

What Do We Have and Who Are We?

A Case Study Upon Tourism Development, Modernization and Cultural Self-consciousness in L Village

Xuya Tian

Sun-yat Sen University, China

Abstract: *In this paper, I will tell you a story about an ordinary village in which things are gradually changing both on the aspects of the villagers' minds and their behaviors during the process of tourism development. This village has been existing as a peace, innocence, and simple virtue(Raymond Willams:1973) village for a very long time before tourism development. Planting and picking tea formed their two primary livelihood models, which some scholars call it the self-sufficiency mode. And my paper will take what has happened in different stages of tourism development in L Village as an analytic approach to look at the villagers how they rethink their hometown and themselves and how the new minds or knowledge are reconstructed under the power of modernization, capital and the state. As a consequence, L Village has transformed from a village full of pastoral characteristics to a place glutted with scenes of modernization elements. Simultaneously, villagers are becoming more practical during the interaction with different active subjects.*

Keywords: *tourism development, modernization, cultural self-consciousness, rural China*

Introduction

Rural tourism is not a fresh phenomenon in China nowadays. In 1980s, China has begun a transformation process and the central government has carried out reform and open policy from that time. Core of the policy is “taking economic development as the central task”. Deng Xiaoping also put forward the famous theory that “no matter if it is a white cat or a black cat, a cat that can catch rats is a good cat”, which means we can take different kinds of ways to develop our country and society. After then, the government started to publish a series of policies on developing economy, market. What they concern most is to escape people from poverty, especially the peasants. Rural tourism development has attracted more attention as kind of a way to enrich farmers and rural areas. And “developing tourism energetically” is broadcast widely as a state policy as well as encouragement to ordinary people. Therefore, many but more and more villages in China has arisen the desire to develop tourism industry in their hometown. Today, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangxi, and many other provinces have

more or less successful and useful experience on tourism. However, the developing model is not the focus problem in this paper. There is no doubt that the rural world could have got big changes during tourism process, and what I interest most is what exactly events has taken placed in a village, and how the villager think about the development process and rethink their culture and reconstruct their values.

Anthropologists have done many researches on rural tourism. In general, there are four analytic approaches. 1. Tourism as acculturation or development. 2. Tourism as a personal transition. 3. Tourism as a kind of superstructure. 4. Policy on tourism (Nash, 1996). In China, scholars take these approaches as lessons sometimes. But they do more applied research on tourism, like problem of community participation and they may concern more about tourism development in minority areas and how the development process affect minority ethnic groups. And the tourism development usually has a strong relationship with culture protection of minorities (see Sun Jiuxia,2007). While this paper will primarily follow the first research approach, as Nash pointed out in his book, to look at a Han village closed to cities. For China has a strong government, which is different from western world to some extent, the author will focus on the state power and power of capital in world system pressed on the transformation of an ordinary village.

The narrative structures of this paper are as follows: First part, I'll show you a brief introduction about L Village, including its history, characteristics as an old village, and its tourism resources. Second part, I'll show you a process of tourism development from about 1995 to 2005, during which they developed mainly by themselves driven by passion of seeking interests. They begin to realize that beautiful sceneries can create money if there are groups of travelers coming here, which is astonished but normal to them in this capital world. Third part, I'll analysis the interaction between villagers, state and tourism companies, during which the villagers continually rethink about interest, value and means of their home and culture. The last part, I'll make a conclusion. So this paper may provide a microscopic observation on China's rural transformation through rural tourism development.

Fieldwork and Methodology

My research begins at September 19 , 2012, when my tutor has successfully applied an evaluation project of Rural Arrangement Project for World Bank in Huangshan. I feel very lucky to be one of the researchers to participate in this project with other partners. However, during the research process, Being followed by the local governors had stayed with us all the time may not be good for our job, for the villagers won't talk to us freely if there are officials on the spot. And my task is to send questionnaires and advise the villagers on how to fill out the forms. So I have more chances to contact with local people directly. As there are no officials here in this step, I can talk to them more freely and easily. I try to make friends with them

first and not regard myself as a researcher. “Making friends first” is not only kind of a helpful field work skill, but also a necessary mental attitude to a fieldworker. In L village, I fortunately meet a nice woman, who became my key reporter afterwards. She is a good guide who can help me find people, places and whatever things I need. The research project kept about half a month, and I kept in touch with the villagers and the local governors by QQ and phone after I returned back to Guangzhou. We chat once or twice times a week averagely. I originally intended to stay longer if I don’t have that many courses this term.

