Tourism Management 58 (2017) 286–292

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Tourism Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tourman

The significance of the West Lake pattern and its heuristic implications for creating China's heritage tourism economics

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Describes West Lake, Hangzhou, as a not-for-profit management plan designed to protect heritage resources.
- Using West Lake the paper identifies challenge facing other Chinese heritage sites managed under a profit oriented system.
- It offers a normative look at Chinese management for cultural and heritage sites.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 7 March 2016
Accepted 7 March 2016
Available online 1 April 2016

Keywords:
Heritage conservation
Heritage tourism
The tourist economy
West Lake pattern

ABSTRACT

West Lake's economic, social and cultural structure comprises six facets: (1) maintaining West Lake World Heritage Site as an open accessible tourist location; (2) ensuring the planning, management and tourism marketing of West Lake are culturally rather than purely economically oriented; therefore truly benefitting the preservation and conservation of West Lake; (3) selectively decreasing and mitigating the tourism pressure on West Lake, especially in those areas of high cultural, ecological and environmental vulnerability; (4) ensuring travellers adopt appropriate sustainable tourism values to enjoy a positive experience; (5) ensuring the marketing of West Lake tourism and the consequent distribution of incomes comply with legal and other appropriate standards; and (6) expanding and extending the social benefits of West Lake tourism. To aid the examination of West Lake in this paper, a comparison is made between the management policies of West Lake and Mt, Huangshan (Yellow Mountain) to illustrate a number of fundamental and organisational relationships involving tourism at heritage sites.

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1. Introduction

West Lake, one of China's world heritage sites, is located in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province in eastern China. Long a recreational zone for the city's residents, it also possesses a specific pattern of tourism that the Chinese travel industry refers to as the West Lake Pattern (WLP). This paper examines WLP's organisation and its significance to China's heritage tourism. The WLP is based on the concepts of one “free” and four “no's”, in line with a basic Chinese concept of using numbers to characterize a general set of ideas. In short, the core area is open and free to the public, but with no increases in ticket prices, no transfer and rent for heritage-related land use, no disturbance of cultural properties, and no commercial occupation of public resources and properties. In essence, the Lake is perceived as a public and non-profit oriented heritage services supply system. It also reflects the development of the tourism industry in China.

2. The system and significance of the WLP

2.1. The system

In essence, the West Lake is a public- and non-profit oriented heritage services supply system. Located in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, the management approach taken to the Lake was influenced by Zhejiang being the first province in China to adopt a conscious public cultural service. For example, Zhejiang museum sold year-long admission cards to customers as far back as 1998. The price of

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.03.013
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the year card is lower than a single ticket, being but 10 RMB for adults and 5 RMB for students (Chen, 2008). The Museum is also free to certain groups of people (Yang, 2011). In 2001 Zhejiang Museum tried to open the museum to all tourists in 2001 on a free entry basis. The success of this scheme led the Chinese central government to promote a policy of encouraging free entry to all museums. The West Lake site sustains this approach with its concepts of one "free" and four "no's". Only by first achieving the one "free" first, can the four "no's" be achieved. The nature of the lake is shown in Figs. 1 and 2.

2.2. The significance of the WLP

The WLP's economic, social and cultural significance is characterised by six factors:

2.2.1. Making the West Lake world heritage site serve as a global common good and provide universally accessible tourist opportunities

In order to earn more profit, heritage operators may distort the public nature of heritage attractions. For example, the heritage operators may require visitors to buy tickets to enter the tourist attractions, thereby introducing a market system and the concept of cultural commodification.

On the other hand, West Lake pursues an alternative policy whereby it is open to all - both local residents and tourists - free of charge.

2.2.2. Ensuring the planning, management and tourism marketing of West Lake are culturally oriented rather than purely economically oriented, thereby truly benefitting the preservation and conservation of West Lake

Under the for-profit management model, heritage planning, management and operation are led by economic considerations. In order to earn the maximum economic benefit, tourist attractions in China tend to become excessively focused on infrastructure construction. For-profit management models hence protect tourist attractions on a selective basis, often concentrating on the core of the heritage tourist attractions, thereby isolating it from its surroundings, including the social and natural as well as the cultural.

It is here contended that by being open and free to the public, the management model is changed from an economy-driven to one that is culturally-driven. Because there are no direct economic benefit conflicts in the West Lake, there is no point in improving tourism GDP by harming the heritage and ecology through infrastructure construction.

