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ABSTRACT

Tourism has become a worldwide phenomenon and an increasingly recognized tool for regional development, especially in remote and underdeveloped areas (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000). In China, tourism development has been used as a pro-poor strategy by local government to diminish poverty and increase the living standards of rural residents (Su, 2001). Although the economic and social aspects of rural tourism development have been widely examined and debated, little attention has been paid to the impact of rural tourism development on the cultural construct of rural life (i.e., residents’ rural identities). In this study I explored the role of tourism development in changing rural identities in the context of China, which has been experiencing rapid urbanization and rural reconstructing processes in recent years.

To understand the features of local residents’ rural identity change and its underlying mechanism, I conducted a case study in Chongdu Valley, a popular and pioneering rural tourist destination in the middle of China from June to August 2014. Through the collection of on-site materials, participant observation, and individual interviews, my study: 1) examined the patterns of local residents’ rural identity changes and the underlying reasons behind the changes; 2) explored the detailed transformation of everyday life and performance of rural residents, and how it has influenced the mentality and identity of Chongdu Valley residents; and 3) compared and contrasted different discourses on tourism development issues and their implications for community power relations.

The results indicated that rural identities in Chongdu Valley did experience changes over the course of tourism development. The changes included recognition of the good associated with living a rural life, a change in residents’ perspectives from rural-urban inequality to rural-urban difference, and a rise in community identity. These changes can be attributed to the shift in
national government policies towards rural populations and the local economic and environmental changes brought by tourism development. Daily interaction between rural residents and urban tourists also helped to reconstruct rural identities as it either reinforced or diminished rural-urban differences.

The results also indicated that tourism has provided local residents with an alternative way of living that has greatly changed their life as a rural resident. They have developed a new rural identity from being a farmer to being a businessperson (Bye, 2009). As their experiences accumulated, they were able to acquire a new set of skills, which included, but were not limited to, external networking, marketing, cooking, room service, house and room design, and managing debt. Non-work related activities and mentalities with respect to leisure, consumption, and education were also explored as they were directly influenced by residents’ changes in livelihood.

My analysis also revealed that, in spite of congruence on issues of destination image and overall development outcomes, the local community and the private company that is in charge of Chongdu Valley management, presented conflicting discourses, and thus divergent values, theories, and attitudes towards a range of community and tourism development issues. The private company, which occupies an influential and dominant position when it comes to decision making and strategy implementation, is dealing with the issues in its own way, but it may not take long for residents to challenge the authority of the private company. Further, without community participation, Chongdu Valley faces environmental degradation and growing problems with inequality.

The findings of the study enrich the tourism field’s understanding of the cultural impacts of rural tourism development on local communities, especially related to identity change and
reconstruction. Through examining residents’ changing rural identity, this study provides insight to the rural-urban relationship in China and how it is being transformed along with the ongoing process of rural restructuring. Theoretically, the study contributes to existing knowledge of the intersection of tourism and identity by focusing on a less conventional setting in which identity is constructed by multiple forces instead of only cultural difference. Methodologically, the study introduces the framework of rural performance to the tourism field and discourse analysis to community tourism research. Practically, the study renders managerial and political implications for practitioners who work with community tourism and tourism development in rural areas.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Research overview

Tourism is a worldwide phenomenon and can be an effective tool for economic development (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000). Indeed, it has been used as a strategy for poverty alleviation, industry revitalization, and economic restructuring, particularly in rural areas (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). Although the economic and social impacts of rural tourism have been widely examined and debated (see Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Daugstad, 2008; Kneafsey, 2001), analysis of its cultural impacts is limited. Understanding the cultural impacts of rural tourism development is important because “the everyday lives of rural people …are increasingly the subject of cultural mediation” (Cloke, 1997, p. 372).

One cultural impact of tourism development is the identity shift of local residents (Oaks, 1993). In a rural context, tourism development provides a platform on which rural identity is produced and reproduced by differing discourses. Tourism development also gives rise to fundamental changes in the overall environment and in residents’ lifestyles, which further lead to modifications in their rural identities. Hence, the primary purpose of this study is to uncover local residents’ rural identity and how it has been (re)constructed in the changing context of rural tourism development.

To understand the features of local residents’ rural identity change and its underlying mechanism, I conducted my case study in Chongdu Valley, a popular and pioneering rural tourist destination in the middle of China. Through the collection of on-site materials, participant observation, and individual interviews, my study aimed to: 1) understand the patterns of local
residents’ rural identity changes and the underlying reasons behind the changes; 2) explore the
detailed transformation of everyday life and performance of rural residents, and how it has
influenced the mentality and identity of Chongdu Valley residents; and 3) compare and contrast
different discourses on tourism development issues and their implications for community power
relations.

The findings of the study enrich the field’s understanding of the cultural impacts of rural
tourism development on local communities, especially related to identity change and
reconstruction. Through examining residents’ changing rural identity, this study provides insight
to the rural-urban relationship in China and how it is being transformed along with the ongoing
process of rural restructuring. Theoretically, the study contributes to existing knowledge of the
intersection of tourism and identity by focusing on a less conventional setting in which identity is
constructed by multiple forces instead of only cultural difference. Methodologically, the study
introduces the framework of rural performance to the tourism field and applies discourse analysis
to community tourism research. Practically, the study renders managerial and political
implications for practitioners who work with community tourism and tourism development in
rural areas.

**Understanding identity**

**Theories of identity**

Identity, defined as “a person’s sense of self” (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000, p. 715), has
served as a fundamental construct across the social sciences for decades. As John Donne noted,
“No man is an island entire of itself” (in Sen, 2007, p. 20). Every person living in the world
carries certain characteristics that are shared by others, such as race, nationality, language,
sexuality, hobby, and health condition. These characteristics comprise one source of identity. Other sources of identity include the roles one plays in society (e.g., being a mother, a teacher, a sister) (Stryker & Burke, 2000) and the groups one belongs to (e.g., companies, organizations, religious groups) (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Because every individual is a part of larger society, identity is an inescapable part of every social being. As Castells (2010, prologue) noted, “In a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning.”

The importance of identity has been addressed in different disciplines. Political scientists see identity as a source of mobilization that can stimulate political practices such as resistance and social movements (Bernstein, 2005). Economists consider identity fundamental to human behavior and note that it can largely influence individual’s and group’s performance (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). For instance, identity can make people more altruistic in a group if they identify themselves with the group (Chen & Li, 2009). Sociologists argue that identity is a core concept linking social structure with individual action, for identity reflects the role one plays in society and the influences of social structure on individuals (Stets & Burke, 2000). Scholars in community studies consider identity a crucial indicator of community solidarity and wellbeing because sense of identity can increase the strength and warmth of relations with neighbors and other members of the same community (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). Thus, identity as a social construct is closely related to a variety of issues such as individual and group behavior, economic performance, community cohesion, and individual-society relations.

Identity construction is the process through which identity is created, negotiated and reinforced by various forces using different kinds of building materials (Castells, 2010). It is a core theme in identity studies and it is also the focus of this study. Various theories exist to
explain the processes and mechanisms of identity construction which, based on identities of interest, can be largely divided into two categories: construction of individual identity and construction of collective identity. The former refers to identification of the self to describe “who I am,” while the latter entails definitions of a group as a whole to describe “who we are” (Thoits & Virshup, 1997, p. 107).

Collective identity, represented by ethnic, gender, and national identities, is a group-level construct that involves common history, culture, and the interest of group members (Hall, 1990). It has become popular in recent decades along with the surge of cultural studies and studies of social movements. In general there are three aspects related to construction of collective identity. First, collective identity is situated within larger social, economic, and political contexts and it is subject to continuous changes arising from history, culture, and power (Hall, 1990). Second, many collective identities originate from dominant institutions (e.g., Black people being referred to as “natural athletes” in the U.S.) and then become identities only through internalization by group members (Castells, 2010). Third, collective identities involve interactions between outsiders and insiders. Boundary making (drawing a boundary between “we” and “others”) is a critical process in collective identity formation as it helps reinforce group entities and create “in-group” meanings (Taylor & Whittier, 1992).

In this study, I focused on the collective identity of rural residents in China and how it has changed along with tourism development. I viewed rural identity as embodying a set of shared cultures and collective interests that are embedded in China’s large social, economic, and political contexts. I regarded rural identity as a phenomenon determined by dominant discourses and political arrangements, such as urban based policies and governmental support for tourism development. Meanwhile, in terms of the role tourism development plays in rural identity
changes, I acknowledged that it helped reshape rural identity through touristic representations, changing lifestyles, tourist-resident interaction, and other tourism-related activities that rural residents perform on a daily basis.

**Identity and tourism**

Tourism has long been considered an avenue of identity building and formation. For instance, Bandyopadhyay, Morais, and Chick (2008) found that the Indian government used media representations of Indian heritage to promote a Hindu centric national identity. The link between heritage and tourism was also found to help people in Croatia establish a sense of identity and belonging (Goulding & Domic, 2009). In Britain, experiencing heritage tourism helped to create and maintain a national identity through invoking a sense of intimate familiarity of tourists with national history (Palmer, 2005).