Some interesting stories and phenomena still attract me and make me think even when I have come back to my daily life. Then, after I reflected some problems happened during the research, I decided to write a paper about microscopic study upon rural tourism development. In fact, I have concerned about this theme for a long time but have no opportunities to carry out a research. Then, there are two reasons for why I choose tourism development as my research approach. First, considering about the characteristic of tourism development itself, it may be more directly to take a close look at transformation from a microscopic perspective. Second, L village is one of the typical villages which is in the process of developing tourism, sometimes they are more like to seek a developing way, and this paper may give them some help on making appropriate decisions. The anthropology fieldwork generally needs a long time observation and sometimes fieldworkers prefer to participate in the local people’s daily practice. Only in this way can the anthropologists collect detailed and real materials.

A Brief Introduction of L Village

China has a long history of the tea culture. Tasting tea is most ancient Chinese’s habits and customs and tea planting was their primary livelihood. Even till now, tea industry makes up a large part of economic income for some particular places, such as Zhejiang Province, Anhui Province, Fujian Province, Yunnan Province and so on. These sections are areas concentrating tea planting in China. This paper focus on an ordinary tea village called L Village that belongs to Qimen County, Anhui Province. Planting, picking and selling tea based on family unit form the vital part of their income pattern. Besides, the villagers also make money from finding a job in cities, which is another important part of their livelihood. Today they still plant some vegetables and rice consumed by themselves, but not used for exchanging or selling.

According to map linear measurement, L Village is 400 kilometers, 260 kilometers, and 250 kilometers away from Shanghai, Nanjing, and Hangzhou. And it is only a short distance ranging from 70 to 100 kilometers with second-tier cities such like Huangshan, Jingdezhen, Anqing and Tongling.

The village is located in a place by rivers and surrounded by hills. Here, old trees

tower to the sky; numerous streams walk along. When the village was established in early Song Dynasty, villagers set about planting trees in the north which worked as a wind barrier and prevented soil erosion. The shelterbelt has been preserved soundly during hundreds of years. There are 360 trees more than one hundred years old, and 45 trees at the age of more than 300(Qimen County Almanac, 2008).The biggest camphor tree is called “Buddha's-hand-Camphor” because it shapes like a Buddha's hand. Trees make the air fresh and pure. A stream flows down the hill to the village. Villagers make tea with water from the stream and black tea produced by themselves. That tastes sweet. Mountains are good destination for explorers. With rice field stretching flat and houses laying well-arranged, it is such a place of peace for people in metropolises to rest.

According to Biography of Wangbi, the Shangshu of Tang Dynasty from an ancient book called Wang’s genealogy in L village, Langya, a chief executive of the Ministry of National Defense in Tang Dynasty, or called BingbuShangshu, Wangbi. Since Wangbi’s fourth descendant Wangtie lived here in Song Dynasty, the village has formed.

The village has not only beautiful scenery, but also quaint folk customs and profound culture. It is the origin of Mulian opera. Besides, the village is honored as “the home of imperial physicians”. As an old story goes that, during the years of Jiajing in Ming Dynasty, the imperial physician Wangdian cured the crown prince and was awarded constructing Heyi Hall, which is now Wang’s ancestral hall. Wang is the main family name in the village. There are many old dwellings built in Ming and Qing Dynasty well reserved due to the village’s situation and isolation. That means a lot to tourism development.

When Tourism is coming

L Village began tourism development in the middle of 1990s.

“Our village then belonged to Penglong Xiang. At that time, Penglong government already had ideas to develop tourism of our L Village. But they didn’t publish clear policies. So we villagers decided to do by ourselves first.”The villagers said.

As I mentioned before, L Village was always an ordinary tea village. Each family own about ten acres land to plant teas, and the tea income may reach 8,000 to 9,000 Yuan per year. Working part-time in cities can earn more. Villagers who are richer, or have enough time and sufficient labors are preparing to seek other ways to make more money.

“We extremely want to make some changes and we all have a great passion in developing our village. We did by ourselves at the first several years. We collected money about 10,000 Yuan to

mend the road under ‘Foshou Camphor’(kind of a camphor and named after its shape). We didn’t have any other beliefs but to pave the way as best, only in this we can we attract more travelers.”

“We didn’t call for help from others but did the whole work all by ourselves. Anyone who have free time would lend their hands. We are together.”

“We also did some publicity. Some of our villagers post through the Internet. And others who work in the cities could bring out some tourism messages.”

Farmers who have bigger houses build up “happy farmhouse”, which is kind of a hotel in the countryside to provide accommodation for travelers. This living mode creates chances of interaction between local people and travelers from the cities, by which way the modern elements could easily go into the rural world.