2.2.3. Selectively decreasing and mitigating the tourism pressure on West Lake, especially in those areas of cultural, ecological and environmental vulnerability

Under the for-profit operation model, tourists tend to be drawn to visit "hot" tourist attractions, which in turn attract high prices that in themselves come to symbolise "importance". These hot tourist attractions may then become exposed to cultural, ecological and environmental vulnerabilities. For example, open-air sites are sensitive to tourists' trampling effects. Murals become sensitive to chemicals including those caused by the presence of high volumes of visitors and their breathing. Alternatively the high prices of tickets may lead tourists to visit some so-called 'cold' tourist attractions; thereby exceeding the environmental carrying capacity of such attractions.

It is suggested that being open and free to the public can get overcome this problem. One reason is that because a given site is open and free to the public, tourists can arrange their time to visit the tourist attractions based on their personal travel preferences and time schedules, thereby overcoming the cultural, ecological and environmental pressures that are associated with tour bus operations that are prevalent in China.

2.2.4. Ensuring travellers turn to the appropriate values of tourism and enjoy a healthy tourism experience

The For-profit management model results in high ticket prices for a tourist attraction. It is suggested this affects behaviour as high prices induce tourists to visit as many of the attractions as is possible within their stay at a site. This, especially in summer, will create physical discomfort, induce tiredness and thereby reduce the satisfaction that may otherwise be derived from the trip. Being both open and free to the public provides a form of tourism that allows tourists to visit at their leisure, pursue an increase in knowledge and enjoy the experience. High frequency repeat tourists may even

Fig. 1. Waiting for a boat at West Lake.

Fig. 2. Restaurant by the Lake side.

come feel that they are the owner of the heritage tourist attraction. They not only appreciate the heritage, but also tend to protect the environment.

2.2.5. Making the marketing of West Lake tourism and the distribution of incomes comply with legal, reasonable and appropriate standards

The tourism economy created by for-profit management model depends on the ticket price and revenue derived from the heritage site and the degrees of monopoly or competition that exist. The West Lake model provides a new type of tourism economic system, yet it is still culturally-driven heritage tourism. Compared with the for-profit management model, it is possible to identify three differences from the more conventional profit driven approach. First, the for-profit management model depends on ticket revenues from what may be regarded as a 'public' heritage that should be owned by all. The value of West Lake depends on tourists' experiences of the Lake. Second, for-profit management model depends on monopoly. The West Lake employs an open market development pattern. Third, the heritage department is just the manager of the heritage tourist attraction. The WLP makes the marketing of West Lake tourism and the distribution of incomes comply with legal, reasonable and appropriate standards.

It is therefore suggested that being open and free to the public reflects the value of the heritage accurately. It matches the rationale of heritage economy. Equally it is here contended the WLP expands and extends the social benefits of West Lake tourism.

2.2.5.1. A comparison between the West Lake and Mt, Huangshan management schemes. The Huangshan management scheme is a representative of for-profit management operational model. It traditionally is the main approach to managing and operating heritage tourism sites (Xu, 2003). The Table 1 shows the comparisons between them.

In making comparisons, two perspectives can be adopted, one being an appraisal of the system and the second an assessment of performance.

The WLP regards heritage as a public good and tries to both protect and develop heritage at the same time. It also combines non-profit and for-profit management. It handles the relationships among different stakeholders appropriately, including government, travel companies, heritage communities and tourists. The performance of WLP is claimed to be not only outstanding, but also comprehensive. It not only contributes to the local tourism economy, but also preserves culture. It also ensures that the marketing of West Lake tourism and the distribution of incomes comply with legal, reasonable and appropriate standards.

From this stance it becomes possible to identify the implications for the Chinese heritage tourism industry. After the open door policy commenced in China, for-profit management became the main management style of heritage (Xu, 2002). This possesses specific characteristics. First, the goal of heritage tourism is to help achieve a higher GDP at a local, regional or national level. Second, the tourism economy is led by the high price of tickets. Third, heritage resources are a monopoly of the government. Third, for-profit management poses three problems for the development of heritage tourism. These are (a) a contradiction between the development of heritage tourism and the conservation of the heritage resources, (b) how might revenue be shared between government, companies and communities, and (c) a contradiction between high ticket price and tourists' desired psychological benefit. These hinder the development of heritage tourism in China.

