

## Progress in tourism management

# Assisting the poor in China through tourism development: A review of research

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## ABSTRACT

The role of Pro-Poor Tourism has been increasingly studied in China since the 1990s. The research has addressed a broad range of key issues such as the implication of “*fu pin lv you*” (or TAP to use an English acronym arising from the translation ‘Tourism-Assisting the Poor’), governmental roles, local participation and the contribution of rural, natural and cultural resources to TAP. However, there has been a lack of research in some areas such as in the micro-economics of TAP targeting local poor people, quantitative research, case studies and anthropological analysis. This paper reviews Chinese academic literature on pro-poor tourism to provide a clearer picture of current practice and progress in TAP policies and research in China.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, tourism as an instrument to reduce poverty has been an important research topic, particularly in developing countries. In 1999, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) introduced the term “pro-poor tourism (PPT)” to define a specific form of “tourist seeking” that contributes to poverty reduction (Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2000; DFID, 1999). In 2002, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (WTO) launched its report “Tourism and Poverty Alleviation” at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and announced the development of a programme of work on “Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP)” (Sofield, Bauer, De Lacy, Lipman, & Daugherty, 2004; WTO, 2002).

The purpose of this paper is to examine tourism and poverty alleviation in China by reviewing past research publications relating to policies known as ‘*fu pin lv you*’ (or TAP to use an English acronym arising from the translation ‘Tourism-Assisting the Poor’). The paper will therefore comprise three main approaches: (a) a discussion of the measures of poverty in China with reference to per capita annual income, followed by (b) a listing of publications and their features identified and (c) a discussion of the approaches and themes found within the studies.

### 1.1. Poverty in China

As the largest developing country, China still retains a huge area of poverty-stricken rural regions in which there are resident over 100 million on incomes significantly below the poverty line (World Bank, 2009), even though significant progress has been made on poverty reduction since the adoption of ‘Open Door’ policies under the late Deng Xiaoping. Tourism has played a role in these policies (Ryan & Gu, 2009). Measured in terms of the World Bank poverty standard of 888 RMB per person per year at 2003 rural prices, China’s poverty reduction performance has been striking. Between 1981 and 2004, the fraction of the population living below this poverty line fell from 65 per cent to 10 per cent, and the absolute number of poor fell from 652 million to 135 million, a decline of over half a billion people. Measured by the new international poverty standard of \$1.25 per person per day (using 2005 Purchasing Power Parity for China), the levels of poverty are higher, but the decline since 1981 is no less impressive (from 85 per cent in 1981 to 27 per cent in 2004) (World Bank, 2009). In 2011 the “China Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development Outline (2011–2020)” established targets for future policy after changes that also included an extension of pension rights to the rural population. This was part of a wider economic policy that sought to encourage consumer spending as a source of economic growth in the face of potential lower earnings from exports. At the end of October 2010 the Government proposed increasing the poverty standard to 1500 RMB pa, almost double the 2007 annual per capita income standard. In the interim period, in 2008, the National Bureau of

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Statistics had increased the standard to 1196 RMB pa and in 2010 to 1274 RMB pa, so the issue is one that is continually under review. Lu Mai of the China Development Research Foundation has argued that to reach international standards of poverty definition China would need a level of about 2000–3000 RMB per capita pa, but some argue that such levels would be misunderstood by many (Fang, 2011). Li Shi of Beijing Normal University Institute of Economics and Business Administration has estimated that at 2000 RMB the numbers 'officially' poor would be about 130 million (Fang, 2011).

The issue is far from simple, and the wider debate within China over poverty alleviation also assesses the delivery of the policies. Lin Jialai, of the China Association of Poverty Alleviation and Development, has noted that the focus of policies in rural areas are directed to the village rather than the family as the primary unit, and the Association's 2007 report, "China Development Report 2007: Eradicating Poverty During Development" argued that over-involvement by bureaucracies has created significant inefficiencies in policy delivery while permitting redirection of funds from key areas such as early childhood nutrition (Fang, 2011).

### 1.2. *Tourism, economic development and poverty alleviation*

Certainly there exists a significant literature on the relationship between tourism and general economic growth, and the terminology of "tourism growth led hypothesis" has become accepted within both the tourism and economic literatures. Among those studies Shan and Sun (1997) and Shan and Wilson (2001) have used econometric techniques within a Chinese context, the latter finding evidence of a re-iterative effect between tourism and trade (imports and exports) as both feed into each other. While their main concern relates to the quality of forecasting techniques and the deficiencies of single equation approaches in tourism forecasting they specifically state that the null hypothesis of no linkages between tourism and economic growth in China as measured by trade can be rejected. At a micro level several descriptive studies exist in Chinese literature that purports to show positive outcomes for rural areas from tourism development. For example, Zhou and Wang (2004), Wu and Wang (2001) and Yin (2004) argue that tourism benefits rural areas while more empirical studies can be found in the English language *Journal of China Tourism Research* (e.g. Gu & Ryan, 2010; Yan, Barkmann, Zschiegner, & Marggraf, 2008), books such as Xie's (2011) *Authenticating Ethnic Tourism* on tourism in Hainan and other sources.

