

Cultural Heritage and Regional Tourism Development in Yunnan, China

Jie Bai¹, Suhana Binti Johar², Noraziah Binti Mohammad³

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between cultural heritage and regional tourism development in Yunnan. The provincial government has initiated efforts to save and conserve the cultural heritage of its many ethnic communities. With the preservation, the government is also building the tourism industry. In order to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between economic advantages and the safeguarding of cultural treasures, it is imperative for all stakeholders to engage in meticulous and deliberate deliberations. This research therefore seeks to comprehensively explore Yunnan's experience with the goal of elucidating the mechanisms via which cultural heritage influences tourism and, reciprocally, how tourism influences the perception and preservation of cultural heritage. The research indicates that there is a distinction between national and regional officials efforts in spearheading the direction of tourism development. The long-term impact of the subject under consideration will be contingent upon its ability to effectively integrate preservation initiatives with sustainable development.

Keywords: *Cultural Heritage, Yunnan, Authenticity, Tourism Development.*

Introduction

One feature of a globalizing world is the shift in relative accessibility brought about by breakthroughs in technology and improvements in infrastructural development. This shift is apparent in the rising movement of tourists from one location to another (Ford, 2012). Tourism on a global and regional scale can involve a self-reinforcing cycle that, depending on how it is managed, can either contribute to or detract from the functioning of local socioeconomic systems. For instance, the desire for tourism frequently results in the creation of infrastructure that either reduces or eliminates the degree to which local people are isolated. Once access is achieved to a 'new' region, additional development may follow, leading to an increase in the number of tourists. It is obvious that some people will gain from this, but probably not everyone. For instance, in order to make way for tourism developments and access roads (Mastny, 2002), some of the local residents might have to be relocated from picturesque sites. Therefore, the development of tourism in isolated places is frequently met with opposition. The impacts of tourism development on remote areas, specifically in relation to environmental sustainability, the economic and social well-being of local communities, and the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage, have been a subject of concern among researchers and policymakers for an extended period (Cater, 1995; Briassoulis, 2002; Thaothampitak, 2018). China, a country with rich cultural and tangible heritage is one of the fastest developing nation on earth and one of the largest global economy. Yet, it needs to balance between preservation of culture and development.

Cultural Heritage Tourism in Yunnan, China

This paper explores the dynamic interplay that exists within the backdrop of Yunnan, China. Research on the ways in which cultural heritage and tourism have a mutually beneficial effect on one another would benefit greatly from being conducted in Yunnan because of the province's rich historical legacy, multicultural population, and breathtaking scenery (Yang and Wall, 2009b). The instance of Yunnan provides a fascinating vantage point from which to grasp the challenges, opportunities, and complexity that arise when these two spheres collide. This is particularly relevant at a time when locations all over the world

¹ Ph.D in Built Environment, Faculty of Engineering & Built Environment, National University of Malaysia, Email: 994356871@qq.com

² Ph.D in Built Environment (Heritage Aspect), Faculty of Engineering & Built Environment, National University of Malaysia, Email: suhana.johar@ukm.edu.my

³ Ph.D in Built Environment (Architectural Design, Architectural Professional Practice, Project and Contract Management), Faculty of Engineering & Built Environment, National University of Malaysia, Email: noraziahmohammad@ukm.edu.my