The WLP provide a good example how to overcome at least some of these issues in the development of heritage tourism in China. It does through three complementary principles or policy implications. It is suggested that the WLP represents a challenge to the normal pattern of heritage tourism in China, and highlights a series of challenges to those policies. These are listed below.

2.2.6. Policy implication one

2.2.6.1. The fundamental importance of choosing an appropriate organisational platform for heritage tourism. Choosing an appropriate organisational basis for heritage tourism is essential when developing heritage tourism. The positive attitudes towards

Table 1
Comparison of the tourism operational system and performance between West Lake and Huangshan.

Types of administration affairs	West Lake pattern	Huang Shan pattern	Comparison
Culture identity and economic, social characters of scenic area			
Cultural identity	World Cultural Heritage site	World Natural and Cultural Heritage	Equal
Social character	There are indigenous communities		Equal
Economic character (property)	Public Goods; indigenous communities has traditional power on the resources		Equal
Tourism management and operational system of scenic area			
Administrative belongs	Governed by the Hangzhou government, maintaining the traditional affiliation	Governed by the Tunxi city government instead of the former Taiping county, and now Tunxi city is called Huangshan city	Huangshan processes inappropriate in terms of dealing with traditional rights and the historical culture
Basic institution and objectives	A three four 'no's' policy (which means free entry, do not increase the price, do not to sell the land, no vandalism, no misappropriation of public resources); to operate to in forms of a "franchise"	Profit-making business; The goal is "to maximize the economic impact, minimize negative environmental impacts."	West Lake is right, but Huangshan does not perform well.
Space of scenic area	Soft border for visitors' free-flowing	Hard boundary, so tourists cannot flow freely	West Lake is right, but Huangshan does not perform well.
Subject of administration	Government	Government	Same
Subject and nature of operation	Nonprofit business of the government, and profitable business for private company	Monopoly profit business	West Lake is right, but Huangshan does not perform well.
Tourism mode	Maintaining the historical layout; No new commercial construction after becoming world heritage	Increasing a number of new commercial buildings, even up on the mountain after becoming the world heritage	West Lake is right, but Huangshan does not perform well.
Planning and construction			
Planning	Culture-led Heritage Tourism Plan	Economy-led Heritage Tourism Plan	West Lake is right, but Huangshan does not perform well.
Construction	In premise of the maintenance of the historical and cultural value and function, developing and enriching the culture	• Make great efforts to resort safety facilities construction and tourism road construction • Improve the scenic sanitation • Continue to strengthen the scenic green • Construction of tourism cableway • The construction of large hotels, restaurants, shops and recreation ground for tourists to provide food, shelter, transportation, travel, shopping, entertainment and other services • Built office facilities, workers' living area and reservoirs to meet the living needs of tourists and resort workers	West Lake is right, but Huangshan does not perform well. Huangshan performed well in terms of tourism safety, scenic clean, tourists' convenience and other aspects. However, due to the economic-oriented, it produced many negative effects on heritage protection and tourists in spite of the high cost.
Protection of heritage, ecology and environment	• Has protected the authenticity and integrity of West Lake • Although there has been controversial about the reconstruction of the Leifeng Pagoda, the way in exploring the characteristics of protection method based on the Chinese heritage has its inevitability • Spare no effort to protect the environment and ecology	• Cultural Heritage has be properly protected • Ignoring the vulnerability of the natural environment, the mode of operation to create the tourist hotspot was detrimental to the protection of natural heritage, ecology and environment • For the management of tourism pollution and ecological destruction issues, did not hesitate to pay high price	• West Lake is right, but Huangshan does not perform well. • Huangshan has two main problems: (1) Heritage, ecological and environmental problems caused by the tour operation are difficult to resolve • Did not focussing on the source when solving the pollution problem, making the price too high
Evaluation on the management and operation of scenic area			
Evaluation on the economic effect	• "Multiple-Day Tour" instead of "day trip" • Incomes rise, not fall, benefiting society	• Operate monopoly, so the income is extremely high; • Competing interests with society, affecting the income of local community and enterprises	West Lake is better
Evaluation on the heritage effect	• Ensure the authenticity and integrity of heritage	• The mode of operation is now affecting part of the natural heritage • Some engineering facilities are causing the loss of water landscape downstream of the river	West Lake is right, but Huangshan performs not well.
Evaluation on the ecological effect	• Ensure the ecological quality	• For part of the natural heritage for mass tourism, its ecological landscape quality cannot be consistent with the protection criteria of the World Heritage	West Lake is right, but Huangshan performs not well.
Evaluation on the environmental effect	• Ensure environmental quality	• Be able to protect the quality of the environment	Same
Evaluation on the psychology of tourists	• It enables visitors to get a real physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual enjoyment	• With tourist cableway, and exhausted, this is not a normal state of mind tourists	West Lake is right, but Huangshan performs not well.
Evaluation on the social responsibilities	• Consistent with the social requirements in terms of heritage and environmental protection, tourism services and heritage communities	• Cannot meet the social requirement in terms of heritage and environmental protection, tourism services and heritage communities management	West Lake is right, but Huangshan performs not well.