That there is such interest in China is of little surprise when considering the growth of tourism as both a destination and tourist generating country. Its size of population of 1.3 billion people approximately, the double figure growth in Gross Domestic Product for almost two decades and the resultant growth of domestic tourism (numbering 1.6 billion travelers in 2007) and inbound tourism (19.73 million visits in the 12 months to February, 2009) according to China National Tourism Administration data (<http://en.cnta.gov.cn/html/2009-3/2009-3-25-14-48-14525.html>), are sufficient data to explain the academic and policy interest in tourism. Additionally, as noted by several commentators, the central government has specifically used tourism as a means of developing an infrastructure to complement other rural economic development policies to address issues of income disparities between rural and urban zones, and between east and western China (Ryan & Gu, 2009; Wu, 2004).

As part of this total growth of tourism, rural tourism has been increasing steadily. It is estimated that in 2008 rural tourism received more than 400 million tourists and created more than RMB60 billion of revenue, which took around 23 per cent and 8 per cent respectively of the total national tourism data on numbers of

visitors and expenditure (Guo & Han, 2010). It has been suggested that tourism has contributed directly to around 10 per cent of the reduction in numbers of those below the official poverty line (CNTA, 2009; Shi, 2003).

In China, such tourism development specifically targeted at the reduction of rural poverty has been known as "*fu pin lv you*" or "*lv you fu pin*", which could be translated in English as "Tourism-Assisting the Poor", or abbreviated as TAP, which term will be generally used in this paper. In assessing and distributing TAP research findings from China to the English-speaking world there have been the conventional linguistic and possibly conceptual difficulties of translation, although a large volume of literature has been available in Mandarin. Added to this was also a lack of awareness on each side of work completed in this area, but in recent decades, academic institutions and government agencies throughout China have had access to English-language literature across a broad range of fields and disciplines including TAP, through either an active and widespread translation program, or the work of Chinese researchers fluent in English. In contrast, their counterparts in the Western countries have had no access to Chinese-language literature unless they themselves are individually fluent in written Chinese, while it is almost only in the last few years that western academics have been able to more easily access Mandarin journals through the internet. As a consequence the large volume of literature related to pro-poor tourism produced in China has, for the most part, not been acknowledged internationally.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to review this literature of the last two decades and provide a clearer picture of the research progress in tourism-assisting the poor (TAP) ("*fu pin lv you*" or "*lv you fu pin*") in Chinese, and thereby perhaps develop a better understanding of the current position in China among western colleagues. As such the paper seeks to make a contribution to a literature that is described by Zhao and Ritchie (2007) thus: 'Despite the potential of tourism as a development tool and the worldwide mushrooming interest in tourism-based poverty alleviation initiatives, the relationship between tourism and poverty alleviation largely remains *terra incognita* among tourism academics' (p. 10).

## 2. Methodology

Ding (2004), Zeng (2006) and Li, Zhong, and Cheng (2009) have analyzed the TAP related literature and summarized progress until 2007. Since then, more research has been published and indicated new directions and progress when compared to the past. Additionally, some of the past reviews, such as that of Zeng (2006), were more concerned with general issues relating to rural tourism than simply poverty reduction, which is the primary concern of this paper. The amount of literature published before 1990s was very small (Li et al., 2009), and hence this paper focuses on publications since 1990. To that end major databases in both Chinese and English were used.

China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database ([www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net)) is the most powerful engine to search Chinese academic publications. It integrates journal papers, degree theses, conference proceedings, books and newspaper articles into one database protocol. This database was searched using the combination of keywords "*lv you* (tourism)", "*pin kun* (poverty)" and "*qiong ren* (poor)" (in Chinese), from 01/01/1990 to 25/08/2010 (<http://epub.cnki.net/grid2008/index/ZKCALD.htm>). A total of 366 Chinese publications were collected. For the English literature, the major databases searched included EBSCOhost and ISI Web of Knowledge. In addition the search engine Google Scholar was used to identify any literature that might have been missed from the other databases. In the latter cases the search terms included the keywords

“tourism”, “China OR Chinese”, “poverty OR poor people OR PPT” and/or poverty reduction in the ‘Subject Terms’, ‘Title’, and ‘Abstract’ in different combinations. From the total of 69 records located, 22 publications emerged after the removal of duplicated and/or irrelevant ones from EBSCOhost with a further 16 being identified from the ISI Web of Knowledge after using the same search procedures. The same procedures were used with Google Scholar, and after removing Chinese sourced material from [cnki.net](http://cnki.net) and similar sources, four new items were added to the English dataset. At the end of this process, the literature from the three different sources was imported to Endnote, and the duplication between different databases was removed. Finally, 30 English articles on TAP in China were added to the Mandarin database.

This total dataset was then re-established on Excel recording attributes including author, paper title, publication year, publication source, keywords and abstract. Based on a review of the abstracts, a more detailed analysis of the research topics, methodologies and research regions was conducted and this was accompanied by recourse to the full texts to better identify the key findings. It should be noted that not all the literature published in 2010 were collected, and the study only covers the period to August 25th, 2010.

In drawing up the lists the authors depended on the self-selection of authors as to what was their concern, using keywords as stated below, but there is a need to recognize that there is a current debate in China on definitions of poverty. The World Bank, for example, uses as a definition an income of US\$1 a day, while some countries use a standard of relativity such as those who fall into the lowest 20 per cent of income. As noted above in the introduction, the proportion of the Chinese defined as poor is now less than 10 per cent of the population but more recent research by bodies including the China Development Research Foundation has noted the increased rate of inflation that has eroded the ability of people to buy basics. The China Reform Foundation in its report *Alleviating Poverty Through Development* (2007) suggested increasing the official poverty line by approximately 50 per cent to an annual income of 1100 RMB, which would increase the number of people under this line to about 80 million. It has also been noted that the vast majority of these people live in mountainous areas and on the eastern and northern borders of China, and generally in rural areas, and consequently in some literature there is a conflation of rural tourism development and poverty alleviation, with different authors laying different degrees of emphasis on one or the other.