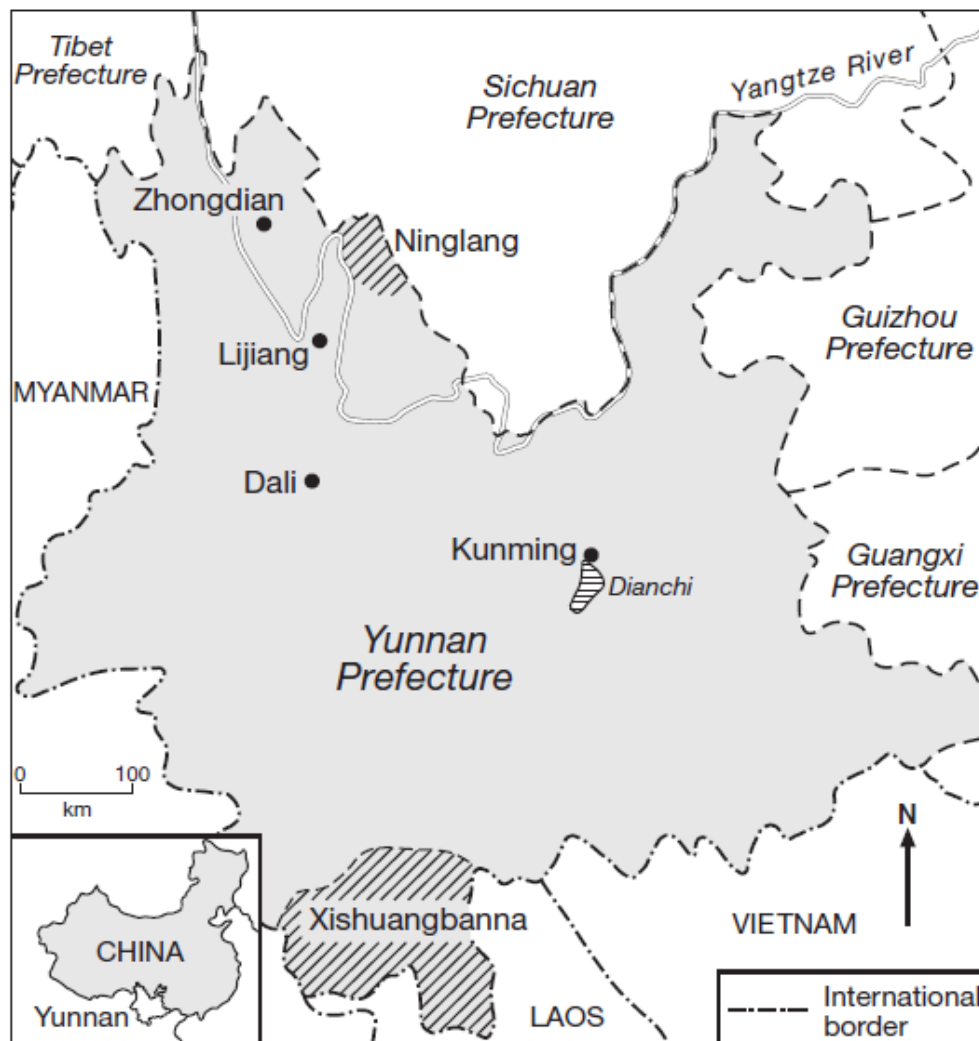
are searching for sustainable routes for economic growth and cultural preservation (Wu, 2015). The diversity of ethnic groups that make up the province, each with their own unique traditions and dialects, contribute to the province's rich cultural fabric. In addition, the province's attractive natural beauty attracts tourists who are looking for both exciting new experiences and cultural immersion. Yunnan is a microcosm where ancient history and modern aspirations coexist and debate their roles in creating the region's future destiny (Yang and Wall, 2009a). This microcosm exists against the backdrop of globalisation and its impact on local identities. Local communities, policymakers, and tourist stakeholders are engaging in dialogues that aim to navigate the contradiction between economic growth and historical protection.

At the centre of these conversations is the fusion of tradition and transformation, which takes centre stage (Donaldson, 2007). In order to address these complex dynamics, a multidisciplinary strategy is required. This paper comprehensively explores Yunnan's experience with the goal of elucidating the mechanisms via which cultural heritage influences tourism and, reciprocally, how tourism influences the perception and preservation of cultural heritage. It focusses on regional tourism development in China by looking into how cultural heritage is shaped for tourism development in the province.

Yunnan is one of China's most popular tourist destinations. This paper tries to provide light on the complications inherent in the quest of harmonizing economic progress and cultural safeguarding by evaluating governmental frameworks, community involvement programmes, infrastructure development, and the shifting cultural narratives. Ultimately, the goal is to achieve a balance between the two goals. In addition, the insights that were gained from Yunnan's context are applicable beyond the province's borders, making a contribution to wider conversations on the complex relationship that exists between cultural heritage and tourism all over the world. This paper intends to create a nuanced understanding of the reciprocal relationship between cultural heritage and the growth of regional tourism by conducting a thorough analysis of Yunnan's efforts and obstacles. By peeling back the layers of this relationship, this paper not only expand theoretical perspectives but also give practical insights that can inspire strategies for sustainable development that honour cultural legacy while embracing the opportunities presented by tourism. These strategies aim to honour cultural legacy while embracing the benefits presented by tourism. Exploring the experiences of Yunnan brings to light the possibility for synergy, mutual benefit, and a more balanced approach to the process of determining the future of destinations in a world where the maintenance of cultural traditions and the promotion of economic growth frequently appear to be in conflict with one another.

