/Interests Matrix serve to clarify the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. The scholars and planners, the heritage protection sectors, as well as the enterprises that act as the tourism operators, are subsided by, or interplaying with, the local governments. What actual roles they play are the mediators of the managers’ decisions. In other words, the local county governments, residents and tourists constitute the core of this tourism system, among which the governments and the tourists perform as the supplier and the demander, co-determine the direction of Fujian Tulou tourism development. Whereas the residents, as the involvers in daily tourism operations, do not enjoy the deserved discourse power and interests congruent with their ownerships of heritages. Meanwhile the three counties are competitors of each other for the shared brand and tourists market. Furthermore, the coordinator, the world heritage designer and the social monitor are worth mentioning as the secondary stakeholders, represented by the nation state institution -- Fujian Provincial government, the UNESCO and the mass media respectively (Figure 4).
The whole process of stakeholder analysis indicates the sources of conflicts that have occurred in the process of Fujian Tulou tourism development. Frist and foremost, the imbalanced distribution of power, or the lack of real power by the heritage preservation sectors, should be considered the cause of the inappropriate protection and over exploitation of the heritage resource. Then the ineffective guidance and coordination should bear the responsibilities for the malignant competitions among the three counties. Last but not least, the conflicts of interests among stakeholders are the results of the absolute discourse power of governments in the processes of the WHS application and the associated heritage tourism development.

**Conclusion: Prospect for sustainable heritage tourism**

Our investigation of Tulou heritage tourism in China indicates that various conflicts of interest exist in the development process. The findings implicate that efforts should be made for joint decision making - what Jamal and Getz (1995) postulate as the core of stakeholder collaboration, especially in the planning and management processes. With regards to the specific case of Fujian Tulou, an institution of a higher level above the three competing county governments may help effectively ease the tensions of the irrational regional competitions so that sustainable strategies can be applied
effectively in heritage tourism development. Such an institution should be constituted by authorities either from the Chinese central government or the Fujian Provincial government, or both. Unlike the Cultural Relics Bureau, it can act as a coordinator responsible for heritage protection and tourism development, as well as consultant handling daily management matters. In terms of marketing strategies, for instance, it will be able to allocate different promotional themes to the three counties, as the Fujian Tulou Master Plan (2012) suggests - Hakka culture for Yongding, the natural beauty of Nanjing and Tulou origins in Hua’an, in order to share relevantly distinct market segments and maximize the tourism benefits. The constitution and operation of such an institution as a mediator for enabling joint decision making among the three counties, is not only theoretically sound, but also practically workable in the current social and political environment of China.

To alleviate conflicts of interests among the key stakeholders, especially these between the residents and governments or tourism enterprises, the empowerment of residents is essential for facilitating joint-decision making (Leong & du Cross, 2008). The administrative control and authoritative power of governments, however, still play the determinant role in WHS application and the associated world heritage tourism development. China’s administrative decentralization was gradually exercised in the past decade, but it has mostly empowered the enterprises to some extent rather than the residents, which has manifested the cooperation between governments and enterprises in WHSs. As shown in Figure 4, the discourse power conveys in an absolute top-down approach, from the central nation state, regional governments of different levels, down to the local communities. The grass root residents have no way to voice their concerns and, consequently they have to, from time to time, resort to force or seek for mass media’s help. Neither of those means could have been conducive to fundamentally improve the situation. Some (Dredge, 2004; Sofield & Li, 2011) point out that China’s strict top-down administrative power distribution system is functioning as a structural institutional barrier to inevitably impede community participation and joint decision making in world heritage tourism development.