The research method is therefore dependent on authors’ ‘self definition’ of poverty, which is consequently problematic as demonstrated below where some writing crosses a boundary line between poverty *per se* and rural tourism initiatives. Moreover some writers about TAP refer to home-stay operations and several issues can arise here as to the pattern of actual property ownership and the nature of the facilities that may be on offer to the visitors. In the experience of the authors of staying in home-stay accommodation in China the accommodation can be very basic consisting of a bed with boards and shared toilet facilities as was offered to the second author in Anhui Province at 50 RMB a night (about US\$4 at the time). Thus in practice the apparent discrepancy of being both below a poverty line and being able to offer home-stay accommodation to tourists is not as great as might at first appear.

Another definitional problem relates to “development” within the context of this paper, for as Harrison and Schipani (2007) note, economic development *per se* does not always generate benefit for the poorest. Development they note may be ‘top down’ or ‘bottom up’, it may be referred to as ‘sustainable development’, and indeed pro-poor tourism development has attracted critics who state it is often externally imposed or simply exacerbates income differentials within a society (Mowforth & Munt, 2003; Scheyvens, 2004).

Harrison and Schipani (2007) suggest that a more collaborative approach toward ‘pro-poor tourism’ should be taken on a case by case basis, and indeed the ‘100 bed hotel employing 250 people ... may be the most appropriate option’ (p. 116). “Development” thus covers a multitude of forms in this context from an organizational/economic perspective to consideration of social development that might include empowering females, reducing the need for child labor and creating needs for skill enhancement – in short reversing positions of inequity that reflect more than just simply an absence of income. As noted above, such debates are paralleled in the Chinese literature with its criticisms of a lack of focus on key measures such as poor nutrition.

### 3. Results of bibliometric analysis

#### 3.1. Year of publication

After the completion of the procedures identified above 396 publications (including 366 in Chinese and 30 in English) formed the set to be examined. The first paper with the keywords “*fu pin lv you*” or “*lv you fu pin*” was published in 1996 (Wu, 1996). In this paper entitled “On Tourism Assisting the Poor”, Wu discussed the definition of TAP and raised general recommendations to poverty-stricken areas to apply tourism to reduce poverty. Until 2001, the total number of publications on the wider field of TAP had been less than 20 annually as shown in Fig. 1.

In 2002, the total number of publications leapt to 27, and since then, the volume of literature has continued to increase. This increase is a reaction to (a) an increased number of policy initiatives, (b) more interest in the subject by Chinese academics and (c) a growing awareness of international policies such as those of the UNWTO and accompanying western research, little though it was (Ashley et al., 2000; DFID, 1999). From 2006, the total number of publications reached a total of 40 per annum, and has been maintained at between 46 and 59 annually, which was an increase of about 50 per cent compared to the average in the period 2002–2005.

#### 3.2. Distribution of publication sources

Out of the 366 Chinese-language publications, there were 325 journal papers, 35 dissertations for research degrees and 6 conference papers. Of the 325 journal papers, more than half (167 papers) were published in 79 key journals (generally based on the broadly accepted “Overview of Chinese Key Journals” (Dai & Cai, 2008)), and the rest (158 papers) in 121 non-key journals. In total, there were 35 dissertations, of which three were for doctoral

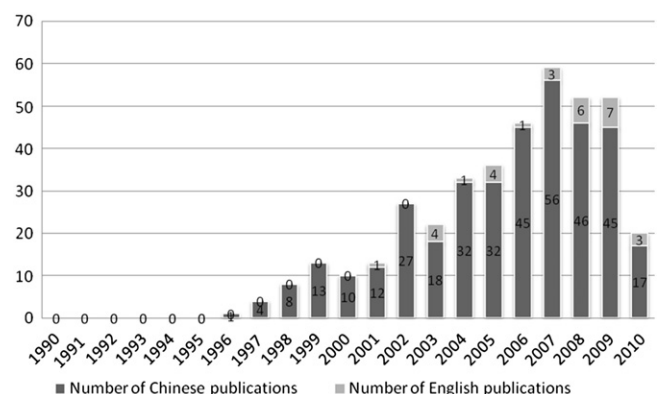


Fig. 1. Total number of publications.

degrees and 32 for the masters' degree. They have been completed by students at 27 universities or research institutes since 2001. The data are illustrated in Figs. 2 and 3.

The research recorded only one book in English (i.e. Zeng, 2008), but no books in Chinese that focused on TAP in China, although some book chapters were recorded. Given that books permit more space devoted to a specific topic, this deficiency implies a lack of systematic assessment and summarization of relevant researches into TAP practices in China.

3.3. The frequency of keywords

Theoretical research dominates the literature. Using keywords statistics, in all 366 Chinese publications, 97 of 1167 'keyword' counts (8.31%) of other than specific locality names were 'strategy', 'model' or 'countermeasure' and the likes, and only 48 counts of keywords were 'poor people', 'community participation' and the like (4.11%). Although these keywords were not necessarily exactly matching the research topics, it is still strongly suggested that the research paid much more attention to the explanation and exploration of theoretical issues, such as models, conceptual bases, and mechanisms, than to any assessments of actual benefits or the degree of participation of local poor people and local communities (see Fig. 4).