Not only is tourism used to create a shared identity within a nation, but it is also used to enhance the position or image of nations within the global community. According to Lepp and Harris (2008), the Ugandan government has attempted to create a positive national identity abroad through international tourism, hoping it will help draw foreign investment and development assistance. The Croatian government has used tourism to manage its “difficult” past by selectively representing the country’s history to international audiences (Rivera, 2008). Similarly, the Romanian government has focused on building a national identity through tourism and demonstrating its aspiration to “return to Europe” (Light, 2001). A more extreme example was introduced by Pritchard and Morgan (2001) who revealed that the Wales Tourist Board has used tourism to create two national identities: one for Welsh people and one for non-Welsh people.
Identity construction through tourism is often a political process. It usually benefits a few advantaged groups and reflects the ideology of dominant groups. Jeong and Santos (2004) examined the contested meanings of the Kangnun Dano festival in Korea and found that the regional identity presented to tourists was defined by a dominant group while other groups' opinions were neglected. Morgan and Pritchard (1998) noted the emergence of Black heritage attractions in the USA and suggested they may reflect the rising status of ethnic minorities within the country. In another study they suggested that the identity construct is also linked to the changing of social and political contexts of the destination (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001).

Not only can identity be built through tourism, it can also be transformed through tourism. Evidence of this has been highlighted in studies of residents living in tourist destinations. One group of studies on tourism and identity change has treated tourism as a global force that can stimulate local identity change, particularly ethnic minorities in developing countries (Oaks, 1993). Drawing on the asymmetrical power between developing countries and developed countries (Stronza, 2001), this approach considers identity change to be imposed by outside forces and beyond the control of local residents, and that commodification of local culture (Medina, 2003), touristic representations (Hunter, 2011), and host-guest interactions (Adam, 1996) constitute the major forces leading to identity change.

The second group of studies on tourism and identity change has focused on the role of residents in actively negotiating and presenting their identities. Scholars argue that identity change is a bidirectional process that involves the participation of both tourists and local residents. According to Rogers (2002), tourism development offers a forum for the local population to engage in expressing, elaborating upon, and debating their collective pasts, presents, and futures. Stronza (2008) discovered that local residents in Peru are capable of
increasing their pride, enhancing their indigenous culture, and heightening their native identity in response to the needs and expectations of tourists.

Linking back to the mainstream discussions on identity construction, it is clear that the identity of rural residents is not developed solely by outside forces. As Jackson (1995, p. 166) noted, “Meanings are never simply received but they are always, to varying degrees in different times and places, negotiated and contested.” The development of rural tourism provides a platform through which rural identity is contested and constructed. In this study, I considered rural identity to be constantly produced and reproduced by dominant discourses, and internalized, enacted, and utilized by rural residents. Also, I paid close attention to the active role of local residents in constructing their identities through everyday practices and embodied performances (Woods, 2010).

**Rural identity and rurality**

Rural identity, or its group-level construct “rurality,” is a phenomenon of increasing interest in rural studies due to the significant movement of the “cultural turn” (Cloke, 1997). Before, rural identity was under-examined due to researchers’ long interest in economic and political issues of rural societies (Philo, 1992). Today, building on postmodern and poststructural perspectives (Panelli, 2006), rural identity and its related concepts such as rurality, rural image, rural discourse, and rural representation are broadly examined to contribute to a better understanding of the sociocultural aspects of rural life and space (Eriksson, 2010; Juska, 2007; Phillips, 1998; Rye, 2006).

The dominant view in rural studies denotes “the rural” as a social construct, i.e. the rural is constructed by the people of the rural, rather than by the objective characteristics of the rural
In this sense, what rural people do and what they think of themselves and the place they live in constitutes the content of their rural identities. According to Cloke (2006, p. 18), the notion of rurality “lives on in the popular imagination and everyday practices of the contemporary world.” Thus, rural identity or rurality has two sides: one is material (i.e., an empirical fact, a material, social and economic reality) the other is cultural (i.e., a mental category and a way of thinking, discourses and representations).

Rural identity is subject to constant change and reconstruction. As Holloway (2002, p. 2058) indicated, “Identity is regarded as in process, negotiable, and potentially multiple.” Therefore, not only is rural identity dynamic, but it is also multi-dimensional and contested. Different populations have dissimilar views towards rurality (Winterton & Warburton, 2013). Because of this heterogeneity, a growing body of research on rural identity has focused on the perspectives of a specific group of rural residents such as older people (Burholt, Scharf, & Walsh, 2013); youth (Rye, 2006); women (Little & Austin, 1996); and second home owners (Halfacree, 2012), rather than rural residents as a whole.

Overall, I believe that socially constructed rural identity is heterogeneous, contested, and fluid. I have adopted this perspective to examine rural identity change during rural tourism development. I considered the heterogeneity of rural residents by collecting data from various groups of local residents based on their gender, occupation, age, wealth, and level of involvement in tourism industry. I also accounted for the fact that rural identity: (a) evolves along with local tourism development and other social-economic factors; and (b) situates in the general social and institutional context of China in which rural tourism grows, spreads, and is sustained.
Understanding rural tourism

Definition of rural tourism

There is little consensus regarding the definition of rural tourism (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). Nonetheless, scholars have tried to define rural tourism by proposing a “pure” and a “broader” definition. The pure definition of rural tourism refers to experiencing the countryside and rural life, in which “the rural” serves as an end in itself (Lane, 1994). In this context, the “universal appeal of rural tourism rests on the ordinary and everyday happenings of a rural community” (Clarke, 1999, p. 26). The broader definition of rural tourism includes any form of tourism in a rural area, so that the rural just provides a context in which tourism takes place (Sharpley & Robert, 2004).

Most rural tourism falls under the broader definition. Not only do traditional cultures and rustic scenes draw urban dwellers to the countryside, but also a wide range of nature-based tourists who want to engage in activities such as fishing, hiking, horse riding, and skiing. Rural tourism appeals to urban dwellers who enjoy an increasing amount of disposable time and income but at the same time live with a great deal of work pressure and alienation (Urry, 2002). Rural tourism provides urban dwellers with the opportunity to undertake nature-based adventures, appreciate cultural attractions, discover ecological uniqueness, or just experience the peace and quiet of the countryside (Page & Getz, 1997; Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997).

Rural tourism as a development tool

Rural tourism is often promoted as an effective strategy for regional development, poverty alleviation, and industry revitalization (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). It plays a key role in the context of rural restructuring, which includes but is not limited to, the decline in
agricultural income and the leave of traditional extractive industries (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008). At the macro level, rural tourism has been found to help maintain the social structure of rural communities by creating job opportunities and preventing out-migration. At the micro level, rural tourism provides a new livelihood strategy that leads to economic diversification and multi-functionality of rural households (if farm tourism is involved) (Iorio & Corsale, 2010).

Scholars around the world have provided empirical evidence of how rural tourism can be used to develop a regional economy, what makes it successful, and what hampers its growth. Although most previous work is based on local contexts, some common themes can be drawn from the findings. For example, Fleischer and Felsenstein (2000) argued that policy and financial assistance to rural tourism development, especially for small-scale businesses, is necessary for success. MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003) found that culture plays a critical role and acts as a valuable resource for rural tourism development. They also emphasized the importance of networking and partnerships for the overall benefit of communities. Garrod, Wornell, and Youell (2006) proposed building “countryside capital” (i.e., natural, built, and social) in a rural setting to link various rural resources and enable more effective rural tourism development. And, Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, and Van Es (2001) identified five factors for successful rural tourism development, which includes good community leadership, support and participation of local government, strategic planning, coordination and cooperation between businesspersons and local leadership, and widespread community support for tourism. In summary, successful rural tourism development is built upon a good social, cultural, and political environment.

Meanwhile, tourism cannot be considered a panacea for every rural area and there have been increasing challenges with rural tourism development. One is that rural tourism entrepreneurs are mostly farmers that are undereducated, unfamiliar with the capitalist market,
and lack experience in the service industry (Reichel, Lowengart, & Milman, 2000). Also, rural tourism has become increasingly competitive, particularly as more and more regions devote themselves to its development (Pina & Delfa, 2005). Further, starting a new business requires a fair amount of capital investment, but a mature financial environment is often absent in rural areas.

**The impacts of rural tourism**

The economic, social, and environmental impacts of rural tourism have been widely recognized. Economically, rural tourism serves as an effective tool in creating job opportunities, but most are often low-end, seasonal, and unstable (Frederick, 1993). Moreover, the economic benefits brought by rural tourism are often unequally distributed among local residents (Iorio & Corsale, 2010) and lead to an increase in living costs and property values. For instance, in some rural communities, second home owners have driven local people out of the property market (Müller, Hall, & Keen, 2004).

