

Policy Assessment: A Case Study of Rural Tourism, Recreation and Leisure Development in Suburb of Chengdu, China

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Abstract

In this essay, we are going to illustrate the development of the rural tourism, recreation and leisure in a suburban area of Chengdu City, assess its implement and give rationales to its development. The results shows that the policy has achieved performances including Having promoted the income of local farmers, Having provided tourism, recreation and leisure for the public, Achieving the mutual promotion of industries in the area, Having improved the public facilities of the community, Having improved the conservation awareness of the community, Improved the capability of local community. While it met some issue to be solved such as Non-equal distribution of tourists, Lack of recreation facilities, Negative impacts on the community, fewer local business operators. Measures should be taken to make it better including the local community has developed; farmers get richer; the site serves the public.

Key words: Policy assessment; Land use; Village tourism; Rural economy

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INTRODUCTION

China economy rapid growth leads to a dual-structure of society. There are large prosperous cities meanwhile poor and underdeveloped rural areas. Urban people have more wealth to spend in tourism, recreation and leisure, while the peasants want to make money. In order to minimize the distance between the urban and rural areas, the central government launched rural tourism to encourage the urban people to consume in rural areas when the National Tourism Bureau made the theme of tourism of that year as “touring in countryside around China” in 1998 (Jiang & Zhang, 2006). In late 1990s and early 2000s, many local governments around China, as well as Chengdu city, encouraged the development of rural tourism with different models. In this essay, we are going to illustrate the development of the rural tourism, recreation and leisure in a suburban area of Chengdu City, assess its implement and give rationales to its development.

1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTORY

1.1 A Brief Introductory of Chengdu City

Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province, has a population of 14 million, with a history of more than 2300 years (GOCa, 2009), has always been the economic center of the southwest of China. In Song Dynasty, the first paper currency in the world, “Jiaozi”, was invented in Chengdu (GOCa, 2009). Because of the prosperity in the long history, people in Chengdu have different ideology of life. The leisure culture is part of the culture of Chengdu. Chengdu is famous all over China for its cuisine, hotpot, Sichuan snacks, tea and Majiang culture. The leisure culture, the large population, the national wide famous cuisine are good foundation to develop rural tourism in the suburban areas around Chengdu.

1.2 A Brief Introductory of Sansheng Huaxiang

Sansheng Huaxiang is a rural tourism site located in Sansheng Town, named with the Sansheng temple where there are three Ancient Saints worshiped. It is alongside one national road, about 20 km away from the city center of Chengdu.

Sansheng Huaxiang is a collective name for five scenery sites including “Chrysanthemum Garden at the Eastern Fence”, “Moonlight at the Lotus Pond”, “Vegetables Field of Jiang’s family”, “Happy Plum Forest” and “Farmhouses in Country of Flowers” in that area. Huaxiang in Chinese means the country of flowers, which means a beautiful place. These sites have different scenery features from each other. They attracts tourist at all seasons. At the Farmhouses in Country of Flowers, there are many pot-flowers for sell for all seasons in different green houses. Moonlight at the Lotus Pond, you can enjoy the lotus in summer. Chrysanthemum Garden at the Eastern Fence, you can enjoy and buy different flowers of chrysanthemum in autumn. Happy Plum Forest, you can enjoy and buy plum flowers in winter. Vegetable Field of Jiang’s Family, you can rent a plot of field and grow vegetable you like.

For Chengdu people, the most important thing in Sansheng Huaxiang is that you can have delicious dishes with farmhouse flavor, and you can have tea and play games with family members and friends at the “Happy Farmhouses” at all the scenery sites.

2. THE RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF SANSHENG HUAXIANG WITH THE SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY

2.1 The Background of the Policy to Encourage Rural Tourism, Leisure and Recreation in Sansheng Huaxiang

The development of the rural tourism, leisure and recreation in Sansheng Huaxiang has an obvious government leading feature. Local government launched the policy because of the following backgrounds.

2.1.1 The First Flower Expo of Sichuan Province was Hold Here in 2003

The expo was very successful and attracted a large number of tourists. In the first week, about 1.2 million tourists visited the expo (Yan, 2008). In order to hold the expo, a few big flower companies were moved to the area with the incentive of policy. A big flower market was established permanently there. After the expo, these companies also exhibit their flowers and do business at the market. The market attracts many people who come to have a look at the flowers and buy flowers. These people need some services, especially places for food.

2.1.2 Governments Want to Find a Suitable Industry to Enrich Farmers

The rural area has not changed a lot because of the non equal development policy in China. The big challenge for governments is to enrich the farmers, develop country side and promote agriculture. The success of the flower expo attracted many tourists every weekend. In order to serve the tourists, a few simple Happy Farmhouses were established and the owners all succeeded in their business. Happy Farmhouse is one kind of farmhouse restaurant to serve farmhouse favor dishes for tourists, who are more likely the urban residents tired of the urban life and dishes. The first Happy Farmhouse was established for Bonsai customers at Nongke Village, the Village of Bonsai of China, in 1987 (He, 2006). Nongke Village is a suburban village about 30 km away from Chengdu City. It is famous for its Bonsai art. When the owner made money by restaurant, the Bonsai in his garden became a tool to attracting guests. Later on, the model has been learned, and many Happy Farmhouses are established at the suburban areas of Chengdu. There are about 5000 Happy Farmhouses around Chengdu, and this has become a featured rural tourism in Chengdu (Special Commissioner’s Office in Chengdu of Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China (SCOCD of DOC), 2005). In order to attract guests from the city, many Happy Farmhouses build their garden first, and then begin their food business. Gradually, the farmhouse favor dishes are the important reason for tourists (He, 2006).