However, since 2003, the frequency of the latter keywords has been generally increasing, and the frequency of former ones slightly declining in number, indicating some change in focus by researchers, and possibly the ease of obtaining different types of datasets when compared to the past. Since 2001, PPT (in English) has also emerged as a keyword in publications. This reflects the fact that Chinese scholars have begun to accessed the English-language literature, and largely kept pace with their counterparts in the West.

3.4. Coverage of research regions

The research has covered all parts of China. Although most research focused on underdeveloped (or poverty-stricken) regions, for example, southwest and northwest provinces, much research

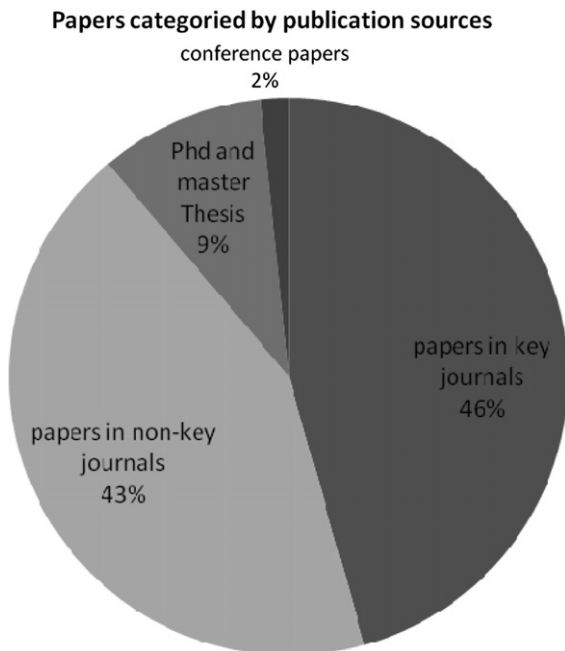


Fig. 2. Distribution of total Chinese-language literature by publication sources since 1996.

Paper numbers categorized by publication source

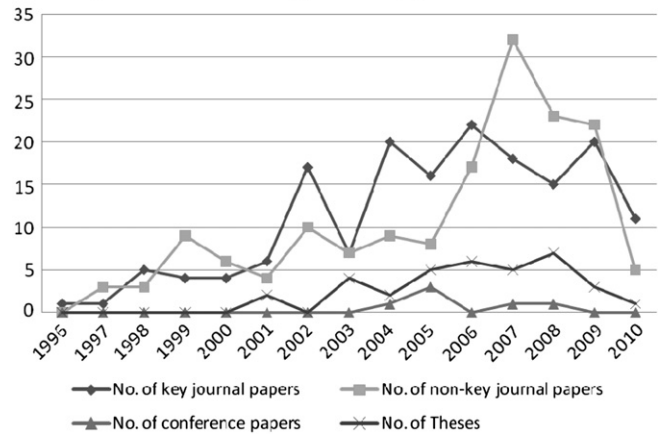


Fig. 3. Annual distribution of Chinese-language literature by publication sources.

also studied rural areas in more developed provinces like Zhejiang (e.g. Zheng, 2007) and Guangdong (e.g. Li, 2004). TAP in ethnic regions has also been increasingly emphasized in recent years (e.g. Chen, 2009; Ma, 2010; Wang & Wang, 2010).

3.5. Research methodologies

Most research have applied qualitative and descriptive methods. Li et al. (2009) examined methodologies used for TAP assessment before 2007, and found that 62 per cent were descriptive where problem identification, conception, and general pro-poor tourism strategies were discussed. Although some quantitative analyses were applied (28%), most were of a general statistical nature. Only around 2 per cent adopted economic models or comparative methods.

Although a large number of studies were built on real cases, only a few papers were based on small-scale cases and built up a proper "case study" in terms of developing themes and 'lessons'. For example, among the 35 academic dissertations, 28 included case study approaches. However, only eight focused on small-scale areas such as townships, villages and scenic areas and actual impacts, the rest generally introduced cases at above county level and were more concerned with general planning approaches.

3.6. English-language literature

As noted above, in English the number of publications was very few. In the total of 30 publications, there were 19 journal papers,

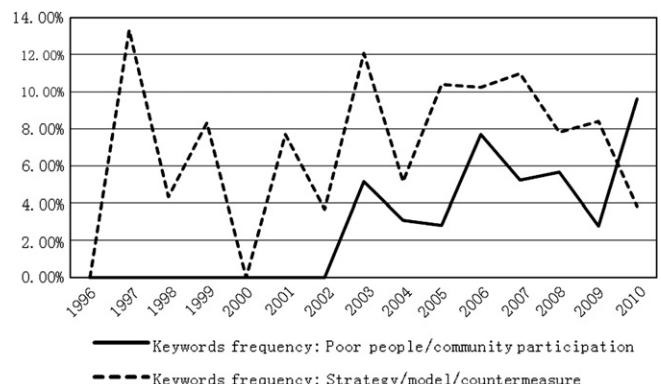


Fig. 4. Change in frequency of keywords in the Chinese-language literature.



8 conference papers, 3 book sections and only one book. Only 11 of them were authored by scholars in mainland China. The rest were authored and/or co-authored by overseas researchers, including 13 of 18 journal papers, 2 of the 6 conference papers and all book and book sections. Consequently it might be argued that there was a low contribution from Chinese mainland scholars to the international knowledge body of TAP, as Chinese literature itself is always difficult for international researchers to access. This also implies that international cooperation between Chinese scholars and English-speaking scholars would help introduce China's TAP studies and researchers to the world.