Background of Study

Figure 1.0. An Overview of Yunnan in China



Source: Chow, (2005)

The level of accessibility could potentially have significant ramifications for the economic development, tourism sector, and cultural landscape of the region. Yunnan province, located in the southwestern region of China, is a landlocked province that shares borders with Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Vietnam. The terrain of the province, which spans a total area of 394,000 square kilometers, is exceedingly difficult, with mountains and high plateaus making up 94% of the total area (Chow, 2005).

Across the vast expanse of the terrain, the elevations vary between 4,000 and 5,000 meters. Chow, (2005) asserts that the remaining 6% of Yunnan province is comprised of low-lying areas, exhibiting distinct features such as sharply carved valleys and limited expanses of flat terrain. The province of Yunnan has historically experienced a significant level of isolation from the rest of China, mostly due to its challenging physical topography (Marafa, Chan and Li, 2022). This isolation was particularly pronounced during periods predating the establishment and utilization of advanced transportation systems. This phenomenon was particularly prevalent before the introduction of contemporary modes of mobility.

Yunnan was formerly a province on China's periphery and in an isolated location; as a result, its residents were, for the most part, ignored by the country's other regions. The Han people, who make up the majority of China's population, mostly entered Yunnan in the lowland valleys and settled areas of the rich plains. According to Chow, (2005) they were primarily restricted to political centres, easily accessible sites, and military stations where Han soldiers were stationed. In more inaccessible and hilly regions, the indigenous civilizations were more dominant. Because of this province's relative geographical isolation, it is home to a diverse collection of ethnic minority cultures.

However, in the modern era, developments in transit have dramatically modified the degree to which something is accessible. Today, Yunnan has strong connections to the rest of China and the rest of the world by all modes of transportation, including air, rail, and road. It can be said that the scenic beauty of Yunnan and its wide variety of local ethnic cultures have attracted increasing number of tourists from both inside and outside of China (Lin and Wen, 2021).

Regional Development in Yunnan, China

The province of Yunnan has a wealthy cultural past and a diverse ethnic composition, both of which make it an appealing destination for tourists who are looking for a combination of historical significance and natural beauty (Donaldson, 2007). An example of how tourism may revitalise historically significant locations while also stimulating local economy is the ancient city of Lijiang, which is listed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Lijiang has developed into a flourishing destination thanks in large part to the preservation of traditional Naxi architecture and customs, in addition to the city's rapidly expanding tourism business (Shi, Jin and Li, 2020). In a comparable manner, the Shangri-La region, which is well-known for its Tibetan influences and stunning landscape, serves as an example of how tourism can enhance local people by giving employment opportunities in hotels, restaurants, and companies that specialise in handicrafts. In this way, tourism may help local populations become more self-sufficient.

The Development of Regional Tourism in Yunnan

The expansion of regional tourism in Yunnan has resulted in a number of positive side effects. In the first place, it has brought about an increase in economic vibrancy in areas that were previously underdeveloped. The flood of visitors drives up demand for services, which results in the creation of new employment possibilities and additional revenue for the locals of the area (Donaldson, 2007; Wu, 2015). Because tourists frequently immerse themselves in the customs and practises of the places they visit, tourism frequently helps to promote intercultural understanding and communication. This connection between different cultures strengthens social cohesion and helps to contribute to the maintenance of indigenous customs. Additionally, the profits made from tourism are frequently invested in the improvement and expansion of the region's infrastructure, which results in an increase in both accessibility and the overall quality of life in the area.