heritage property and the principles of heritage conservation determine the success of such a platform. The WLP uses the 'one free' and 'four no's' approach to solve these three problems and contradictions. Hence a priority is the determination of the organisational framework within which heritage tourism is to be developed.

2.2.7. Policy implication two

2.2.7.1. The adoption of non-profit oriented marketing of heritage services and priority given to the conservation of heritage authenticity and integrity. There are two important implications for the success of the WLP. First, it is a way to manage non-profit public resources and services. Second, it promotes the conservation of heritage authenticity and integrity. It is premised on the view that heritage resources are public goods. Therefore, these resources should be used for the public and supported by non-profit marketing of heritage services. In terms of heritage tourism, this includes two components. The first is the appreciation of heritage. The second part is the provision of ancillary services to support heritage tourism, including food, accommodation, transport, shopping and entertainment. The first component is non-profit, while the second is oriented toward being profitable. The WLP represents the combination of both parts.

2.2.8. Policy implication three

2.2.8.1. Recognising defects of current tourism economic-related principles in providing guidelines for heritage tourism. Three defects can be found in a traditional economic oriented approach to tourism when applying these principles to heritage tourism. These are:

2.2.8.2. Cultural and natural heritage as tourism resources. The usual approach ignores the essential differences between heritage and non-heritage travel-reaction resources. Generally natural resources, cultural resources and man-made resources are defined as tourism resources (Sinclair & Stable, 2004). However, tourism resources can be classified into at least three classifications. The first is cultural and natural resources. The second are land resources with cultural or natural elements. The third is general land resources.

2.2.8.3. The unique nature of heritage property rights. However, cultural and natural heritage are public goods. The aboriginal communities who live in the setting of natural heritage should retain traditional resource rights (Posey & Dutfield, 1996). Heritage is multi-functional, including social, educational, research and economic functions. Heritage tourists should enjoy the non-profit nature of these resources, and the aboriginal communities should share the economic revenues. If the management approaches ignore the unique nature of heritage property rights, it will be hard to build the foundation for properly analysing the tourism economy within the wider resource base.

2.2.8.4. The unique principles and standards required for heritage conservation and a new understanding of sustainable tourism. Most authorities refer to the need for environmental and cultural protection, and sustainable tourism. However, they cannot replace heritage. There are therefore unique principles of heritage conservation. They are the conservation of heritage authenticity and integrity. One main problem for heritage conservation in China is that a sole focus on environmental protection ignores the need for conservation of heritage authenticity and integrity. As a consequence some heritage resources have been destroyed. The requirements of heritage conservation therefore promote a new understanding of sustainable tourism.

2.2.8.5. Measuring the value of the heritage. The economic value is just a part of the worth of heritage. Equally any value from heritage tourism is just a part of the value of heritage. Heritage value cannot just be determined by economic values alone. Therefore, there is a need to recognise the limitations of the methods used to measure heritage value. Measuring heritage value is to be mainly used for the conservation of heritage, and not simply for determining the ticket price. Because heritage is a public good, there is no link between entry price and the value of the heritage. The textbooks on tourism resources and heritage tourism decision often fail to make such distinctions. The entry ticket price should be influenced by the cost of the conservation of heritage authenticity and integrity.

2.2.8.6. The link between heritage and tourism supply and demand. Many speak of the supply and demand of tourism product. Again, however, they often fail to classify the differences between heritage tourism and other tourism products. In fact, the theory of supply and demand (and the inverse link between demand and price) is not appropriate for heritage. Foreign museum experts believe that there is no price elasticity for museums (O'hagan, 1995; Luksetich & Partridge, 1997). Heritage is also the same. Because of the uniqueness of heritage, the high ticket price is not an effective way to control the number of tourists. If the traditional theory of supply and demand is used in heritage tourism, it will lead to the over-exploitation of heritage resources Therefore, it will adversely affect the conservation of heritage authenticity and integrity.