Socially, while proponents claim that revenue from rural tourism development can be used for the maintenance of or upgrades to local public services and facilities, opponents argue that tourists put a lot of pressure on public services such as public transportation and security (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). While rural tourism has enabled social exchange between residents and tourists, it also has created social problems such as crime, crowding, and social conflict (Williams & Hall, 2000). Last but not least, while rural tourism elicits a sense of pride among local residents in traditional cultures, it also has resulted in commodification of local cultures (Shepherd, 2002).
Environmentally, rural tourism is thought to increase the awareness of and provides financial sources for environment protection, but the inflow of tourists also gives rise to excessive use of the environment and threatens environmental sustainability (Gibson, 1993). While people believe that rural tourism largely improves the built environment, the temporary stay of tourists also creates various kinds of physical pollution in local communities, which includes but is not limited to, litter, noise, and water pollution. For communities with limited water resources, tourism may cause serious water shortage (Stonich, 1998).

In summation, rural tourism can bring fundamental changes to tourist destinations at both the community and individual levels. It may change the natural, built, and cultural environments of rural tourist destinations, and also affect residents’ everyday life, livelihood strategies, consumption behaviors, day-to-day practices, social networks, and beliefs. It is reasonable to believe that these changes will contribute directly to rural identity changes.

**Rural tourism in China**

China has the biggest agrarian population in the world, so the wellbeing of its rural people has long been a challenge for the government. Since the mid 1990s, the central government has started advocating for rural tourism as a poverty alleviation strategy in less-developed and marginalized regions to increase the living standards of local residents (Su, 2011). Although there is a lack of specifically designated statistics for rural tourism, scholars estimated that over 500 million tourists visited at least one rural tourist destination in 2006, which contributed over 300 billion in revenues to the industry (Gao, Huang, & Huang, 2009; Su, 2011, 2013; Zeng, 2012). On the supply side, it is estimated that more than 20,000 villages in China
and over 6 million rural Chinese residents are involved in rural tourism and have benefited from it (Gao, Huang, & Huang, 2009).

The huge and growing rural tourism market in China can be attributed to a number of factors. First, since 1978 the constantly growing Chinese economy provided a lot of Chinese families, especially urban ones, with disposable income which theoretically contributes to a demand for outdoor leisure activities and tourism. Second, reform of the holiday system in China, especially the introduction of three “Golden week” holidays in 1999 (seven-days off during spring festival, the beginning of May and October) greatly stimulated Chinese people’s demand for both long and short distance travel (Wu, Xue, Morrison & Leung, 2012). Third, governments at the central, provincial, municipal, and township levels adopted rural tourism as an effective tool for poverty alleviation, and began developing rural tourism in many poor and backward areas in the country (Gao, Huang, & Huang, 2009).

Indeed, the Chinese government at the local level has played a significant, decisive role in rural tourism development. According to Gao, Huang, and Huang (2009), rural tourism in China was initially embraced for the purpose of poverty alleviation. However, Donaldson (2007) found that how local, rural governments implement tourism can have huge influences on economic outcomes. He compared tourism development in Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, finding that rural tourism greatly contributed to Yunnan’s economic growth but did little to reduce its poverty rate. Alternatively, Guizhou’s rural tourism contributed little to the provincial economy but helped poor people with much larger economic benefits.

One of the most beneficial aspects of rural tourism in China is that it often incorporates family owned and operated small businesses. Happy Rural Home (HRH) (“Nongjiale” in Chinese) represents one of the most typical forms of small businesses. Equivalent to the “Bed
and Breakfast” businesses in Europe and North America, HRH offers visitors simple accommodations and dining services that allow them to freely enjoy rural cuisine and lifestyle. Since it was introduced, HRH has gained huge success in many parts of rural China. As Su (2011, p. 1439) noted, HRH “has developed not only as a new style of vacationing among Chinese urban residents but also as a new form of privately owned small enterprise run by millions of Chinese farmers.” By 2009 the number of farmer families operating HRH enterprises in rural China had reached an estimated 1.3 million (Su, 2011). Most HRH owners were farmers, yet little is known about how their everyday life has changed along with their livelihood change from agriculture to hospitality. In this study, I took HRH owners as an example and explored the detailed transformation of everyday life and performance of local residents, and how it has influenced the mentality and identity of rural residents over the course of rural tourism development.

**Study Site: Chongdu Valley, China**

To examine rural identity changes under the impact of tourism development, I employed a case study approach which is considered effective for understanding complex social processes (Yin, 2009). As identity is dynamic, fluid, and multi-dimensional (Holloway, 2002), a single case study can render a deep and nuanced comprehension of how identity change is taking place over time.

Chongdu Valley, located in southern Luoyang, is a popular rural tourism destination in the middle of China. It is under the jurisdiction of, from lowest to highest level, Tantou town, Luanchuan county, and Luoyang municipality. Chongdu Valley is the only village located in the
valley and has approximately 367 households (1,440 residents). Before tourism development was introduced in 1999, Chongdu Valley was a typical poor village in a rural mountain area where people lived their lives farming, growing bamboo, and harvesting timber. The geographical location of Chongdu Valley made it difficult for residents to improve upon their standard of living. The Valley is a naturally formed area surrounded by 500 to 1,000 meter mountains with only one access road to the outside.

Due to limited workable land within the Valley, local residents opened up farmland in the surrounding mountains to grow wheat and beans for self use. During farming season, the farmers of the family (usually male) often spent two hours on average going back and forth to their farmland. Because the mountain land does not have stable sources of water for irrigation, their harvest at the end of the year was dependent on the weather. Chongdu Valley residents had to rely on food aid from the central government when it came to bad years. While the husband or male family members worked on the farmland, the wife typically stayed at home and did all the housework, took care of parents and children, grew vegetables for daily consumption, and raised pigs and chickens to sell.

Chongdu Valley residents also relied on bamboo, wild game and other crops to generate an income. With plenty of water supply, bamboo was one of the dominant crops in Chongdu Valley. Chongdu Valley residents made bamboo curtains and sold them in local markets. Brave young men hunted wild animals in the mountains and sold the meat for a good price. Some families learned to plant mushrooms and herbal medicines that could be sold at a much higher price than other crops. Despite these efforts, Chongdu Valley residents continued to live in poverty. The yearly GDP per capita was less than 400 RMB (around 50 US dollars based on the exchange rate in 1999).
Further, Chongdu Valley residents lived with a poor infrastructure and limited access to transportation. A popular local poem in Tantou town vividly described local residents’ hopes for a paved road:

Chongdu Valley, Chongdu Valley,
Has an ancient mountain road.
Muddy when it is raining,
Earthy when it is sunny.
Food on aid,
Life is out of hope.
Everyone says Chongdu Valley is beautiful,
But all its daughters left for somewhere;
On foot people come in and come out,
The villagers dreamed of having a paved road.

A breakthrough occurred in 1995 when the first paved road was built with financial assistance from the National Transportation Department. From 1995 to 1997 two critical roads directly connecting Chongdu Valley and the outside world were built. Soon after, a few other roads were constructed that dramatically decreased the travel time from Luoyang (the nearest city) to Chongdu Valley. Surrounded by rich natural scenery, including vast areas of bamboo forest, wild, free-flowing waterfalls, and stone-paved roads along mountain springs, Chongdu Valley began to attract the attention of urban dwellers in nearby cities.
The story of Chongdu Valley’s tourism development can’t be told holistically without mentioning Haiming Ma, a deputy town chief of Tantou. Haiming Ma had visited Chongdu Valley as a child and was impressed by its natural beauty. Now, as an adult and as the deputy town chief of Tantou, he was responsible for alleviating the poverty in Tantou, which includes Chongdu Valley. Based on his travel experiences throughout China he believed that tourism would be a great option for Chongdu Valley. He traveled to Chongdu Valley to persuade local residents to turn Chongdu Valley into a rural tourist destination that would entice tourists from nearby cities to experience rural life and enjoy its beauty. Initially, none of the residents believed him. In fact, they named him, “Braggart Ma,” for his “unrealistic” proposal. A villager recalled:

Tourism development was proposed by a deputy town chief. Back then, needless to say, the local residents, the village leaders doubted his proposal and said: ‘How could it be possible? Who will come to Chongdu Valley? There is just a stream of water. No one will want to see it.’ The deputy chief finally managed to persuade local villagers build a few basic tourist facilities. Urban people then started to come to Chongdu Valley. They drove cars, good cars that the elder people in the village had never seen before.

