The historical evolution of China's tourism development policies (1949–2013) – A quantitative research approach

Xiaoyun Tang
China Tourism Academy, Beijing 100005, China

HIGHLIGHTS

• Traces China’s tourism policies from 1949 to 2013.
• Identifies themes based on analysis of 378 major tourism policies.
• Confirms the role of the Chinese Government as determinant of the country’s tourism policies.
• Indicates how tourism policies change to address current economic and social problems.
• Highlights the current stresses of changing to market led systems under delegated government controls.

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the multi-dimensional analysis of the 379 tourism policy documents issued by Central Government and related departments and ministries from 1949 to 2013, this article analyzes the evolution of China's tourism development policies since the founding of China using a perspective. The research results show that (1) Tourism policy in China has evolved from being based on the administrative allocation of resources to a market-based allocation of resources constrained by administrative powers. (2) The targets for tourism policy have always been developed with the strategic objectives of national economic and social development in mind. These can be divided into four stages: servicing foreign affairs, developing the business economy, providing a new growth point in the economy, and becoming a national strategic pillar industry. (3) Tourism policy is mainly used for micro-supervision. Tourism policy formulation lacks the ability to macro-control the factors of production such as capital, land, technology and talent. (4) Increasing numbers of government departments are becoming involved in formulating tourism policy, but policy efforts have become more stable. Recent studies suggest that the effective operation of the tourism economy is highly dependent on the institutional arrangements within the wider social economic system. Thus, when the Tourism Law was enacted, the development of the Chinese tourism industry entered a new stage. In this new stage, technological advances, market demand, and the competition and cooperative relationships among companies will jointly lead innovation in the tourism industry. Innovation, such as new products and new business models will in turn be the base for tourism industry development. Furthermore, industrial macroeconomic regulation and public service will become the basic elements of government tourism management under the new law.

1. Introduction

Effective operations under real conditions are dependent on the complex and diversified system arrangements of human society, as is the industrial economy. The system, as a productive asset and social capital, is a framework fully unleashing entrepreneurship in a marketing process and is the basis of economic growth (Kasper, Manfred, & Han, 2000). In practical industrial development, the government usually stipulates policies with which to develop industries. The tourism industry is a service industry featuring mobile space and involving multiple departments, and it is heavily dependent on a system. China’s tourism industry had first developed in the 1920s and then served China’s diplomatic policies with...
the founding of the New China. It has subsequently turned into industry of economic and social importance after China's reform and opening-up.

This article takes the 379 policy papers issued by the government from 1949 to 2013 as the base from which to systematically sort and analyze the quantity, structure, types and frameworks, targets and tools that explain the internal relationships between China's tourism development and policy arrangements, and the evolution, implementation and development of those policies. Semantically, the word "policies" means political strategy or tactics. In the practice of politics, "policy" bears three layers of meaning, the strategy, tactics and/or implementation. Secondly, there is an implicit code of conduct, including guiding principles, routes, policies and criteria stipulated by the Party and the administrative orders, decrees and statements, and thirdly, the final political actions (Dai & Chen, 2003; Liu, 2005). The policies themselves possess the characteristics of various classifications, mistakes, procrastination and modes of expression reflecting power structures and struggles. They reflect the organs of power through language and words, and the nature of it is the idealization, subjection and practice of class interests (Chen & Min, 2006). Relevant research practices (Liu & Sun, 2007; Li, Wu, Gao, & Zhang, 2009; Yang, 2006) shall be referred to in this paper. As such the paper divides the range of policies into laws, administrative regulations, rules of departments, the standard documents of the State Council and standardized documents of various departments.

Research into national policies towards tourism development has long been conducted in the international arena, and can be divided into three categories. First, there are the policies and regulations promoting tourism development and the policies of restrictions on, and guidance of, tourism development. With regard to promoting policy research, Edgell (1983) analyzed the important role of the National Tourism Policy Act issued in US in 1981 that promotes tourism against the background of international economy and trade. Similarly Soshiroda (2005) analyzed the evolution of Japanese tourism policies from 1859 to 2003 and their regulating role during a period of recession. With regard to research into standards and conservation policies, Krippendorf (1982) evaluated the risks of an unrestricted growth of tourism against the background of mass travel and suggested regulatory policies for the corresponding economic and technological sectors. Gössling (2013), for his part, estimated energy consumption and the emission of greenhouse gases resulting from tourism in many countries and believes that the consumption and intensity of greenhouse gas emissions have been seriously underestimated, thus suggesting a need for national legislation. With regard to research into the direction and development of tourism policy, Smyth (1986) provided the example of Northern Ireland to discuss tax preferences and lowering tax thresholds while employment rates remained high, fully confirming the contribution of tourism to employment.