#### 4. Progress of TAP research in China

Although anti-poverty initiatives have been one of the major international aid projects for decades, it was not substantially associated with tourism development until the late 1990s. Most researchers came to recognize the application of tourism to poverty reduction in China by analyzing socio-economic developments and the distribution of impoverished populations across the country. Xiao (1997) and Ma (2001) suggested that the interaction of poverty elimination programmes and tourism development in central and western China would be important components in any national development strategy, given the highly overlapped distribution of poverty-stricken communities and rich tourism resources. Additionally, tourism development has been considered as an industry that could balance economic development and environmental protection better in rural areas than many others such as mining and manufacturing.

##### 4.1. Conceptual studies

"*Fu pin lv you*" (Tourism-Assisting the Poor: TAP) in China is interpreted in different ways. The two main interpretations are: (a) a special poverty reduction strategy, in which tourism is introduced to increase incomes as well as to improve capacity building; and (b) a tourism model where poverty reduction is an important goal. It is suggested that TAP in China has been generally defined as a tourism-induced poverty reduction strategy. Its characteristics are that it is governed by governments and oriented by the market. It is based on the unique resources existing in rural areas and supported by tourist products and services attractive to the market place. It targets the creation of benefits for local communities, in particular the local poor, and contributes to local poverty reduction, while sustaining regional economic development and environmental conservation (Guo, 2003a, 2003b).

These objectives differ slightly from those of Pro-Poor Tourism as originally defined by the PPT partnership in 1999 (DFID, 1999; Goodwin, 2009). According to their definition, Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) is not a specific tourism product, but a special approach that leads to a net benefit from tourism (especially from a mainstream tourism industry) for poor people. It is important to link PPT to the mainstream tourism industry, not just to advocate small-scale alternative tourism as a benefit to the poor.

The introduction and adaptation of the concepts and principles of PPT and ST-EP to China has been dominating recent TAP study. Generally, most key issues had been identified and discussed to some extent. For example, Wang (2003) had explained the relevant concepts and principles of PPT strategy, and discussed the adaptation of PPT in China regarding its philosophy and economic implication. He addressed the importance of identification of target population, target areas, and key stakeholders with particular reference to poor people. It was suggested that PPT should, by definition, target the poor, and be implemented on the basis of interaction between tourism, community and the poor within

those communities. A systematic structure which was embodied with mechanism, dynamics, supporting, and monitoring/assessing subsystems was the functional structure for a successful PPT implementation. Wu, Yang, and Feng (2004) argued that the target population, specific objectives, participation mechanism and financial management were the four key issues determining the success of PPT. For his part Zhou (2002) regarded the question of how tourism revenues reach the poor as the core issue in PPT research and practice.

Zhong (2003) summarized the theories applied in TAP and categorized them into two groups: one focused on development capacity including 'circular and cumulative causation' (CCC), life cycle assessment (LCA) and sustainable development; while another focused on an economic approach to benefits for poor people, such as income distribution theory, investment multiplier theory and asymmetric Information theory.

TAP policies have not been adopted without criticism. Zhao (2003) noted risks inherent in TAP with reference to cognition, economics, socio-cultural aspects and environmental sustainability, and suggested that it was important to establish procedures that would reduce risks such as a resultant over-dependence on tourism within marginal economic situations. Yang (2003) and Liu (2006) applied opportunity cost theory in PPT and suggested that innovation in institutional arrangements was necessary to a sustainable PPT implementation. Based on two primary definitions, namely: (a) tourism is based on the market economy, and (b) tourism is a comprehensive social phenomenon, Lin (2000) analyzed input–output ratios, multiplier effects, leakages and research methodology as applied to TAP. Lin (2000) suggested that there were deficiencies in TAP theory, including the possible negative impact from the application of TAP theory.

##### 4.2. Roles of governments

In China, TAP has been integrated into the national strategy of anti-poverty in rural areas. However, while recognizing the reality that Governments at different levels have been playing important roles, a continuing question is, what should be the key role of government and how should it be implemented? Traditionally, governments have been playing multiple roles. Generally they have functioned either as operator, policymaker and coordinator between tourism and other industries (Zhang, Chong, & Ap, 1999). This suggests that governments have been monopolizing the tourism development in rural areas, including TAP policies. This has created various dilemmas. For example, on one hand, strong government intervention has enabled newborn TAPs to grow up and function. On the other hand, the governmental (public) capital in the TAP has generally excluded the involvement of other stakeholders including small businesses, private sectors and local communities. This exclusion actually led TAPs in the wrong direction in which the key stakeholders, in particular the local poor, have been excluded and thereby gain little benefit. One result has been that governments might benefit from PPT, but benefits for the local community and local poor did not always follow (Swain, 1995). Hence, while some researchers have suggested that governments should take a leadership role, and administer the TAP development and practice, (the so-called 'government-oriented TAP mode', Guo, 2003a; Liu, 2004; Yang, 2001), others have urged governments to take responsibilities only in macro management focusing on financial and policy supports, and capacity building, but certainly not at the level of tourism business operations, preferring instead that these are left to local entrepreneurs, community associations and similar stakeholders (Cao, 2002; Cao & Ding, 2003; Guo, 2003b).