In late 1999, the Chongdu Valley Scenic Zone was officially established and Haiming Ma was deemed the pioneer of Chongdu Valley’s tourism development. In 1999 there were only six HRHs in the village, by 2006 the number of HRHs had increased to 238 and approximately
8,800 visitors could be accommodated at the same time. In a 2003 household survey, Cottrell, Vaske, Shen, and Ritter (2007) found that 75% of the households were involved in the tourism industry. By 2004 the development of Chongdu Valley faced difficulties due to lack of financial support. To upgrade the valley’s infrastructure and environment so as to draw more urban residents, the village officers decided to rent the scenic zone to a private company (mentioned as the Company hereafter). A deal was reached with a 50-year contract. The deal required the Company to pay the township (80%) and village governments (20%) a one-time fee of 16 million Yuan, followed by 500,000 Yuan every year for 50 years. The Company also was required to invest 30 million Yuan in upgrading Chongdu Valley’s infrastructure and to make sure Chongdu Valley obtained the title of National AAAA Tourist Attraction before the end of 2006. In exchange, the Company was granted the right to manage and gain revenues from Chongdu Valley, mainly through entrance fees, for 50 years. In reality, the Company also gained revenues through building a large lake-view hotel and restaurants along the main street. With funding injected by the Company, Chongdu Valley gradually grew to be a famous rural tourist destination in the middle of China. In 2009, it drew over 588,000 tourists, which brought about 160 million Yuan (25 million USD) in revenue to the village.

I chose Chongdu Valley as my case study site for a number of reasons. First, the rural restructuring that is going on in China, particularly in Chongdu Valley through tourism development, has reshaped its vast rural-urban divide (Day, 2008). Yet, little is known about how rural residents’ identity has changed along with the tourism development process. Second, China represents a society in which culture, discourse, and identity play a crucial role in state-society relations (Jacka, 2013). In particular, the differences between urban and rural, touted through various economic and political agendas, have been used for collective goals of the nation.
A close examination of identities within the context of rural-urban divide will enhance understanding of the transforming rural-urban relationships in this country. Third, Chongdu Valley is a famous rural tourist destination not only for tourists, but also for the government. It was chosen and promoted as one of the national models of rural tourism by the central government. Government officers from different rural areas in China have visited Chongdu Valley and learned from the village’s experiences. In this sense, Chongdu Valley may represent a typical rural tourism development model in China. Last, Chongdu Valley has a relatively long tourism development history that has induced various societal changes. It thus provides an ideal scenario for examining rural identity changes, which tend to be more salient over a long period of time.

**Data collection and analysis**

From June to August 2014, I employed a mixed-method approach that incorporated semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and on-site material collection to collect data for the research. Through semi-structured interviews and participant observations, I sought to document how local residents perceive of rural identity changes, how they reconstruct rural identity through their daily practices, and what factors influenced their identity changes. Through on-site material collection, I obtained the data for analyzing the managerial discourses regarding the community’s development issues.

In total, I conducted 50 semi-structured interviews with local residents and 10 unstructured interviews with nonlocals who work in Chongdu Valley as souvenir shop owners, employees of the Company, and tour guides (See Table 1-1 and Table 1-2). The criterion I used to distinguish locals from non-locals was whether they hold household registration in Chongdu
Valley. Since there are four sub-regions of Chongdu Valley (the southern, central, front, and western regions), interviews were conducted in all of them. The interviews with residents focused on collecting background information about them and their families, gaining insight to the trajectories of their lives over the time in which tourism has been developed, and documenting their perceptions of tourism development and the changes in the community, and the gap between rural and urban areas. Among the local interviewees, there were 22 females and 28 males. In terms of age, 10 were 20 to 29 years old; 13 were 30 to 44 years old; 19 were 45 to 59 years old; and 8 were 60 years old or over. Interviews with non-locals focused on collecting their reasons for, and experiences working in, Chongdu Valley, and their perceptions of tourism development and changes in the community. The results of these interviews were used to triangulate the data and verify the facts provided by local residents (Decrop, 1999).

Table 1-1. Information about local study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
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<th>Household size</th>
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Participatory observation was conducted to gauge family members’ daily routines and practices. To enhance representativeness, I lived in and carefully observed the members of five rural households in all four regions of Chongdu Valley from June to August 2014. Since the central region is larger than the other three regions, I chose to observe two rural households from the central region. I lived in each rural house for three to seven days to learn about the owners’ experience operating a HRH. While living in the houses, I obtained information about what family members do to run a rural house, what specific strategies/means they use, how work is divided among household members, and how they talk about what is going on in their HRH. Through observation and informal conversation, I also identified patterns in their weekday and
weekend activities, how they cope with the off-peak season, how they interact with their children, and how they spend their leisure time.

Participant observation also included a wide range of informal talks with local residents and non-locals. These people assume jobs as rural house owners, souvenir shop owners, street vendors, tour guides, house cleaners, and employees of the Company. These informal talks provided different views of tourism development and enriched the data I collected. Depending on the contexts, I either took jot notes and later expanded them into detailed field notes, or tape-recorded the communication and transcribed it afterwards (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

I also reached out to a deputy manager of the Company who provided me with a variety of electronic documents and printed materials produced by the Company. The documents and materials included annual performance reports, resort planning documents, tourism promotion materials, and tour guides’ speeches. After my fieldwork, I reviewed some online materials including the official website of the resort and news articles about Chongdu Valley. Together on-site and online materials provided insight to the discourses held by the Company.

During my stay in Chongdu Valley, I kept a journal documenting my daily activities, field notes, and reflections. I tried to write in my journal every evening before I went to bed, but sometimes I was too tired or occupied by other duties and wrote in my journal the next morning. Keeping a journal helped me focus on the goals of my research, adjust my research plan and interview questions, and organize my thoughts. I ended up with a 30,000-word journal which comprised an important component of my final data.

After returning from Chongdu Valley, I transcribed all the recorded interviews verbatim Chinese. The transcriptions of the interviews along with my journal were complied prior to data analysis. In data analysis, I employed a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2009) to
allow themes to emerge from the data rather than develop a codebook beforehand. After reading and reflecting on the data, I identified 7 categories and 27 subcategories that covered all aspects of my interviews and observations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These categories proved helpful when organizing my data in a systematic way and when looking for supporting data.

Table 1-3. Categories and subcategories uncovered from open coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural and urban comparison</td>
<td>Livelihoods, policies, characters of people, environment, discrimination, preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in Chongdu Valley</td>
<td>Livelihoods, household income, natural environment, built environment and facilities, transportation, mentality, education, neighborhood and community relations, leisure and consumption, inequality, preference, reputation</td>
</tr>
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<td>Chongdu Valley development history</td>
<td>Buffering effects, outside influence, history</td>
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<td>Family development history</td>
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<td>Daily practices</td>
<td>Host-guest relations, yearly or long-term routine, everyday routine, future concerns, debt issues, business models</td>
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<td>Management and politics</td>
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<td>Lay discourses</td>
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I employed selective coding to identify themes for each research question. In total, I used selective coding five times and identified five sets of themes that represented the overall rural identity changes perceived by local residents, factors indicating the reasons behind rural identity changes, HRH owners’ everyday life and practices, HRH owners’ off-work activities and mentalities and, finally, common development issues perceived by local residents and the Company.
Table 1-4. Categories and subcategories uncovered from open coding

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<th>Themes</th>
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<td>From rural hardship to rural amenity, from a rural-urban divide to a rural-urban difference, and a rise in community identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors indicating the reasons behind rural identity changes</td>
<td>National government policy changes, community economic development and environmental changes, and personal interaction with urban tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRH owners’ everyday life and practices</td>
<td>Being a businessperson, quality service in the HRH, and (Re)building and renovating HRHs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRH owners’ off-work activities and mentalities</td>
<td>Leisure, consumption, and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common development issues in managerial and lay discourses</td>
<td>Destination image, development outcomes, and institutions and regulations</td>
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</tbody>
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Positioning the researcher

Reflexivity is a critical component of ethnographic inquiry which maintains that researchers are part of the social world they study (Denzin, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In ethnographic studies, what questions were asked, what observations were made, and what conclusions were drawn, are linked to, if not always, the interaction between informant and the researcher. (England, 1994). Therefore, before I present my findings, it is necessary to state my roles and identities in enacting the research process and the potential bias I brought into the research.

Throughout my stay in Chongdu Valley, I found myself inhabiting multiple identities while conducting my research and interacting with local residents. My research gave me the identity of being a “researcher” who was trained in social science inquiry to explore a village of an eastern country whose culture might not be able to be fully understood via a western way of thinking. However, as a Chinese woman who was born and grew up in a city 150 miles away from Chongdu Valley and who had visited Chongdu Valley twice before my fieldwork, I consider
myself acquainted with Chongdu Valley and sometimes even an “insider” who shares a similar culture, background, and dialect with the locals. However, despite a few local friends I made, I was still a “stranger” to most of the local residents. I even used a criterion to test whether I am a stranger or a friend to local residents. In Chongdu Valley, everything is sold with two prices: a price for locals and a price for tourists. When I was charged a local price, I was quite happy because the seller considered me a village member. Unfortunately, I was charged the price for tourists most of the time.

Overall, my identity as a “researcher” facilitated my data collection process. It made my communication with the Company and the process for collecting documents and materials easier. Playing the role of a researcher, I was able to interview a deputy manager of the Company twice, who allowed me to copy about 11 GB of documents from the company’s computer. Had I not introduced myself as a PHD student from the United States, the deputy manager might not have taken the time and effort to support my fieldwork.

