



CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

Zhu Jia Jiao, China

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Abstract: Chinese water towns have experienced tourism investment since the adoption of the Open Door Policy in 1978. These river-based settlements offer an ancient small-town atmosphere, historic architecture, and a diversity of heritage commodities. The implications of this development in one such town, Zhu Jia Jiao, are examined through application of the model of creative destruction. Data collected on investments, tourist numbers, and resident attitudes reveal that this destination is in the model's second stage of advanced commodification, which may be maintained if limits are placed on arrivals. Findings should be beneficial to other communities which are basing their development on marketing small-town heritage. **Keywords:** China, creative destruction, heritage, attitudes. © 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: Destruction créatrice à Zhu Jia Jiao, China. Les villages d'eau chinois ont connu de l'investissement touristique depuis l'adoption de la politique «Porte Ouverte» en 1978. Ces villages fluviaux offrent une atmosphère de petit village ancien, de l'architecture historique et une diversité de produits patrimoniaux. Les implications de ce développement dans un tel village, Zhu Jia Jiao, sont examinées à travers l'application du modèle de la destruction créatrice. Des données recueillies sur les investissements, les nombres de touristes et les attitudes des habitants révèlent que cette destination se trouve à la deuxième étape du modèle de la commodification avancée, qui peut être maintenue si on impose des limites sur les arrivées. Les résultats devraient être utiles à d'autres communautés dont le développement est basé sur le marketing du patrimoine de petit village. **Mots-clés:** Chine, destruction créatrice, patrimoine, attitudes. © 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of the Open Door policy in 1978, destinations focusing on ancient heritage have become an increasingly visible element of the Chinese landscape. Water towns are prominent within the more than 220 such designated sites (*Chinese Old Town Tour 2005*). They are river-based settlements offering tourists the

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opportunity to become immersed in a heritage setting, replete with historic architecture and small-town ambience. Their emergence as destinations for both domestic and foreign tourists has been driven by a surge in both public and, to a lesser extent, private investment. Like all destinations, however, it is becoming increasingly evident that the financial gains spawned by such investments have not come without costs. These externalities are the primary focus of this paper.

The fundamental purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between tourism investment and the quality of life of residents living within the Chinese water town, Zhu Jia Jiao. This settlement has been the recipient of large sums of capital, projected to enhance its heritage base and ensure its development as a viable destination. To guide understanding of the implications of these investments for local residents, a variety of models developed in the literature was consulted. [Butler's \(1980\)](#) model, based on the idea of a cycle of tourism evolution, is the most prominent one, and its strengths and weaknesses have been widely discussed ([Butler, 2006](#)). While such instruments are of great value and have been applied to a wide variety of types of destination and at a diversity of scales, a new model, originally introduced to the field of rural geography ([Mitchell 1998](#)), is presented here. Like [Butler's](#), the new one of "creative destruction" uses stages but differs in two respects. First, [Butler's \(1980\)](#) was developed initially with coastal resorts in mind, whereas the new model specifically addresses small towns with heritage resources. Second, the former is one-dimensional in that it considers the evolutionary process on the basis of a single variable, number of tourists, whereas the latter incorporates a greater number of variables. This paper introduces the creative destruction model and also applies it in a novel Chinese context.

Creative Destruction

The term "creative destruction" is borrowed from the early work of [Schumpeter \(1942\)](#), who coined it to explain why capitalistic economies undergo cyclical periods of growth and decline. [Schumpeter](#) argued that the quest for surplus value, or profit, is what drives investment in the creation of new technologies. These investments, he demonstrated, subsequently lead to the obsolescence (destruction) of existing technologies and the innovations dependent on them. As this production cycle unfolds, it has a direct bearing on the regional economy, whose response will be one of either growth or decline.

The creative destruction concept has permeated a number of diverse strands of academic inquiry. The field of evolutionary economics that treats competition as an evolutionary process, and not economic equilibrium, owes much to [Schumpeter's](#) early ideas regarding the paramount role of innovation ([Anderson 1994](#); [Metcalfe 1998](#)). Studies of globalization also have been enhanced by application of this concept ([Cowen 2002](#)). In this case, the diffusion and adoption of Western creative activity is seen as responsible for the destruction of national cultures.

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