Policy to “open the door” obviously takes China into a new development stage, which may involve this country itself to a world system. “Opening the door is a process that China breaks out the closed situation and enters into the global system.” It means that there isn’t even one remote village completely closed nowadays. From 1980s, China has loosen the limitation of household register in order to promote increasing of urban economy. The government has put up series of policies to encourage farmers to work part-time job in cities. True, farmer workers actually make big contribution to the urban economy, they also reach their goals of making money at the same time. Number of farmer workers in L Village is about 100 in the 1980s and 300 nowadays. Most of them choose to return back home at last. They usually build new houses, drive new cars, all of which strongly stimulate more and more farmers’ desire to seek interest. This is not the only but one of the important reasons on why means of capital are playing a important role in the rural world and people have a lot passion in tourism development. Desire for wealth drives people in L Village to seek any possible ways to gain interests.

Scenic Spot Construction and Cultural self-consciousness

From the 1990s, rural tourism attracted more attention as kind of an economic growth pattern. Many old houses which people thought it worthless before is worthy nowadays and they are defined as culture heritages that should be repaired and protected. Chinese central government put forward a series of policies on developing rural tourism from 2005. And the local government of L Village also published relevant policies. Around 2005, Qimen County has made a decision on developing tourism. The local government then makes some efforts, including cleaning the rubbish, defusing the woodshed of L Village. Then they transferred operational right of scenic spot of L Village to HY Company for 50 years. This means HY Company will develop the scenic spot and be solely responsible for L Village’s tourism development. In particular, the HY Company has promised to invest L Village 50 million Yuan in 10 years in future. And their final goal is to build L Scenic Spots to an AAAA degree spots in China, concentrating the functions of ecotourism, farming

participation, cultural experience, original adventure and leisure vocation.

In the following years, the most important thing they have done is to find out the characteristics of this old, beautiful village, mark and construct a series of scenic spots which didn't exist in the past. For example, Zhennan Ci (temple for ancestors of their families) was a place for the villagers to visit their ancestors in particular festivals in the old days. As I mentioned above, one of their ancestors is Wangdian, a famous herbalist doctor in Ming Dynasty. His memorial tablet also sits in Zhennan Ci. In order to emphasize L Village's characteristics, enhance its cultural value, as well as attract people's eyes, Zhennan Ci is renamed Palace Doctor Hall. "We villagers don't say like that. But we know its name has changed. And the travelers like that, we know." A local villager told me like that. Till 2009, L Village has a basic forming and base facilities including parking lot, tourist reception center, scenic spot guide brand. In October 2010, L Village got an honor and was named as "Base on micro film and TV production in Anhui". During these years, L Village has also been titled "characteristic village of China", "Historical and Cultural Old Village", "Ecological Demonstration Village in Huangshan City".

After tourism development, the number of motorcycle ownership continues increasing these years. Nearly everybody owns their mobile phone. More tidy and modern public toilets are built up, which completely replace the past old and dirty ones. Qimen Count was a black tea base. For the price of green tea is higher than the black tea, some villagers change to plant green tea. Green tea also serves as the best kind of tea to recommend to travelers. In general, what HY Company has done on tourism development changed the villagers' lifestyles, all of which may give them more experience. Surely they are getting familiar with modern lifestyle than before.

As Fei Hsiao-Tung pointed out in his book, cultural self-consciousness is a process that people who gradually generate their own understandings to their own culture and have a clear idea upon the origin, characteristics, and development trend of their culture, which can strengthen the capacity of transformation in modern society and find for a proper position in new environment and new ages (Fei Hsiao-Tung, 2003:5). Process of approving the scenic spots and developing rural tourism is as well as a process for the villagers to rethink and reconstruct their local culture.

Negotiation and Culture Reproduction

According to the villagers, HY Company didn't keep the promise to share out bonus with the villagers, and they did nothing useful to the villagers after they enter into the progress of tourism development in L Village. In fact, HY Company promised to give the village committee 50 thousands per year as dividends while the head of L Village has always complaining that they didn't get any money from HY Company till now. But this is not all, HY Company has slowed down develop steps after 2009.

“Indeed, they actually help us to build up some scenic spots, but now they do nothing. We don’t know why.”

“We ever don’t get dividends from HY. Some of our villagers were employed by HY Company to take care of daily routine in L Village. En... There was then a woman work as guidance for them but quit at last, because they provide her a very low salary. And now she is taking care of her own babies at home.”

“We didn’t think we still have relationship with tourism of our L Village, the (local) government do nothing either. They must be reaching some agreements beforehand. And we guess they should have some common interests. ”

As a consequence, some of the villagers stop managing tourism and closed their happy farmhouse, but to transfer themselves to the traditional industry like tea planting. Or they may choose to find jobs in cities as before. Families who are still engaging on opening happy farmhouse or restaurants also choose to put part of family labors into tea planting or working. In a modern and global field society, no one could bear unfair treatment, not to say take resources from them. Meaning of L Village to the villagers is not just their hometown, but becomes a place full of with resources which can bring them wealth.