My identity as an “insider” played a mixed role in my data collection. With the help of a few local friends I made, I got used to the environment quickly every time I went into the village. “Little horse,” an employee of the Company, helped me several times to find a proper farmhouse to live in. “Lingge,” who opened a souvenir store in the main street of the village, were the same age as I and I liked to drop by her store and ask her the questions I had about the village. On the flip side, my familiarity with the conditions of Chongdu Valley may have restricted me from paying attention to all details.

I did not like my identity as a “stranger,” because it negatively affected my communication with the locals. In four of the five HRHs I stayed, my relation with the owners changed from host-guest relations to friendship. I really enjoyed the changing process -- seeing
them become more open to me, sharing more personal stories, and discussing sensitive topics about the community was rewarding. During the peak time, they allowed me to help them clean rooms and serve meals for tourists, which became one of the memorable experiences of my fieldwork. In only one HRH I was not able to develop a friendship with the owners. There were few informal talks between me and the owners and as a result, I feel I missed a lot of opportunities to learn about their lives and social interactions.

In terms of my stance and biases, I held a critical perspective towards many community issues. I had more sympathy for local residents than for other stakeholders such as the Company, the governments, and tourists. I believe that local residents are, most of the time, in a disadvantaged position, and it is my duty to understand them and make their voices heard. I am concerned for the suffering and misfortunes of the poor, and am particularly good at capturing any signs and incidents of social injustice. Although tourism development has led to an overall improvement of living standards, some residents in the community have gained more than others. It is my responsibility to understand why this has happened and what can be done to alleviate its severity. In interpreting the data, I am biased towards the negative impacts of tourism compared to the positive impacts. I believe that the negative sides need much more attention from scholars and policymakers, so that lessons can be learned and problems can be addressed. Despite my subjectivity, I tried to keep my viewpoint/stance objective through looking at both positive and negative impacts, asking opinions from different stakeholders, and data triangulation.

**Structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation is comprised by five chapters. In addition to introduction chapter and a conclusion chapter, the second, third, and fourth chapters represent three interrelated articles that
address different aspects of identity changes within a rural tourism setting. Chapter 2 provides overarching descriptions and analyses of rural identity changes. Chapter 3 draws on the framework of rural performance to examine the changing activities and mentalities of Chongdu Valley residents as they experienced a shift in their livelihood from agriculture to tourism. Chapter 4 adopts discourse analysis to examine the power relations between local residents and the private sector in Chongdu Valley. The titles of and research questions addressed within the three articles are noted below.

**Article 1: Tourism development and changing identity in rural China**

Research questions:

1. How does rural identity evolve along with local tourism development?
2. What factors perceived by local residents have contributed to their rural identity changes?

**Article 2: Living a new rural life after tourism development: From peasants to businessmen**

Research questions:

1. What are the detailed transformations of everyday life and performance of HRH owners in Chongdu Valley resulting from tourism development?
2. How have the changes in everyday life influenced the mentality and identity of HRH owners?

**Article 3: Discourse and power relations in community tourism**

Research questions:
1. What are the managerial and lay discourses in Chongdu Valley as related to a variety of development issues?

2. What implications for community power relations can be drawn from the congruence/incongruence of the two discourses?


Chapter 2

Tourism development and changing identity in rural China

The text in this chapter will be modified for an article to be submitted to The Journal of Sustainable Tourism. It will be the leading article of three published from the results of this dissertation as its focus is on the changes that have taken place in the rural identities of local residents as a result of tourism development.

Abstract: This study, which was conducted in Chongdu Valley, China, examined local residents’ rural identity and how it has been (re)constructed in the changing context of rural tourism development. Employing interviews and participant observations, the study found three indicators that identity transformations are taking place: (1) recognition of the good associated with living a rural life; (2) the change from rural-urban inequality to rural-urban difference; and (3) a rise in community identity. The changes can be explained by forces ranging across macro-, meso-, and micro-levels, which include shifting nationwide government policies towards rural populations, local economic development, environmental changes facilitated by the rise of the tourism economy, and daily interactions between rural and urban populations.

Keywords: rural tourism; rural-urban divide; identity; community
Introduction

Tourism has become a worldwide phenomenon and an effective tool for economic development (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000). Indeed, it has been used as a strategy for poverty alleviation, industry revitalization, and economic restructuring, particularly in rural areas (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). Although the economic and social impacts of rural tourism have been widely examined and debated (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Daugstad, 2008; Kneafsey, 2001), analysis of the cultural impacts of rural tourism is limited. Understanding the cultural impacts of rural tourism development is important because “the everyday lives of rural people …are increasingly the subject of cultural mediation” (Cloke, 1997, p. 372).

One cultural impact of tourism development is the identity shift of local residents (Oaks, 1993). In a rural context, tourism development provides a platform on which rural identity is produced and reproduced by differing discourses. Tourism development also gives rise to fundamental changes in the overall environment and in residents’ lifestyles, leading to modifications in their identities (Butler, 1993; Edensor, 2006). The current study, conducted in China, examined local residents’ rural identity and how it has been (re)constructed in the changing context of rural tourism development. Using Chongdu Valley, a popular and pioneering rural tourist destination in the middle of China as the case study site, this study investigated the patterns of local residents’ rural identity changes and the underlying reasons behind the changes.

China is an ideal place for exploring rural identity shift because of the vast urban-rural divide that began in 1949 (Knight & Song, 1999; Whyte, 2010). Although the gap between rural and urban populations is still huge, if not expanding (Knight & Gunatilaka, 2010), recent rural restructuring processes in some rural areas of China has led to regional variations (Day, 2008). Residents of some rural communities have established successful local industries instead of
merely relying on agriculture, and have gained economic prosperity through livelihood change and income diversification (Démurger, Fournier, & Yang, 2010). Yet, little is known about how residents’ rural identity has changed along with the rural restructuring process. In Chongdu Valley, tourism development has led to increased living standards of local residents and has reshaped the local rural-urban divide. A close examination of rural identity changes in Chongdu Valley will enhance understanding of the transforming rural-urban relationships in this country.

In addition, China represents a society in which culture, discourse, and identity play a crucial role in state-society relations (Jacka, 2013). In particular, the differences between urban and rural areas, touted through a range of political agendas and development initiatives, have been used for collective goals of the nation (Liu, 2005). Therefore, rural identity in China is not simply an outcome of cultural and environmental disparity, but more of a result of national political arrangements. An examination of this unique scenario can help enrich existing academic knowledge of the intersection of tourism and identity.

**Identity and tourism**

Identity, defined as “a person’s sense of self” (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000, p. 715), has served as a fundamental construct across social sciences for decades. As John Donne noted, “No man is an island entire of itself” (Sen, 2007, p. 20). Every person living in the world carries certain characteristics that are shared by others, such as race, nationality, language, sexuality, hobby, and health condition. In a tourism setting, the relation of tourism and identity can be understood through the role tourism plays in identity building and transformation (Goulding & Domuc, 2009; Palmer, 2005; Rivera, 2008). In particular, scholars have argued that tourism can act as a global force to stimulate local identity change, particularly within populations of ethnic
minorities in developing countries (Oaks, 1993). Drawing on the asymmetrical power between developing countries and developed countries (Stronza, 2001), these studies consider identity change to be imposed by outside forces and beyond the control of local residents, and that commodification of local culture (Medina, 2003), touristic representations (Hunter, 2011), and host-guest interactions (Adam, 1996) constitute the major forces leading to identity change.

However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the role of residents in actively negotiating and presenting their identities. Scholars have argued that identity change is a bidirectional process that involves the participation of both tourists and local residents. As Jackson (1995, p. 166) noted, “Meanings are never simply received but they are always, to varying degrees in different times and places, negotiated and contested.” According to Rogers (2002), tourism development offers a forum for the local population to engage in expressing, elaborating upon, and debating their collective pasts, presents, and futures. Similarly, Stronza (2008) discovered that local residents are capable of increasing their pride, enhancing their indigenous culture, and heightening their native identity in response to the needs and expectations of tourists.

Despite the heightened attention on this topic, studies of tourism’s effects on identity have mainly focused on encounters of peoples from distinctive cultures, usually modern tourists from western countries meeting with local ethnic minorities in developing countries (Stronza, 2008). In this context, cultural difference always acts as the primary source for identity formation. Given that the sources of identity are diverse (e.g., gender, age, place, occupation, and class), few researchers have explored the role of tourism development on identity formation in a setting where identity is forged by multiple forces instead of culture alone. To fill the gap, this study focused on Chongdu Valley in rural China where rural identity is embedded in different cultural
backgrounds, economic statuses, and livelihoods. Conducting a study in this less conventional context (i.e., rural China) may render a new explanation of the mechanism(s) by which tourism development alters identity. The study will also help practitioners who work with rural tourism to better understand the cultural impacts of tourism development on local communities of rural areas.