In Sansheng Huaxiang, the gardens of those flower companies become public gardens attracting a steady stream of tourists. What the farmers need to do is to establish restaurants. Therefore, in order to enrich the farmers, local government encouraged the farmers to invest Happy Farmhouses.

2.2 The Measures of the Policy

In order to implement the policy, a few measures were conducted in Sansheng Huaxiang. Firstly, the whole area was planned scientifically. In order to differentiate from Happy Farmhouse in other area, the local government planned the whole area with different features. According to the natural resources, five different parts were planned as illustrated above. Secondly, encourage farmers to promote the houses by traditional Sichuan farmhouses to attract tourist. The farmers took the main responsibility and local government gave them some subsidy. Thirdly, local government paid for the public facilities. In order to promote the whole area, local government broadened and paved the public roads with asphalt. The tourism information office, public toilets, visitor square, public garden, and other facilities were constructed by local government.

Fourthly, farmers were educated. Happy Farmhouse is a business, and operating the business was a challenge for farmers. In order to promote their abilities, a series

of educations were provided to the farmers. Fifthly, financial services were provided by banks with the help of government. The establishing of a Happy Farmhouse needs a lot of money. For most of farmers, they could not afford it. Local government coordinated banks to provide financial services to farmers.

3. THE OUTCOMES OF THE POLICY

With the cooperation of local farmers, community, companies and governments, the tourism of Sansheng Huaxiang developed rapidly and achieved great outcomes.

3.1 Having Promoted the Income of Local Farmers

After the development of the tourism site in Sansheng Huaxiang, the income of local farmers has increased significantly. The traditional livelihood of farmers is agriculture. Because of the high population, farmers in China have not large amount of land, they cannot make reasonable income from the land. Although the income of the farmer of Sansheng Huaxiang was higher than that of most rural area in Chengdu, the average income was still relatively lower. After the development of tourism there, farmers can get income by a few ways. Firstly, some farmers are operating Happy Farmhouse business, and they are the richest in the community. Secondly, some farmers have rented their land and house to others, and work as workers in the community or outside. They can get rent and salaries as well. The rent for one farmhouse has increased from 500-1000RMB (NZ\$100-200) in 2002 to 30,000-100,000RMB (NZ\$6,000-20,000) per year (Annual report of Sansheng Huaxiang in 2010, 2011). They can get higher steady income than ever. Thirdly, because there are some collective companies to make money, such as the car park, the public children's park, every year, people in the community can get bonus from the collective companies. In 2010, the net annual income of per farmer was 13320RMB (Annual report of Sansheng Huaxiang in 2010, 2011), about more than twice of that of farmer in Sichuan.

3.2 Having Provided Tourism, Recreation and Leisure for the Public

The establishment of Sansheng Huaxiang has provided tourism, recreation and leisure for the public. Traditionally, Chengdu people have these events at the public parks in the city. With the development of Happy Farmhouse, more and more people go out of the city to enjoy the nature. The development of Sansheng Huaxiang has provided a broader area for rural tourism, recreation and leisure for the public. Chinese people are not traditionally sports enthusiasts. They prefer sitting calmly and chatting or playing games with friends. The many tourism sites in the big area of Sansheng Huaxiang attract the public to walk around and enjoy the beauty of nature. It provides more recreation chances for the public. On the

other hand, it is the feature of Happy Farmhouse that the food of Happy Farmhouse is normally cheap and most people can afford it (Zhou, 2004). In Sansheng Huaxiang, you can have a meal with the price of 10-50RMB (NZ\$2-10) per person. In 2010, about 11.8 million tourists visited Sansheng Huaxiang, and the total income of tourism was about 450 million RMB (NZ\$90 million) (Annual report of Sansheng Huaxiang in 2010, 2011).

3.3 Achieving the Mutual Promotion of Industries in the Area

Flower industry provides many beautiful flowers, which attract tourists to consume in Sansheng Huaxiang. On the other hand, the consumers of Happy Farmhouses also buy a lot of flowers. The flower industry and the rural tourism promote each other.

3.4 Having Improved the Public Facilities of the Community

The development of rural tourism in Sansheng Huaxiang has also improved the public facilities of the community. Shaw and Williams (2002) pointed out that tourism can bring new infrastructure construction in community. In Sansheng Huaxiang, local government conducted the planning and then put a lot of money for public facilities such as paved road net, water distribution network, public square, tourist information center, *et al.*

3.5 Having Improved the Conservation Awareness of the Community

The development of rural tourism has improved the conservation awareness of the community. The development of rural tourism mainly depends on the attraction of the beauty of nature. Then, just as Cohen (1978) pointed out, tourism gives people a motivation to preserve nature. In Sansheng Huaxiang, local community hires cleaners to keep the environment tidy and clean. Local residents also pay attention to not litter.