One day in 2010, representative of L Villagers, they hold a meeting in office room of Village Committees Building on the third floor, whose first floor is used as tourist reception center now. They voiced their dissatisfaction about HY Company, talked about they could have got more interest if they develop the tourism by themselves or under the guidance of government. They often compared themselves with their neighborhood, H Village, whose tourism industry develops well under the guidance of local government, as a good example to exploit tourism resources independently, but not rely on a company. As the villagers said, “they can get more money and their villagers get most of the interests.” As a result of a heated discussion, the villagers finally made a decision to send letter to Qimen County Government to drive HY Company out from their development plan depending on the power of government. All of the representatives have signed their names on the letter to show their determination. Then they chose village head as L Village’s representative to hand in the letter went to meetings to county government. At first, the county government didn’t give him response, but scold village head and warned him not to do such things to instigate villagers.

The government didn’t want to break the contract with the company, so they pretended that nothing happened. But there are still some problems they can’t avoid. Under the power of both policies from the state and the villagers, the local government has to think about how to develop tourism L Village further on. And the governors also admit that the HY Company has done nothing substantive after 2009. Accordingly, the local government is exploring new ways to promote the economic

development. And Loaning from World Bank to the Rural Arrangement Project in Huangshan is a new exploration to develop economics. Now this project is under assessment. The local government plan to use most part of this sum of money on tourism developing. After HY Company did the scenic spot construction, Qimen County Government is continuing to reconstruct the scenic spot as well as the facilities of L Village. They already give many spots of L Village fresh meanings and names, and they also try to excavate as many folk cultures as possible. For example, there is no doubt that the local culture reproduction is to move forward. Old temples such as Heyi Tang, somebody call it “Wu Feng Lou”, old trees and ancient folk houses are continually renovated and protected as culture heritages. As kind of an art performance, Mu Lian Play is considered as “living fossil of Chinese opera history”. In all, the government are applying fund to mend them from as many ways as possible.

In the wave of modernization, different groups are involved in the circle of development filled with power, interests and rights. Sometimes they cooperate with each other but sometimes they need to negotiate with others to fight for things they need. Villagers are continuing to reshape conceptions of their culture under the interaction with the HY Company and the local government.

Conclusion

This paper tries to take tourism development as an observation approach to give readers a microscopic perspective on transformation in an old village under the background of modernity. The transformation now is more like a flowing or dynamic process than fragmented phenomenon which is impelled by two main powers, the state and capital. Capital and modern elements arouse the villagers’ desire to develop. Construction of the scenic spots also reforms their conception and knowledge about village and themselves. During the interaction with the local government and HY Company, the villagers’ value and sense of culture are always reconstructed. In a modern society, even a closed small mountain village has to learn the rules of modern world. When the villagers negotiate with various profit subjects, they are rethinking and changing themselves at the same time. And their behaviors are reconstructing the local culture in the mean time. The process of tourism development in L Village is still continuing. No final conclusion has yet been reached on the modernization of this village.

Rural tourism is a new economic development mode that has been grown under the background of “Construction of new socialist countryside” since 2005 in China. It is promoted by the power of government to a great extent. Maybe throughout this case, we can not only take a close look at the transformation of a village in rural China, but also explore a new developing mode of rural tourism. The local government is now trying to draw support from the World Bank with the form of project, rather than

completely cooperate with companies. For central government, the primary goal of developing rural tourism is to benefit the peasants. And there is no doubt that these explorations accord with the state policies on “building new countryside” and can benefit the villagers themselves. Villagers certainly give positive feedback on the policies, including our assessing work. So maybe the research can provide some experienced reference to villages which have trouble on developing rural tourism.

Besides what I have talked above, I still have some questions. Maybe we can say that rural tourism development is involved a bigger scope of the global context as World Bank has entered into L Village as lenders. Modernization in L Villager is simultaneously promoted by another power coming from global world. That's to say, the farmers do face a global world at the same time. So is it true that the globalization has become another power to impel tourism development in countryside China? If it is, what are the concrete impacts on farmers' lives and their conceptions? That's what I'm thinking now.

References

- Raymond Williams.1973.*The Country and The City*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dennison Nash. 1996. *Anthropology of Tourism*. New York:Pergamon Press.
- Sun Jiuxia.2007. *Inheritance and change: the ethnic groups and culture in tourism*. Beijing: China Commerce and Trade Press.
- Committee of Chorography of Qimen County. 2008. *Chorography of Qimen County*. Huangshan : Huangshan Books.
- Fei Hsiao-Tung.2003. “My Words about ‘Cultural Self-consciousness’”. *Academic Research* 7:5-9.