**Research questions**

In a rural setting the development of tourism provides a platform through which rural identity may be reconstructed. What rural people do on a daily basis and what they think of themselves and their place of residence may change simultaneously with tourism development. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine rural identity changes and the factors that contributed to these changes. I aimed to answer two major questions:

1) How does rural identity evolve along with local tourism development?

2) What factors perceived by local residents have contributed to their rural identity changes?

**The rural-urban divide in China**

Rural identity in China cannot be understood without first discussing the country’s vast rural-urban divide, which has been a significant problem since 1949. Unlike many other countries in the world where a rural-urban divide is mainly a result of different natural endowments and/or population density, the rural-urban divide in China is by and large a consequence of state control and institutional arrangements. Notably, the *hukou* system, or the household registration system invented through a series of policies put into effect in the 1950s,
has built an “invisible great wall which divides rural and urban people and generates a substantial difference in their levels of economic welfare” (Knight, & Song, 1999, p. 13).

Generally speaking, the hukou system carries out two functions: one is to prevent free mobility of Chinese people between urban and rural areas, and the other is to determine people’s accessibility to state-provided benefits and opportunities. When China was operating a socialist economy prior to 1978, the central government was responsible for the employment, housing, food, medical care, education, pension, and other essentials of urban residents (Cheng & Selden, 1994). Rural people, on the other hand, had no access to state-sponsored benefits and had to work on their own, support themselves, and help or be helped by other people from the same rural communities.

With the development of a market-oriented economy after 1978, a more flexible hukou policy was adopted to permit temporary mobility between urban and rural areas (Chan & Zhang, 1999). However, the amended policy was mainly aimed at taking advantage of rural labor to facilitate the modernization of urban China, which has gradually become a world factory (Ngai, 2005). In 2008, an estimated 150 million rural people migrated to urban areas in search of jobs and increased income. China became a nation “on the move” (Fan, 2008). Due to the existence of the hukou system, however, rural migrants have continued to suffer inequality in urban areas, including, but not limited to, unstable job opportunities, lower salaries, lack of fringe benefits, and a lack of formal education for their children (Fan, 2008).

The economic and social disparities between urban and rural areas in China have been reflected in the various discourses on rurality versus urbanity. The word “peasant” in Chinese carries a negative connotation and has long been used to describe all rural residents, despite their occupations. Rural areas have been portrayed as backward, dirty, and unorganized, and rural
residents have been perceived to be under-educated and of low-quality. In terms of the environment, cities have been showcased as civilized centers with striking skylines, grandiose high rise buildings, and windows to the progressive West. Villages have been presented as dark, primitive, and composed of conventional agricultural fields and spaces (Lei, 2003).

Overall, rural residents are thought to be provincial, superstitious, shortsighted, and ignorant (Lei, 2003). This sentiment was promoted by Mao Zedong, the founder of the People’s Republic of China:

Speaking of workers and peasants, the workers have relatively more culture….we can’t say the peasants have no culture – intensive farming, the singing of folksongs, and dancing are also culture. But the majorities of them are illiterate and have no modern culture or technical skills. They can wield hoes and plows but can’t use tractors. In terms of modern culture and technology, the bourgeoisie is ahead of the other classes. (in Lei, 2003, p. 613).

In sum, national policies biased towards the urban, along with rigid state control over rural-urban migration have constituted the major reasons for the historically lower social status and unfavorable image of rural people in China. Rural identity, impacted by decades-long state control and policy bias, has been the focus of discrimination and prejudice. Further, the sources of rural identity go beyond cultural and environmental differences to economic, social, and political inequality.
Methods

Case study setting: Chongdu Valley, China

The village of Chongdu Valley, located in southern Luoyang, is a popular rural tourism destination in the middle of China and an ideal place for this study (see Figure 2-1). Chongdu Valley is the only village located in the Valley and in 2013 home to 367 households and 1,440 resident. Before tourism development was introduced in 1999, Chongdu Valley was a remote mountain village without modern roads, and local residents had to walk miles to buy necessities. From 1995 to 1997 two critical roads connecting Chongdu Valley to the outside world were built. Soon after, a few other roads were constructed that dramatically decreased the travel time from Luoyang (the nearest city) to Chongdu Valley (see Figure 2-1). Surrounded by rich natural scenery, including vast areas of bamboo forest, wild, free-flowing waterfalls, and stone-paved roads adjacent to mountain springs, Chongdu Valley began to attract the attention of urban dwellers.

In late 1999, the Chongdu Valley Scenic Zone was officially established. At the time there were only six rural houses (similar to the Bed & Breakfast business in Europe and North America) receiving tourists in the village. By the end of 2012 the number of rural houses (“Nongjiale” in Chinese, Happy Rural Houses or HRH in English) had increased to 328 and they were able to accommodate approximately 12,000 visitors at the same time. According to the Resort’s 2013 annual report, more than 95% of the local population works in the tourism industry; 90% own and operate HRH businesses. In 2004, infrastructure and environment upgrades in Chongdu Valley stalled due to a lack of financial support. Village officers responded by renting the scenic zone to a private company for 50 years. Since then Chongdu Valley has been co-managed by a private corporation and the local government. With funding injected by
the private corporation, Chongdu Valley has gradually become a famous rural tourist destination in the region. In 2013, it drew 573,700 tourists who brought about 200 million Yuan (30 million USD) in revenue to the village.

Figure 2-1. The locations of Chongdu Valley, Luanchuan County, Luoyang municipal area, and Henan Province in China

I chose Chongdu Valley as my case study site for two reasons. First, Chongdu Valley is a famous rural tourist destination not only for tourists, but also for the government. It has been
selected as one of the national models of rural tourism by the central government. Government officers from different rural areas in China have visited Chongdu Valley and learned from its development experiences. Hence, Chongdu Valley may be representative of rural tourism development in China. Second, Chongdu Valley has a relatively long tourism development history that has induced various societal changes. It thus provides an ideal scenario for examining rural identity changes, which may become more salient over time.

**Data collection and analysis**

From June to August 2014, I conducted 50 semi-structured interviews with local residents and 10 with non-locals who work in Chongdu Valley as souvenir shop owners, corporate staff, and tour guides. The interviews with residents focused on collecting background information about them and their families, gaining insight to the trajectories of their lives over the time in which tourism has been developed, and documenting their perceptions of the gap between rural and urban areas. Among the local interviewees, there are 22 females and 28 males. In terms of age, 10 were 20 to 29 years old; 13 were 30 to 44 years old; 19 were 45 to 59 years old; and 8 were 60 or older. Interviews with the non-locals focused on their reasons for and experiences working in Chongdu Valley, and their perceptions of tourism development and changes in the community. The results of the interviews with non-locals were used to triangulate the data and verify the facts provided by local residents (Decrop, 1999). Participant observation was used to understand local residents’ interaction with tourists and how it has contributed to changes in their sense of being a rural resident and living a rural life. During my stay in Chongdu Valley, I lived in five different rural houses to observe the family members’ daily routines and practices. I wrote field notes to document my activities, observations, and reflections every day.
Table 2-1. List of selected interview questions with local residents

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<td>1)</td>
<td>Please recall the time when tourism development began in Chongdu Valley. What did you do for a living then? What was your life like then? What was the village like then?</td>
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<td>2)</td>
<td>What did you think of tourism then? Can you remember what others in the village thought about tourism?</td>
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| 3) | Do you feel your life has changed since you began working in the tourism sector (or since tourism started being developed in Chongdu Valley)? If yes, can you recall the changes in chronological order?  
   a. Probing: income, values, social network, kinship ties, lifestyle, etc. |
| 4) | Do you feel the Village has changed along with tourism development? If yes, can you recall the changes in chronological order?  
   a. Probing: natural environment, built environment, interpersonal relationships, governance, etc. |
| 5) | Do you think of yourself as a rural resident? If yes, what does it feel like to be a rural resident? If not, why not? |
| 6) | Do you feel being a rural resident (or living in rural areas) has changed over time? If yes, how has being a rural resident changed? |
| 7) | What do you think living a rural life versus living an urban life was like before tourism development? What do you think of both now? |
| 8) | Do you and/or your family members plan to move to a city in the future? If yes, where do you want to move to and why? If no, why not? |
| 9) | What do you think makes urban dwellers visit Chongdu Valley?  
   1 “Probing” was used when interviewees could not properly put their thoughts into words. |

The transcripts from the formal interviews and my field notes were put together for data analysis. A grounded theory approach was adopted to allow themes to emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). Opening coding and axial coding were used to discover a range of categories and subcategories representing all the content and information mentioned by interviewees (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to identify themes representing the overall rural identity changes perceived by local residents, and factors indicating the reasons behind rural identity changes.
Rural identity changes in Chongdu Valley

Through data analysis, I identified three themes representing identity changes that Chongdu Valley residents have experienced along with tourism development: From hardship to amenity, from a rural-urban divide to a rural-urban “difference,” and a rise in community identity.