The contradiction between heritage protection and tourism development is a long term challenge to world heritage tourism development in China. Figure 3 indicates that most of the stakeholders who favor for heritage preservation have slight real power or influence, due to the current social and political mentality in China that economic development should be the real hard truth for China’s economic growth and prosperity. Since China started the economic reform in 1978, such top-down drive for growth and development has frequently sacrificed resource conservation for revenue generation (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). WHS application in Fujian Tulou has thus been essentially regarded as a strategic means to boost the local economy. The case of Tulou therefore has revealed a series of problems in taking plans and decisions into practice, which have been observed by other tourism researchers (Lai, Li, & Feng, 2006). First, the implementation of plans has been largely ignored by the governments of all levels, resulting in a multitude of plans “hanging in the wall”. In this regard, joint decision making in the planning process loses its significance. Second, the overlapping administrative sectors in Fujian Tulou tourism development induce
divergence among them with regards to “whose duty it should be” when important management and conservation issues need to be resolved. Consequently no action can be effectively taken until those issues deteriorate into crises. Furthermore, the policies and regulations of Fujian Tulou tourism are featured with ambiguity and vagueness. Taking the “Fujian Tulou World Cultural Heritage Protection Regulation” as an example, most of the regulations were made by a general reflection of existing cases in China, while no considerations have been given to the specific local conditions (Xu & Sofield, 2013). For instance, Article 8 claims, “every entity and individual should protect ‘Fujian Tulou’ according to the law and has the rights to report the destructions.” The key points, however, referring to “which law” and “report to whom in what ways”, are absent. This Article therefore appears meaningless to the public as well as to the management. To sum up, substantial more efforts are needed over a long period of time in order to overcome those structural barriers (Table 1). This also means that Hypothesis 4 should be accepted with a prerequisite of time.

Table 1. From conflicts to collaboration: causes and probabilities

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<th>Main conflicts</th>
<th>Main causes</th>
<th>Solutions to collaboration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interests conflicts</td>
<td>The top-down administration</td>
<td>Empowerment of residents</td>
<td>Structural institutional barrier for long period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbalance between protection and development</td>
<td>lack of real power by preservation sectors</td>
<td>Transformation of the economic oriented development view</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy competition</td>
<td>ineffective coordination</td>
<td>Constitution of an institute of higher level</td>
<td>General institutional difficulties can be improve in short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective implementation of decisions</td>
<td>Ignorance of governments</td>
<td>Improving feasibilities of plans and decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overlapping roles</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous rules</td>
<td>More details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A world heritage status may be conducive to promoting sustainable Tulou tourism development to some extent, given the extensive attentions given by the governments, the financial and technical supports offered by the UNESCO and, the social monitoring efforts provided universally (Hall 2006; Kim, Wong & Cho, 2007). In the meantime, however, the world heritage inscription has also increased complexities of the stakeholder constitution and complicated the power-interests distribution. As these institutional difficulties and structural barriers exist, stakeholder collaboration in managing WHSs remains merely a scholarly or theoretical debate rather than a workable strategy of implementation in contemporary China. That being said, Hypothesis 1 may be rejected as unrealistic at present. It could be expected that the current situation may change over a period of time, but until all these institutional and

structural barriers are effectively reduced, it is still not a sensible option for China to apply for more WHSs, except for cases where specific heritage sites are at risk and need to be saved. So it is obvious that Hypothesis 5 should be rejected in the current context of China.

Sustainable tourism development focuses on economic production with the precondition that the associated resources are being effectively protected and preserved. This study suggests attentions should be given especially to the human elements when applying sustainable principles to world heritage tourism, because human subjective initiatives play undeniable roles in both the protection of resources and the development of the tourism economy. Previous studies in this line of investigation have focused much on the environment and natural resources, such as identification of specific indicators for impacts assessment and so on. More recently, tourism scholars and practitioners have started to gradually turn their attentions to tourist management (Stanford, 2008), community participation (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010), government plans (Bramwell & Lane, 2010) and enterprises' responsibilities (Coles, Fenclova & Dinan, 2014). Sustainable tourism is thus found to be correlated to the social, economic and political system of destinations (Landorf, 2009; Wang, 2014). It is the stakeholders that co-determine the pattern of resource consumption and the mode of tourism development. Hence, the human elements, especially stakeholder collaboration, should be regarded as one of the keys to future investigations in this line of research on sustainable world heritage tourism development.

Notes

“Fujian Tulou” with both initial caps specially refers to the part that has been inscribed in the world heritage list, while Tulou is the generic term of this unique type of architectures in Fujian Province.

Reference

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