2.2.8.7. Heritage tourism and consumer rights. Many textbooks examine heritage tourism from the perspective of managers. Managers tend to regard tourist consumers as ordinary consumers. They try to promote consumption and earn economic benefit through tourism product innovation. In doing so they ignore any responsibility of what heritage tourism means for tourists. Therefore a need exists to provide guidelines for mangers to conserve heritage resources.

2.2.8.8. Heritage and income distribution. The usual analysis of income distribution in textbooks also ignores the unique character of heritage property. The aboriginal communities living in heritage areas own the traditional resources of the heritage tourist attractions. Some buildings in the heritage tourist attractions may be owned by communities or families. Any references to the need to develop heritage tourism for companies, local government and the country may well be deficient if they ignore a need to develop heritage tourism for aboriginal communities or families.

2.2.8.9. Heritage economics. The authors believe that tourism cannot be regarded solely as an economic activity, and multiple approaches are required to analyse tourism activities. With reference to China, Chinese understandings of heritage tourism are akin to those found in the West. However, given the different contexts, the three listed contradictions of heritage tourism found in China seem less apparent in the United States and European countries. Among the reasons are (a) tourism departments, researchers and managers in these countries respect the conservation of heritage (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994) and (b) heritage sites are better protected by heritage departments based on rules and regulations.

In China however, there tends to be a greater emphasis on money, revenue generation and income generation and heritage is dominated by tourism departments in China, often because heritage issues are seen secondary to those of rural and urban poverty alleviation. Creating a heritage tourism economy for China is

therefore advocated.

To develop such a concept it needs to be recognised that a 'heritage tourism economy' is cross- and multi-disciplinary. Three economic contexts can be distinguished - heritage economy, cultural economy and tourism economy. Heritage economy is a new concept in China. In essence, heritage tourism is a cultural phenomenon. Cultural demand and a cultural industry represent a basic demand and supply economic system. However, a clear conceptual framework of Chinese heritage tourism economy does not exist.

Tourism departments and governments should consider the benefits of heritage tourism and the cultural industry and focus on developing the cultural, economic and political function of heritage tourism. In positioning a heritage economic system it might be said that a heritage tourism economy should include the economics of heritage, culture and tourism.

3. Discussion and conclusion

It is suggested that there are three types of land patterns found at heritage resources. First, it should include the core cultural and heritage sites. Second, it should include associated land resources and amenities connected to cultural or heritage elements. These offer a huge potential to become tourism resources through exploitation. The third type is the general land resources, such as the exploitation of Disney Land, which become representative of a culture while being of recent vintage. From this perspective a series of research topics and issues emerge with reference to the management of Chinese heritage sites under the 'for profit' management philosophy. These are:

(1) Heritage management and operation system

This is the foundation of heritage tourism economics. Heritage is a different Disney Land! The management of heritage should solve three problems. First, it should consider the link between cost and performance. Second, tourism product and marketing strategies should be considered. Third, it should consider the link between the manager of heritage sites, tourism companies, heritage communities and tourists.

(2) The heritage tourism product and service price

The guidance for a non-profit management style should be established.

(3) The supply and demand analysis of heritage tourism.

Environmental capacity should be part of the supply and demand analysis of heritage tourism.

(4) The investment in heritage tourism

Investment in development and protection should be balanced.

(5) Tourist consumers' rights

We should establish new concepts of 'consumers travel rights', 'travel preferences' and 'travel consumer surpluses'.

(6) Distribution of the economic benefits of heritage tourism

We should establish a system to distribute the economic benefits of heritage tourism to heritage property owners, heritage communities, tourism operators and governments. We should make the marketing of heritage tourism and the distribution of income comply with legal, reasonable and appropriate standards;

(7) The performance evaluation of heritage tourism

The performance evaluation of heritage tourism is the basis of operation decision-making. Many methods can be used to evaluate the performance of heritage tourism such as CBA and CEA. We should also notice the differences between heritage resources and natural resources. Heritage resources focus more on knowledge and culture. The link between heritage resources and economic development is limited.

It is suggested that the alternative represented by West Lake and its management plan that places free access and then constraints to protect the heritage and cultural values next (the one 'yes' and the four 'no's' approach) is a viable approach that solves many of the above problems. It is not necessarily an answer for all sites, but it is model that is worth considering at many of the other heritage sites found in China, and possibly is a model for other sites around the world.

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