From rural hardship to rural amenity

Older people in Chongdu Valley like to talk about how difficult their life was prior to tourism development. For example, every year from early February through late November, men from the village had to walk about one hour to their farmland in the mountains surrounding the Valley and work for half a day. Because the mountain land does not have stable sources of water for irrigation, their harvest at the end of the year was dependent on the weather. There were good years and there were bad years. Their yearly hope was to make ends meet, to save a little for their children to go to school and, at best, to save some money for family emergencies. Because farming is labor-intensive, many older people in Chongdu Valley indicated that they have chronic pain, particularly in their back, along their lumbar spine, and in their limbs. Tourism development has turned their lives around.

Every respondent, regardless of age, said that his or her life has changed tremendously since the development of tourism. They have experienced change in their livelihoods, household income, environment, education, social welfare, transportation, leisure life, and mentality. Because of the vast disparity that has existed between rural and urban areas, they like to compare their life with those that live in urban areas: “Now our living standard is almost the same as those in the cities. We don’t work on farmland anymore, we buy the food we eat, we work as businessmen, not peasants anymore.”
The freedom from hardship has allowed residents to cherish the amenities they and their ancestors have been blessed with for thousands of years. They have begun to enjoy the natural environment surrounding them: the scenery of the mountains, rivers, and waterfalls; the rural environment absent of crowds, noise and chaos; the unpolluted air; and easy access to clean, organic food, which is quite the opposite of the serious food contamination crisis going on in urban China. An owner of a rural house told me:

If you are rich, for health, and for amenity, you’d better live in rural areas. Of course it is convenient to buy food and clothes in cities, but that is just a small part of your life. If you could own a house in rural areas where air is clean, environment is superb, and pollution is minimal, you will find it is the best life you can get.

Leisure and recreation represent another rural amenity. Prior to tourism development, when life was hard, leisure\textsuperscript{1} was considered a waste of time. Today the slow pace of rural life is considered necessary for life’s enjoyment. In one of the rural houses where I lived during data collection, the sons in the family went fishing almost every evening for hours. They worked hard during the day, providing services to tourists, so fishing in the evening was compensation for their hard work. The close proximity to nature provides a huge benefit and source of enjoyment for rural people. One young boy told me that living in a city would be boring because “there is nowhere to play in the city. You cannot jump into a river and swim.”

\textsuperscript{1} For Chinese people, leisure (Xiuxian in Chinese) can mean “free time” or ‘idleness,’ or it can suggest a comfortable social status, a spiritual or aesthetic condition, or even a state of being” (Liu, Yeh, Chick, & Zinn, 2008, p. 485). In the context of Chongdu Valley, leisure is understood as “free time” or “idleness.”
Close social ties and relationships with neighbors are an additional rural amenity. During my stay, I was surprised by the number of people Chongdu Valley residents know. A typical adult in Chongdu Valley knows every family in the village, as well as their names, experiences, family conditions, and kinship ties. When a family holds a wedding or a funeral, at least one member of every family in the village will attend the event. When someone is in need, relatives and neighbors will be there to help. A rural house owner told me that he always brings his own lunch to his neighbor’s home so they can eat lunch together; there are no boundaries and they treat each other as family.

In summation, residents have come to appreciate the amenities (i.e., freedom from hardship, environment, leisure and recreation, close social ties) associated with daily life in Chongdu Valley. This does not mean that they did not appreciate these amenities before tourism development. Instead, they just didn’t have the time and energy to appreciate them because they were preoccupied with subsistence needs.

**From a rural-urban divide to a rural-urban “difference”**

Rural and urban areas are by nature very different. In western societies, rural areas are considered to be ideal and pleasant places that preserve traditions and trigger feelings of nostalgia (Halfacree, 1995). For instance, in Britain, the countryside is believed to symbolize the “golden age” of the country whereby traditional cultures and values have been carefully preserved (Bramwell, 1994). Urban residents tend to perceive of rural areas as quiet, calm, simplistic, and having strong social cohesion and a sense of community. This is the opposite of urban areas which are considered to be cold, materialistic, and fetishized (Bramwell, 1994). However, in China, perceptions of rural areas have been dramatically different. For a long period
of time, rural areas have been portrayed as backward, dirty, and lacking order, and rural residents have been perceived to be under-educated and of low-quality (Jacka, 2013; Whyte, 2010).

Over the past 15 years Chongdu Valley residents have gained economic prosperity through participation in the tourism economy. Their living standards have risen, reducing the previous economic gap between Chongdu Valley residents and urban residents. In addition, the images associated with rurality in general are no longer considered inferior to the images of urbanity in Chongdu Valley. Local residents have developed a new perspective on the previous rural-urban divide or gap; they now simply see a rural-urban “difference.”

For Chongdu Valley residents, the foremost difference between living in rural and urban areas is the lifestyle. They believe that to live in an urban area one has to bear constant economic pressure: “Not all people living in the cities are wealthy; poor people suffer more in the cities than in rural areas. They have to pay for electricity, water, and gas. Even they have their own apartment; they have to pay management fees. If you think about buying food, it costs a person at least dozens of Yuan to live in the cities every day.” In contrast, one can choose to live with less pressure and at a slower tempo in rural areas. There is almost no cost associated with living in rural areas if one chooses to plant his/her own food.

In addition, rural people and urban people are thought to have different characters. Through daily interaction with urban tourists, local residents have gotten the impression that urban people are cold, self-protected and shrewd, whereas rural people are warmhearted, easygoing and honest. The difference may be partly due to the differences in the living environments of urban and rural people; in cities, life is fast paced and competitive, pushing urban residents to be cautious and discreet. Despite this negative perception, Chongdu Valley residents admire urban residents’ clothes, behaviors, and manner of speaking, which is thought to
be more civilized than their own. As one resident so eloquently put it, “You don’t need to go to the cities to be defeated; they come here to defeat you.”

The changes that have taken place along with tourism development have resulted in rural and urban people admiring each other and, to some extent, wanting to experience each other’s living environment. In Chongdu Valley, there is a growing trend of urban people renting\(^2\) land to build their own house. The rural house becomes a second home they can visit in their free time and, for those who are entrepreneurial, rent to tourists when they are away. At the same time, Chongdu Valley residents admire the convenience urban people enjoy and some of them have already planned to buy an apartment in a city. A local resident told me:

\[\text{The differences are... urban people go to rural areas, and rural people go to urban areas, and that is the difference. In the countryside, we have good air quality, we have mountains and rivers around, urban people like to come. In the cities, there are high-rise buildings and large mansions, we think it is better. Wherever you live, you will always think other places are better. You are going to feel bored if you live in a place for a long time.}\]

This mindset is particularly true for younger generations for whom purchasing an apartment in a city is already an obtainable and desirable goal. Their ideal life is to live in Chongdu Valley from late spring to early fall, when they can enjoy its amenities and work in a

\(^2\) Renting means transfer of land use rights, usually with a fixed period of time such as 50 years. In China, rural land is owned by collectives such as brigades and village units, and there has been no privately owned land since 1956 (Ho & Lin, 2003). In 1986, the Land Management Law was enacted in which land use rights were separated from property rights so that land use rights could be legally transferred, although the ownership rights often stayed the same.
tourism-related business. During the remainder of the year they can move in to the city to enjoy indoor heating, high-quality medical services, and travel convenience. In addition, owning an urban property benefits the family in terms of medical services, the children’s education, and a means of security for the children should they choose to live in the city when they grow up. However, older people in Chongdu Valley indicated that they feel comfortable living in a rural area and have no intention of moving to a city; they prefer to live in the village for the rest of their life.

**A rise in community identity**

Before tourism development took place in 1999, Chongdu Valley was among the poorest villages in Luanchuan County. Today, Chongdu Valley is considered to be one of the richest villages in the region. The story goes that when Chongdu Valley residents shop in nearby towns, they are perceived to be rich people who will only buy expensive products. When salesmen know that the customers are from Chongdu Valley, they refer them to high priced products of good quality. As a result, the reputation of “wealthy” Chongdu Valley people has been established along with their rising living standards.

Not only do outsiders treat Chongdu Valley residents differently, local residents draw boundaries between themselves and residents of other rural areas, particularly in the realm of livelihood. Since the development of tourism, Chongdu Valley residents have been able to develop family businesses in the tourism industry, whereas rural residents from most of the other villages have had to continue to rely on less profitable agriculture or to look for jobs in the cities. Chongdu Valley residents make a living at home without bearing the poor working and living conditions migrant workers usually suffer in the cities. Some Chongdu Valley residents had
worked in the cities before they started tourism businesses at home. Others continue to go to the
cities every winter to work for a few months during the off-season of tourism. Those residents
indicated that it is much better to run a business at home than work in the cities.