Problems and Concerns Relating to Sociocultural Aspects

The rapid expansion of regional tourism in Yunnan, on the other hand, has not been without its share of difficulties. The risk of cultural artefacts being commercialized and distorted is one of the most important concerns. There is a danger that, as indigenous people become more involved with the tourism sector, traditional practises may be changed or presented in a manner that is not genuine in order to fulfil the expectations of tourists (Lew, 2017; Husa, 2019). To successfully navigate the tension that exists between protecting cultural authenticity and satisfying commercial demands, careful navigation is required. In addition, an increase in the number of tourists might result in social disruptions as well as tensions between the native people and the visitors. This is clear in locations like as Dali, where the traditional way of life of Bai minority populations has been dramatically transformed to satisfy the tastes of tourists, resulting in a feeling of cultural displacement and loss among locals (Lin and Wen, 2021).

Repercussions for The Environment

The increase in tourism activity has also given rise to concerns over the environment. The arrival of visitors can impose a strain on the local ecosystems, hence exacerbating issues such as insufficient waste management, water scarcity, and pollution. The Three Parallel Rivers UNESCO World Heritage site in Yunnan faces the difficulty of effectively managing the dual objectives of promoting tourism and preserving its unique biodiversity hotspot (Leask and Fyall, 2006; Bertacchini, Liuzza and Meskell, 2017). The degradation of habitat can arise through unsustainable development practises, hence exerting an impact on the indigenous flora and wildlife within the vicinity. Furthermore, the escalating expansion of infrastructure in response to the requirements of the tourism industry, including establishments such as hotels, transit systems, and recreational amenities, has the potential to intrude upon environmentally vulnerable regions and modify the inherent characteristics of the natural environment (Su and Wall, 2012). This issue is of significance due to the rapid expansion of the tourist sector, which is currently one of the most rapidly increasing industries on a global scale.

Influence on the Population of the Area

The proliferation of tourism within the region often yields a diverse range of impacts, encompassing both favourable and unfavourable consequences, upon the local populace residing in the vicinity (Faulkner and Tideswell, 1997; Temelová and Dvořáková, 2012). While new economic opportunities have the capacity to enhance living standards and provide an alternative to traditional livelihoods, they also possess the potential to generate an unequal allocation of advantages. There exists a potential scenario wherein a significant portion of the indigenous populace may come to the realization that they are unable to reap the economic benefits stemming from the tourism sector (Yang and Wall, 2009b). This predicament can be attributed to their insufficient education or lack of requisite skills necessary for meaningful engagement with the tourism business. Moreover, the escalating expenses associated with the cost of living, resulting from a surge in resource demand, could potentially displace indigenous inhabitants from their customary dwellings and communities. The aforementioned phenomenon has the potential to result in a deterioration of social cohesion, as well as a diminishment of cultural identity within the community (Faulkner and Tideswell, 1997).

The region's rich cultural past and stunning natural landscapes have fostered a rise in tourism, leading to economic benefits and intercultural interactions. Nevertheless, the challenges posed by the commercialization of culture, disruptions in social order, and the degradation of the environment underscore the imperative for a strategy that is characterised by equilibrium and long-term viability. To maximise the potential of regional tourism development for Yunnan's overall growth and prosperity, it is imperative to undertake the following measures: fostering active participation of local populations in the development process, implementing responsible tourism practises, and giving equal importance to both ecological preservation and economic benefits derived from tourism.

The Question of Authenticity in Cultural Heritage for Tourism

Despite the fact that authenticity is an essential idea in the disciplines of heritage and tourism, it is a contentious notion due to the fact that it is socially created (Cohen, 1988) by a number of different stakeholders who each have their own unique points of view (Ooi, 2013). Importantly, critical scholars like Cohen, (1998) argue that the concept of authenticity enhances the "authorised heritage discourse," a hegemonic discourse that is handled by worldwide professional groups like UNESCO in the recognition, registration, and management of cultural assets (Leask and Fyall, 2006). The concept of authenticity is a dominant discourse that is overseen by international professional organisations such as UNESCO in the acknowledgment, documentation, and administration of cultural resources. The concept of the "authorised heritage discourse" acknowledges the significance of authenticity as a fundamental principle (Zhao and Timothy, 2015). Due to the influence of the "authorised heritage discourse," there is a tendency to overlook or conceal the unofficial or alternative historical narratives maintained by local cultural custodians and community members. One of the consequences of the "authorised heritage discourse" manifests in this context. A recent study by Su, (2020) reveals that a comparable "authorised heritage discourse" has been

created at the national level in China for both tangible and intangible assets. This "discourse" relates to China's cultural heritage.