#### 4.3. The fundamental basis of TAP: richness of tourism resources in rural areas

The rapid growth in rural tourism has provided a good opportunity for TAP, as generally rural regions in China are rich in tourism resources regarding their natural and cultural diversity (Ryan & Gu, 2009; Su, 2011). The poverty in these regions is due to poor infrastructure and a lack in capacity building attributable to a long period of past neglect of rural development (Zeng, 2008). With the increasing emphasis on rural development since the 1980s one key variable identified by planners has been the number of rich resources available to tourism. This has been the key to TAP, and consequently has become an important research topic. A unique type of tourism in rural areas in China is known as “*Nong Jia Le*” (means “enjoying farmer home stay”, a type of farm house tourism). Local people are encouraged to participate in tourism development by using their own houses to accommodate and cater to tourists who come from urban areas and enjoy the rural cultural and natural environments (Fu, 2009; Su, 2011; Zeng, 2008). Zeng (2008) argues that this is one of the best means of TAP policies subject to the caveat that capacity building is required from governments, NGOs and the private sector in terms of skill training and seed funding. Indeed Zeng (2008) goes on to argue that a distinction must be made between rural tourism (i.e. tourism in rural environments) and TAP, as the latter requires the delivery of substantial benefits for poor people achieved through special efforts including participatory mechanisms, governmental support and industry commitments, a view also shared by Goodwin (2009) in the English-language literature.

#### 4.4. Local participation and the poor's benefits

Given these views it is thus apparent that community participation should be one of the key topics in the research. However, the literature analysis finds few mentions of such participatory action, implying that possibly the impoverished and the means by which they and their communities are actually involved and empowered has not been to the forefront of considerations. In part this may reflect the ‘top-down’ bias in Chinese planning, but this deficiency has been noted and is being questioned by, for example, Chen and Dong (2008), Guo (2003b), Zeng (2008), and Zhou (2002).

According to Xiao and Li (2004) and Cui and Ryan (2011), local villagers generally welcome the impacts and changes to local communities arising from tourism development, and are willing to accept or endure potential socio-cultural changes in local communities, at least in the early stage of tourism development. However, there are dangers that they may possess unrealistically high or over-high expectations of benefits, and the long lasting gap between this higher expectation and the actual lower benefits could in future significantly reduce their wiliness to support and participate in tourism activities, and possibly even turn their backs on tourism development (Jim & Xu, 2002). However, in the absence of research that monitors the dynamics of TAP policies or assessments of such perceptual gaps there was little if any evidence to support such contentions.

From a perspective of sustainable tourism in poverty-stricken rural areas, it has long been thought crucial to effectively engage the local communities in tourism development to obtain benefits (Murphy, 1985). This is a foundation of a successful TAP. Additionally it is necessary to establish a win-win mechanism that also benefits both tourism operators and local communities (Stone & Wall, 2004). However, while scholars generally argue that local tourism participation is a precondition for benefits reaching communities and impoverished people, in China, particularly in some minority ethnic areas, this paradigm is not easily put into

practice (Wang, Yang, Chen, Yang, & Li, 2010). This needs not only a mechanism for local participation and benefit sharing, but also a capacity building effort to build up the literacy and numeracy competencies, basic tourism skills and initial financial capability for local communities (Chen & Dong, 2008; Ding, 2006; Qiu, 2004; Wang, 2007b; Yuan, 2009), through functional Vocational Education and Training (VET). In addition it may also require the relocation of governmental roles where the related policies, regulations and even institutional arrangements must be in place to support these efforts (Zeng, 2008; Zhong, 2003). Besides the above, it is also important to develop appropriate forms of tourism that would encourage and not discourage local participation, for example, by using local cultural and natural resources, traditional skills, and requiring small funding (Toops, 1991).

#### 4.5. Alternative models

These difficulties have meant that some commentators have sought modifications of TAP, or alternative modes of relief. Indeed Liu and Wall (2005) suggest that under China's planning regimes the concept of community participation in decision taking is possibly one step too far, and that it is more realistic to try to ensure planning mechanisms whereby communities share in *benefits* if not *decision-making* when building human capital. Certainly Zhao (2003) notes that although some common principles are commonly shared, such as sustainable development, poverty reduction, participation of poor people, government-orientation, and the use of a market mechanism and localized identity, the implementation pathways of so-called TAP models do vary significantly in different areas.

Donaldson (2007) analyzed tourism development in poverty-stricken provinces in China and suggested that the various ways in which the tourism industry was distributed and structured affected the extent to which it reduced poverty and stimulated economic growth. He argued that the tourism industry in poor areas could easily access and structure any usage of local resources (including natural, cultural and existing infrastructures) more efficiently to contribute to local poverty reduction than was being done currently simply through better management practices such as the use of zoning and pricing (Donaldson, 2007). In their turn Bai and Li (2002) designed a “TAP experimental zone” based on an integration of governmental intervention and market mechanisms, whereas He, Li, and Ming (2007) argued that different community involvement and participation mechanism/models should be considered and applied at different stages of a TAP implementation strategy. In short TAPS, like destinations, possess life cycles that require different policies at different stages. Similarly Chen and Duan (2005) suggested that any post-TAP strategy must be put in place with the initial development of a TAP. From a different perspective Li and Chen (2004) suggested that a RHB strategy which was based on interaction of resource (R), human (H), and benefit (B).