3.6 Improved the Capability of Local Community

The development of rural tourism has improved the capability of local community. To promote the tourism, local government provides much training on service, cooking, business management. These training can improve the ability of local people. Operating tourism business is more complicated than traditional agriculture. Through operating tourism, local people have learned how to be successful businessmen. At the same time, the operating of collective assets makes local community to know how to manage public resources properly, and local residents pay more attention on public events. Furthermore, tourism is an industry to deal with people. Tourists bring new ideas to the community, the communication between tourists and tourism operators can improve the ability of local people. Over all, all of these improve the ability of local community.

4. THE PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN SANSHENG HUAXIANG AND RATIONALES FOR THOSE PROBLEMS

Although the rural tourism in Sansheng Huaxiang has achieved great outcome, there are still some problems to be resolved.

4.1 Non-equal Distribution of Tourists

Most tourism sites have a common problem of non-equal distribution of tourist. Sometimes, there are too many people, and it is so crowded. Sometime, there are few people, and it is so desolate. In Sansheng Huaxiang, there are much more people in weekend of spring, summer and autumn. There are few people in weekdays and winter. In weekend of spring, summer and autumn, tourists cannot find a quiet place to go for a walk because cars are everywhere along the roads.

To resolve it, there are a few suggestions for that. Firstly, the differential pricing mechanism can be used. In the weekdays, there is discount for the services in the site. In the busy seasons, the price can be a little higher to reduce the demands. Secondly, hold some events in winter time. In Chengdu, it is a little cold in winter. Local community can think about holding some events which is suitable for the participation of tourists outdoor.

4.2 Lack of Recreation Facilities

People come to Happy Farmhouse not only for cheap and delicious food, but also for leisure and recreation. Zhu and Li's (2007) investigation on tourist satisfaction shows that most tourists are not satisfied with leisure and recreation services there, especially for kids. They want more leisure and recreational activities. Their study also shows that tourists there pay less attention to dishes. The first suggestion for this is to investigate the demands of tourist and construct appropriate facilities. The second is to redesign the road network. Just open the broad arterial roads to vehicles and make the voeux roads only access to people. Therefore, tourists can have more leisure and recreational spaces.

4.3 Negative Impacts on the Community

Except for economic impacts, tourism can also affect the community in social-culture aspects, such as impacts on values, lifestyles, mutual relationships and community structure (Ratz, 2000). In one hand, although tourism has positive impacts on communities in social-cultural aspect, such as social modernisation, modernisation of community relationship, development of traditional culture; on the other hand, it has negative impacts, such as income inequality, family disintegration, over-commercialisation of traditional culture and *et al.* (Shaw & Williams, 2002).

Tourism makes some people wealthy, but also polarizes the community. Some households who build

Happy Farmhouse early have made money and get wealthier. However, some households who entered this industry later are not so fortunate, and some of them have debts. Some of the young poorer in the community can find seasonal jobs in the community, and the elder have little economic benefit from tourism. Tourism makes people more economically unequal.

To make tourism benefits local community equitably, the allocation of bonuses from collective assets should be changed. Because the rich owners of Happy Farmhouse have obtained more benefit from tourism, they can have fewer bonuses. The elderly and poorer can get more bonuses because they also contribute to the tourism.

4.4 Fewer Local Business Operators

The operation of Happy Farmhouse needs higher ability. Although there are too many guests, there are still completions among the operators. Local business operators are less competitive to the outside investors. Some losers have to rent their business to outside investors. One objective of rural tourism is to make local people have higher income. The failure of business makes some poorer.

In order to enhance the competitive ability of local business operators, local government can think about providing more business operating training for local business operators to reinforce their ability.

CONCLUSION

China has achieved great economic growth in the last 30 years. However, with a strategy of developing in urban areas, the rural areas have been ignored in some extent for a long time. The unequal development leads China to be a Dural-structure society. In the last decade, different levels of governments have begun to pay attention to the development of rural areas. How to enrich the farmers, develop rural areas, and develop agriculture becomes a main task for governments. In late 1990s, the central government launched rural tourism, and then there were different experiences throughout China. In Chengdu, there was a pilot site for rural tourism in Sansheng Huaxiang. This essay has illustrated its measures to promote tourism, assessed its outcome, analyzed its barriers in the development and given some suggestions for its future development. The study shows that local government has taken a few measures to promote rural tourism in Sansheng Huaxiang. These measures have achieved the planned outcomes. The local community has developed; farmers get richer; the site serves the public and *et al.* However, there are still some barriers for its future development, such as too crowded, lack of diverse recreation facility and polarized community. In order to make it better, a few measures should be taken in this site. For example, the differential pricing for different seasons; redesign the road network, and so on.

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