In the 1990s, Yunnan started the process of establishing its own experimental ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) administrative system. Yunnan conducted research and compiled a list of ICH inheritors, referring to them as "folk artists," in the disciplines of ethnic and folk music, dance, arts, and handicrafts. It was the first programme in China to examine and recognise grassroots ICH inheritors (Wang and Ap, 2013). The concept for this initiative originated from scholars in the academic community. However, it garnered the interest of provincial and national authorities, who subsequently suggested the adoption of regional legislation to safeguard ethnic and folk culture. This development served as a model for other provinces and the entire state (Zhao and Timothy, 2017; Su, 2020). In the latter part of the year 2000, the Ordinance on the Protection of Yunnan Ethnic Traditional Culture and Folklore was put into effect (Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Yunnan Province 2000) (Su, 2018). The Yunnan Ordinance was a reflection of the discussions that were taking place regarding ICH at the time in Yunnan Province from the views of academics/experts and bureaucrats.

In the Yunnan Ordinance, authenticity and original ecology were first introduced. According to You *et al.*, (2014), the phrase "original ecology" may be traced back to native form as its point of genesis. Thus, it can be observed that the concept of the original ecology and authenticity of ICH initially appeared in the official discourse of the regional government for two apparent reasons: the first of which was to safeguard/conservate ICH, and the second of which was to cultivate/sell ICH. This inherent tension between preserving authenticity and commercialization eventually made its way into the national "authorized heritage discourse". This brings in another layer of argument for Yunnan, where the authorized heritage discourse brings in a commercialized, government directed image for cultural heritage. The notion that cultural heritage is decided upon and picked piecemeal to fit into the needs of tourism puts into question whether it resonates with what the people actually want (Katahenggam and Wee, 2020). In this regard, select cultural heritage is packaged for tourism development, and peripheral development are centered around it. While the issue of select authenticity comes into the picture, development is still apparent as a multiplier effect (Lew, 2017).

Commodification of Heritage for Tourism Development from the State Perspective

The influence of government intervention on the process of commercializing tourism is marked by a diverse set of impacts that interact with one another in complicated ways. To stimulate economic expansion and convert their territories into valuable assets, governments routinely engage in activities such as strategic planning, the construction of new physical infrastructure, and the design of new policies (Husa, 2019). This method can increase investment, enhance the experiences of visitors, and provide employment possibilities. For new tourism destinations, this method of state involvement had been practiced especially when initial investments are expected (Katahenggam and Wee, 2020).

Since Deng Xiaoping's Reform China's government has been undergoing a decentralization process, which has resulted in a separation between the central government and local governments in the cultural sector (Shepherd and Yu, 2013; Su, Bramwell and Whalley, 2018). This division has caused a schism in the cultural sector. Because of this, the historic industry has been facing a lot of challenges.

When it comes to the administration of tangible legacy, local or regional governments place a higher priority on economic benefits and development potential in heritage than they do on political goals (Yüksel and Bramwell, 2005; Palmer, 2009; Bramwell and Lane, 2011; Labadi and Logan, 2015; Su, Bramwell and Whalley, 2018). In contrast to this, higher levels of government put more of an emphasis on political goals (Chang, 1997; Hall, 2011; Scott and Marzano, 2015). The study of ICH lays a larger emphasis, in comparison to other fields, on the pursuit of the economic incentives connected with heritage.

Official opinions on cultural heritage are influenced by a complex interplay of national political considerations, local economic interests, and the discrepancy between the theoretical framework and practical implementation of national ICH policies (Maags and Holbig, 2016). As a result, these viewpoints

exhibit a wide range of diversity and stratification, spanning from the national level to the county level. This phenomenon spans across various administrative levels, ranging from the national to the county level. Both of these factors have a significant influence in the exacerbation of the conflict. The commodification of ICH by the tourist industry is not viewed as simply being good or bad in and of itself; as a result, officials tend to focus on the repercussions of tourism commodification on ICH. Because of this, provincial and local officials do not place any restrictions on the ability of registered ICH practitioners to participate in tourism activities so long as the transmission of ICH is maintained.