In terms of developing specific capacity building skills in the rural areas Wang (2007a) identified the potential role of the Internet in building a supply chain of TAP and Yin and Yin (2001) suggested that regional libraries might function as information centers in poor areas. Yin and Qin (2002) also believe that higher education must play a more important role in capacity building in regional areas and in poverty-stricken areas, as well as in PPT practice by offering advice, guidance, skill enhancement and using the resource provided by students. Additionally Wei (2006) suggested that local historic materials could contribute to TAP initiatives as tourism resources that identify local traditions, personalities and stories that can serve as themes for tourism development. Other TAP models proposed by Chinese academics

have included the ‘community-made tourist products’ model called “one unique product each village, one skill each villager” (Yang, Cui, & Li, 1998); multiple dimensional TAP (Li, 2004), “*nong jia le*” (farmhouse tourism) (Fu, 2009), and the government-assisted joint local tourism enterprises between local villagers and outside investors (Ji, 2007; Wen & Li, 2008), and the eco-tourism-based TAP (Ma, 2009). You (2006) has reviewed and compared some of these different TAP models in China, discussed the original motivations of TAP, governmental roles and local participation by lower income groups.

#### 4.6. Economics of TAP

The primary and most expected effect of any TAP has to be its economic contribution to local development and poverty reduction. Past research has generally recognized the positive effect of TAP on local economic development and some success in reducing local poverty. Using econometrics Zhao (2004) conducted a study of the impacts of tourism investment on regional economic growth in western China. The findings suggested that tourism investment had a significant effect on economic growth in western regions, and therefore it was necessary to further encourage such investment. However, subsequent investment that follows the initial injection did show signs of diminishing returns, and thus it was important to ensure that ‘investment efficiency’ had to be sustained, and there were signs of successful capacity building to bring this about. Therefore Zhao (2004) suggested that it is necessary to introduce changes in policies and regulations to attract more efficient investments to the region over the life cycle of the TAP. Zhao (2004) and Yang (2000) also suggested that TAP achieved higher multiplier effects because lower income groups tended to have high marginal propensities to consume, and thereby increased income velocities of income distribution within local areas occurred. Zeng (2008) however provided a warning note, indicating that within poverty-stricken areas not all have equal accessibility to tourist resources and business, and hence one outcome may be an increasing discrepancy of incomes within the area.

This theme of potential deficiencies in TAP projects has also been identified by others. For example, Li (2003) argued that while tourism would positively affect the rural development to some extent, there was a “Distance attenuation effect” whereby others peripheral to the focus of tourism development would benefit far less. Two implications are involved, the first being again the issue of emerging income discrepancies and relative deprivation effects within the destination zone and the second being issues of management, ranging from definitions and measurement of what constitutes the destination zone to means of directing tourism flows to possibly a need for cross-subsidization by means of grants or local taxes. He concludes that any direct contribution to income accrual of local villagers would be very limited in Stone Forest Scenic Zone in Yunnan Province China. Another investigation in the same zone (Li, Li, Zhang, Li, & Zhou, 2004) suggested that only 15 per cent of local residents who lived in the scenic area were benefitting from tourism, and local people were generally involved in non-skilled or basic activities, which further inhibited their ability to gain from tourism.

Given these concerns, the question arises as to whether empirical evidence exists that shows that TAP policies really generate income increases for the impoverished given their likely low levels of education, business experiences and access to capital. Some such evidence does exist. Zeng (2008) found that local households could get around 30 per cent of tourist expenditure in local areas, albeit local poor people could get much less, even with a reasonable TAP arrangement. Lei (2008) compared household incomes before and after TAP in Houzhenzi Village in Shaanxi

Province and suggested that poor people did benefit from TAP but it was not significant and lower than expected. The main reasons why this was the case included (a) low participation rates; (b) higher economic leakages than expected and (c) a lack of private sector involvement (Zeng, 2008).

One possible reason for the lower than expected participation rates are the opportunity costs involved. Liu (2006) suggested that the opportunity costs for involvement in tourism development for those on really low incomes are in effect very high, and the uncertainties of new tourism developments and the needs for financial and human capital, especially in the beginning, inhibited their ability to find time to participate and so prohibited them from benefiting from tourism. Zhang (2007) additionally argued that economics leakages in poverty-stricken areas are always higher than might be expected due to the lower economic development level, poorer infrastructure and a simple/incomplete economic system, thereby increasing dependency on external sources of expertise, capital, marketing and aid. Together these factors would compromise the multiplier effects of tourism and offset the benefits for those with low incomes.

There has also been a concern expressed by some researchers that in practice much of rural tourism development simply neglects communities and local poor people. Although local community and local participation has always been mentioned, what micro-economic analysis is available has suggested that local communities generally failed to obtain significant financial benefit from tourism (Lei, 2008; Li, 2003; Li et al., 2004; Zeng, 2008). These findings support observations that TAP has not functioned well as an effective instrument to assist poor people to fight against poverty (Chen & Huang, 2003; Zhong, 2003).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Since the 2000s, research into TAP in China has attracted increasing amounts of attention. Both the quantity and quality of the related literature has been increasing. The topics extend broadly over definitions and concepts, mechanisms and models, case studies, governance, community participation and benefits to poor people. Generally the research has addressed many of the issues pertaining to this specific area. It is also a topic that has caught the attention of many younger academics in China, suggesting therefore that further and more detailed research might be expected in the future.

Some fundamental issues have been addressed. First, TAP is still regarded as a potentially effective means to address rural poverty, as the tourism resources are rich and can be a basis for tourism development, subject to a need for careful management. Second, the key role of local communities has been highlighted and extensively discussed. Third, roles played by government in pro-poor tourism models have been examined. Fourth, a broad range of cases at different scales and levels provide ample examples to allow researchers to assess the success and failure of TAP initiatives in both practice and research.