Shafer and Choi (2006) also conducted research into government policies in tourism planning and coordination, and the role of the dissemination of scientific knowledge, cooperation and information management between relevant parties with common interests. In a European context Minnaert, Maitland, and Miller (2009) suggested that social tourism might be an effective social policy to improve the quality of life for low-income Europeans.

Second, the stipulation, fulfillment and implementation of tourism-related policies have been studied. Ritchie (1998) believes that any tourism policy should fully consider the ideas of community residents to develop policies and schemes that are universally acceptable and sustainable. Akehurst, Bland, and Nevin (1993) found in their research that European tourism policies sought to attract tourists with higher consuming capabilities, thereby leading to improved product quality and reduce seasonal impacts. Baum (1994) pointed out that economic factors are the main reasons as to why there are different tourism policies in different countries after undertaking a comparative study of tourism policies in various countries. Wang and Ap (2013) concluded in their research that the successful implementation of policies in China is dependent on the capabilities and the holistic ability of the related departments of local tourism watchdogs.

Third, the outcomes of tourism policies have been studied. Liu, Tzeng and Lee (2012) have suggested an evaluation method for tourism policies featuring a multi-target decision model that can be used to identify the sequence of level and standards of tourism policies. Meng, Siriwardanan and Pham (2013) applied CGE to evaluate the effectiveness of Singapore's tourism policies and found that reducing taxes on consumer expenditure can be very effective in promoting local tourism while subsidy policies can be regarded as being less effective.

From a Chinese perspective, research into tourism development policies seem to be mainly about the promotion of international experiences, the design of policy frameworks and a qualitative analysis of policy performance. Such studies have the following three features. First, the promotion and introduction of international experiences was regarded as a priority at the early stage of Chinese research. Cai Wankun (1984), Liu and Wu (1988), and Yang, Senlin and Dineen (1995) examined the tourism policies of Japan, U.S. and EU from these perspectives, and Wang (2002) looked toward the development of agriculture-based tourism in Australia and Taiwan. Second, the focus of research was about observing evidences and designing framework for the shaping of tourism policies, and Yang (2011) and Zhong (2009) provided a comprehensive analysis of evolving Chinese tourism policies. The issues of tourism policies have been to the forefront of consideration in China and have attracted significant attention as demonstrated by the work of Li (2004), Zhang (2005), Luo and Mao (2008) and Dai and Xia (2009) with respect to outbound tourism policies, the orientation of policies for the general public, tourism trade policies and tourism-related employment. Third, a qualitative means of research has been mainly adopted. Liu, Wu and Liao (2007) evaluated the nature of the design defects of Golden Week from the perspective of strategic environment assessment, and Huang and Yuan (2008) discussed the performance of agricultural policies by examining rural tourism policies. Shu (2011) evaluated the performance of policies adopted by Guizhou Province at difference stages And Peng and Hu (2008) suggested establishing a performance evaluation system for tourism policies given that at that time there were no similar quantitative evaluations of tourism policies. Zheng, Mi and Wen (2013) also pointed out that, in the process of stipulating tourism policies, there remained little if any research about the prediction effects of carrying out policies. Therefore, they suggested the implementation of quantitative performance prediction and evaluation. In general, there still remains a huge space for expanding the range and quantitative nature of tourism despite the achievements that have been made in tourism policy research.

2. Methods and data sources

The quantitative analysis of policy has long been a difficult topic. Some fundamental processes have been adopted in public policy analysis and policy documents since the founding of New China. These have been taken as examples for the analysis of tourism development policies of China at different stages despite an inability of accessing many of the myriad of policy documents and all the various tourism development policies across the country. The process of research can include the following three steps. First, there is a need to identify the nature and quantity of documents

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