Su, (2020) conducted a comprehensive study on the commodification of tourism by state officials. In the research, Su, (2020) found a clear distinction between the higher-level officials and the local officials in Lijiang in the construction of a commercialized identity for Lijiang. The national and the majority of the provincial officials view the commercialization of tourism as a measure to conserve and disseminate ICH. This view is based on pragmatism. As a result, they are attempting to strike a balance between the advantages and disadvantages that come with commodification. Sadly, they have discovered that this is not a simple task in actual practise. Lijiang municipal officials, however, as members of the local community, are able to contextualise the commodified ICH practises case by case and see them sympathetically together with local ICH practitioners. This is because of their ability to contextualise the practises in their own local context. As a result, the officials in Lijiang are able to comprehend the energy that is associated with ICH and provide broader leeway for local practitioners of ICH to take part in tourism. Some of the officials in Lijiang are also involved in efforts to promote the commercialization of ICH. Because of their connections to the local ICH, the local officials are able to differentiate between the religious (such as Dongba culture) and secular (such as handicrafts) components of the ICH. As a result, they are able to argue that different ICH practises require different approaches to the commodification of tourism.

Maags and Svensson, (2018) have recently argued for taking a bottom-up approach to examining how individuals and local groups adjust to the AHD. The findings of this study suggest that it is of equal significance to assess the response of lower-level government officials, who are also community members, to the national AHD implemented in a top-down manner. This study uncovers the dual role of government officials in shaping Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) policies. They not only serve as key decision-makers in establishing these policies as authoritative heritage discourse (AHD), but also actively engage in deconstructing the AHD at lower levels. This deconstruction occurs through the integration of their personal experience and affiliations with the communities involved. Government officials are tasked with a dual role in the development of ICH policy, functioning as both actors and stakeholders in the process. This is due to the fact that government personnel are involved in both the building and the dismantling of the AHD. There are more case studies on practical management measures of ICH, as well as tourism efforts based on ICH, at local levels will continue to expand the understanding of how ICH is seen, used, interpreted, and recreated as a range of cultural practises in reality. These studies will be conducted in conjunction with one another.

In order to achieve a harmonic equilibrium between economic growth and the conservation of intrinsic cultural and environmental principles, it is necessary for governmental authorities, local communities, and private firms to carefully strategize and work together. The actions of the government play a significant part in the formation of the process of tourist commodification. This involves the strategic management of the process's advantages and disadvantages within a framework that is impacted by political, economic, and socio-cultural concerns.

Conclusion

In a nutshell this paper provides light on the delicate interplay between cultural heritage and regional tourism development in the attractive terrain of Yunnan, which is located in China. An investigation into the development of tourism in Yunnan reveals a dynamic process in which the province's cultural heritage emerges as a primary catalyst and benefactor of the industry. As indicated by the implementation of a trial ICH administrative system, Yunnan has been a leader in the development of programmes to preserve and acknowledge the significant cultural contributions made by its various ethnic groups and folk customs. On

the other hand, the commercialization of these very traditions in the name of tourism growth presents a difficult obstacle.

The situation in Yunnan exemplifies the delicate balance that needs to be achieved between the competing goals of retaining authenticity and surrendering to the pressures of commercialization. The inclusion of ideas such as authenticity and original ecosystem through the Yunnan Ordinance indicates the region's attempt to reconcile this tension. The region's goal is to preserve its heritage while also capitalising on the attractiveness of its location for tourism. The delicate relationship that exists between heritage preservation and commercial industry is becoming even more apparent as the discourse on authorised heritage, which is represented by the LICH, acquires importance.

The events that took place in Yunnan and the lessons that were learned from them have larger ramifications for heritage-rich regions that are traversing the route of tourism-driven growth. It is necessary for all stakeholders, including local governments and cultural custodians, to engage in a nuanced discussion that strikes a balance between economic gains and the integrity of cultural practises. As Yunnan continues to draw travelers from all over the world, its tale is serving as a testament to the ever-changing nature of the role that cultural heritage plays in defining the tourist landscapes of regional destinations. In the end, the capacity to harmonize preservation with sustainable and responsible growth is the single most important factor in determining whether or not Yunnan's heritage and tourist nexus will leave an enduring legacy.

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