Compared to the very large number of current studies on tourism development and its economic impact in China, the literature discussing how tourism can benefit the poor has been relatively small in general and extremely limited in English-language literature, for there has been little international literature about pro-poor tourism practice and research in China. That might be attributable to the language barrier and, in the past, relatively little international cooperation between Chinese and international researchers in this field. A growth of such liaisons would significantly affect the wider international understanding of research activity in China and permit Chinese researchers better contribute to the international body of knowledge in this field.



TAP differs from western notions of PPT and ST-EP regarding its conceptions and implementations, while of course having similarities. Certainly TAP, PPT and ST-EP all advocate that tourism should benefit poor people and contribute to poverty reduction in developing countries, especially in poverty-stricken areas. For its part PPT emphasizes poor people should be enabled to be “pro-active” to obtain benefits, and the PPT approach is to use mainstream tourism to achieve the objective of poverty elimination (Goodwin, 2009). In turn ST-EP pays more attention to the sustainability of tourism with the participation of poor people to fight against poverty. Finally TAP tends to encourage poor people to be actively involved in and benefit from tourism together with other stakeholders, but in the Chinese situation the role of governments is highly emphasized. An additional factor is that the differences between rural tourism and PPT tourism must be further clarified, and indeed TAP should not be restricted to rural areas alone, but can also be introduced into urban areas as well (Gu & Ryan, *in press*).

However, it can be concluded that at present most of the writing has been at the descriptive, prescriptive and conceptual levels, and the literature is still deficient in empirical studies. There is a need for further detailed study, including a focus on the micro-economics of tourism impacts on poverty reduction. This reflects a situation where the poor and their daily realities have not really been the focus of the research. Few researchers have tried to survey and understand the poor people regarding their perspectives, attitudes and any real benefits gained from tourism, and where there is such an attempt other issues subsequently emerge such as a lack of literacy or understanding of what tourism is (Cui & Ryan, 2011). It seems that many of the Chinese research publications discussing the poor have usually applied a top-down approach rather than a bottom-up or two-way approach. This has compromised the accuracy and reliability of reports, as a top-down approach tends to neglect the social costs and economic leakages.

However, more recently the question of how value chains work for the poor in tourism activities has attracted more attention. The value chain approach will help monitor the impacts of tourism along the whole supply chain, timely identifying the issues that hinder the poor accessing the benefits promised by tourism and possibly eventually delivering appropriate interventions (Mitchell & Ashley, 2009). This suggests that the tourism impacts would spread beyond the specific area where an isolated pro-poor tourism project is located, and over to a broad region along the value chain. Therefore, while the immediate benefit of individual projects to local poor people must be explored in depth, the far-reaching implication and contribution to poverty reduction of tourism development needs a diagnosis at both the local and wider scale. The challenge here is the accuracy of value chain mapping and available data that can determine whether the contribution of tourism to poverty reduction is being correctly assessed. Such an approach also potentially identifies links in the power structures that determine the effectiveness and efficiency of pro-poor initiatives.

Tourism is basically an open system that incorporates not simply the economic but also contemporary and traditional cultures, the natural environment and socio-political dimensions including the structure of power (Hall, 1994). However, within the Chinese broader tourism literature more concern has been paid to economic effects and less to its other components. However, there is an emerging consensus that these impacts (including both the positive and negative) must be investigated and addressed, as indicated in Liu (2007), Chen, Zhou, and Zhang (2006) and Wu et al. (2004), and particularly within a Chinese context and with reference to Chinese ways and culture. This would incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods, but with reference to TAP there is a specific need for micro-economic, micro-sociological and psychological studies of the impoverished communities and the means by which

they can be enabled through tourism developments at both a general and specific location unit of analysis.

### 5.1. Recommendations for future research

Certainly, if Chinese policy aspirations for poverty relief are to be achieved, such policies need to be informed by research about China's TAP undertaken through multiple dimensions. As noted above, more micro-economic assessments of TAP are needed to explore the actual effects of tourism on the poor and disadvantaged groups. This would place them at the center of TAP. Such research would need to integrate the quantitative and qualitative methods into the case study approach. Social research must also be emphasized, and there is a need to conduct ethnographic and psychologically based research to better understand the social impacts of TAP on the poor, help them fight against poverty and to also better understand the changes in stakeholders' perspectives on tourism's impact on poverty reduction as TAP initiatives unfold.

Another issue that emerges from this review is that provincial and national governments have advocated TAP generally in rural areas, but there has not been an effective marketing strategy to transfer the advocacy to the industry's commitment to achieve the desired objectives. Tourism is generally market-oriented, while poverty reduction is basically a governmental responsibility. To link these two requires a mechanism by which governments and the tourism industry collaborate along with other stakeholders. Such organizations require roles to be defined, encouraged and acknowledged and here too it is possible that researchers may be able to help.

Currently it may be said TAP is a special tourism form or mechanism at a special stage of tourism development in China. Within the context of the economic growth and social development taking place in China, TAP needs to convert potentials into a sustainable tourism that will balance the benefits to all stakeholders, even if that means a dual focus on the lower income groups as the center of attention, but within a socio-political-economic system. The whole needs to be viewed with the impoverished remaining the *raison d'être*, but where aid is seen as incorporating wider perspectives. In this sense it might be claimed that between TAP and sustainable tourism, a so-called post-TAP must be introduced. In this post-TAP more attention needs to be paid to the roles of private sector bodies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), in particular with reference to their contributions in delivering skill training and small-scale TAP pilot projects such as small credit TAP (Wang, 2007b).

In short, the Chinese experience is an evolving one, one that can gain from more international attention, and yet which also through the dissemination of its experiences and lessons, one that may also inform pro-poor tourism policies in other countries.

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