The differences in livelihood between Chongdu Valley residents and outsiders are also
evident in the Valley. Since tourism development, Chongdu Valley has become a popular place,
drawing outsiders to move to the area and start tourism-related businesses such as souvenir shops
and restaurants, or work in the private company, none of which are as profitable as running a
rural house. Because the laws in China allow only local residents to own a house, almost all the
rural houses in Chongdu Valley are owned and run by local residents. Other profitable
businesses related to transportation, rafting, and expeditions are monopolized by local residents
as well. When it comes to job opportunities in the private company, Chongdu Valley residents
are given priority over residents from other areas. Hence, being a “Chongdu Valley” resident
affords local people many privileges.

The privileges enjoyed by Chongdu Valley residents have enticed outsiders and previous
residents who left Chongdu Valley for the cities or other places to move back to the village.
Distant relatives who have not communicated for decades now come to visit. A man told
me: “When we were poor, we did not hear from distant relatives. But now they all come to find
us.”

An additional phenomenon is that the men in Chongdu Valley have an easier time finding
a wife. Previously, men in their 40s or 50s were often bachelors, now they all have a wife; some
of them have children. As a resident from another village who is very familiar with Chongdu
Valley told me:
From the year of 2008, Chongdu Valley has sped up its changing pace. The local residents here do not need to do any marketing to draw tourists; they can make money at home. Now girls from all over the Luanchuan County think Chongdu Valley is the best place to marry to. Because being married to someone from here almost means to become a wife of a wealthy family. The only thing she needs to do is to look after the house, no need to do any heavy work.

Last but not least, the natural beauty of Chongdu Valley appreciated by tourists has led to a great deal of pride amongst local residents. Residents have started to recognize the never ending springs flowing down from the mountains, and the vast bamboo forests, which are the only grown in the region. If local residents have built a strong spiritual connection with the natural environment surrounding Chongdu Valley, tourism only helps promote recognition of this connection.

Factors influencing identity changes in Chongdu Valley

My results revealed that the rural identity of local residents in Chongdu Valley has experienced fundamental changes along with tourism development. Local residents have begun to recognize the benefits of living a rural life. They have gained confidence when compared with urban residents, and they have fostered a sense of community identity. But, what factors have influenced these changes? What role did tourism development play in this transformation? In the following section I discuss the factors and mechanisms of rural identity change based on my interviews with local residents.
Macro-level: National government policies changes

“They all regret changing their rural hukou to [an] urban hukou.” – A Chongdu villager

When asked “what they think has helped change their lives of being a rural resident” many Chongdu Valley residents credited the Chinese national government, despite the fact that it was responsible for the distinctive national policies directed towards urban and rural areas in China’s recent history. A villager mentioned: “Now our life is much better than before. The government has made many good policies, putting rural people in the first place. Now being a rural resident has more privileges than being an urban resident.”

Since late 1970s, recognizing the severe economic and social disparity between rural and urban populations, the national government established and implemented a series of policies and regulations to improve the living standards of rural people. A close scrutiny of China’s national policies targeting the rural population revealed that two periods of extensive rural reform have been carried out since 1978. The first period, 1982 to 1986, has as its highlight the household contract responsibility system, which was introduced in 1983. The second period took off in 2004 when the central government started to integrate issues on peasants, rural areas, and agriculture into its national strategic development. Table 2-1 highlights the key national policies and regulations on rural issues introduced since 2004.
Table 2-2. A list of the key national policies and regulations on rural issues since 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Release date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opinions on deepening the pilot reform of rural taxes and fees</td>
<td>To increase the intensity of the deduction and exemption of rural taxes and fees and expand the reform to large areas.</td>
<td>July 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcement on establishing a rural minimum wage living security system</td>
<td>To establish a nationwide rural minimum wage living security system to secure long-term and effective measures for the subsistence of the rural poor.</td>
<td>July 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several opinions on the current finance market for promoting economic development</td>
<td>To increase financing in rural areas and encourage more loans into the countryside.</td>
<td>December 15\textsuperscript{th}, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The key implementation plan of medical and health system reform</td>
<td>To expand the new rural cooperative medical system to more than 90% of the rural population in China.</td>
<td>March 18\textsuperscript{th}, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision on several major issues of comprehensive and deep reform</td>
<td>To establish a mutual and beneficial rural and urban relationship in an effort to let both the urban and rural populations equally participate in the modernization process and share the benefits.</td>
<td>November 18\textsuperscript{th}, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions on how to improve the rural living environment</td>
<td>To carry out and implement scientific village-level planning to help improve the rural living environment.</td>
<td>May 16\textsuperscript{th}, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions on further promoting a reform of the household registration system</td>
<td>To remove limits on the \textit{hukou} registration in townships and small cities, relax restrictions in medium-sized cities, and establish qualifications for household registration in big cities.</td>
<td>July 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The impacts of these national policies on Chongdu Valley residents are twofold. First, the implemented policies on the rural social security system, the medical insurance system, and rural taxes and fees have largely alleviated the economic burdens on Chongdu Valley residents, leading to an increase in their living standards. Second, the policy on finance market in rural areas has provided strong support for Chongdu Valley residents to develop their rural house businesses, thus benefitting the local tourism economy. Moreover, Chongdu Valley residents have benefited from the tax policy for small businesses in China. According to the provincial
provision of the tax policy, small businesses that generate less than 20,000 Yuan in revenue per month are exempt from taxation.

Changing national policies towards rural and urban populations have largely shifted the status of rural versus urban hukou. Today, being a rural resident and holding a rural hukou has a few advantages over being an urban resident. For example, all male rural residents have the right to free farmland and a house site in the community to which they belong. With the increasing value of farmland and house sites, having a rural hukou represents a significant fortune. In suburban areas where rural land was developed into urban space, rural land owners could experience “overnight status change to a ‘millionaire’” (Qian, 2015: 253). In Chongdu Valley, although the land is not expected to be developed into urban land, its value is increasing rapidly due to growing demand for land since the introduction of tourism. Prior to the change in policy, rural people were proud to become urban residents, but now changing to an urban resident is considered silly: “There is no sense to transfer to urban hukou. Even if I was given tens of thousands Yuan, I won’t transfer. Now, a rural house site is much valuable, plus I can earn much more in the rural than in the urban.”

In summary, the implementation of a series of national polices on rural issues has changed the economic conditions of a rural population and the dynamics of rural versus urban hukou. Having a rural hukou, the most significant indicator of being a rural resident, is no longer subordinate to having an urban hukou. It has directly led to changes in feelings about being a rural resident in China.
Meso-level: Community economic development and environmental changes

“Now Chongdu Valley is like little Luoyang” – a Chongdu Valley villager

In addition to national policies, changes at the community level have initiated a new view of rural identity in Chongdu Valley. Before tourism development was introduced in 1999, Chongdu Valley was a very poor village located in a rural mountain area where people farmed, grew bamboo, and harvested timber; the yearly GDP per capita was less than 400 RMB (around $50 US dollars based on the exchange rate in 1999). A popular local poem in the region vividly described the hopeless conditions of Chongdu Valley and local residents’ hope for a paved road:

Chongdu Valley, Chongdu Valley,
Has an ancient mountain road.
Muddy when it is raining,
Earthy when it is sunny.
Food on aid,
Life is out of hope.
Everyone says Chongdu Valley is beautiful,
But all its daughters left for somewhere;
On foot people come in and come out,
The villagers dreamed of having a paved road.

Residents’ dream of a paved road finally came true in 1997, and was followed by the opening of the Chongdu Valley scenic zone in fall 1999. Chongdu Valley residents started to witness substantial changes annually in the areas of livelihood, household income, and assets. First, the
percentage of Chongdu Valley households running a rural house increased from zero to over ninety percent, and none of them continued to work on farmland except for growing vegetables for daily consumption in their backyards. From labor intensive farm work to running a rural house, Chongdu Valley residents changed their livelihoods from being peasants to being businesspeople. Second, the average household income grew tremendously, from an annual income of about 400 Yuan in 1999 to an annual income of about 100 thousand Yuan in 2014. Third, the most significant part of family owned assets, i.e., the house, changed from a one floor traditional clay house to a two to four floor modern rural house valued from 300 to 2,000 thousand Yuan (see Figure 2-2, upper right). Some of the local residents even own apartments in a city.

The education, transportation facilities, and leisure activities have also changed with tourism development. The secondary school in the village was closed due to low numbers, and the elementary school may face the same fate. Most children in the village are being sent to boarding schools in nearby towns for better quality education and care. In terms of transportation, the connecting roads and roads in the village were paved first in cement, and then upgraded to asphalt (see Figure 2-2, lower right). The highway connecting Chongdu Valley and Luoyang city was opened in 2013. And, upgrades to various forms of transportation and the popularity of private cars have made Chongdu Valley residents more likely to drive relatively long distances to shop, relax, and have fun. Finally, tourism has become a big component of local residents’ leisure. Every year the village organizes several groups to visit popular tourist destinations in China, such as Beijing, Hong Kong, and Hainan.
Overall, tourism has given rise to various changes in the community and the economic conditions of local residents. The changes have brought local residents out of hardship, closed the economic gap between urban residents and rural residents in Chongdu Valley, and created unique opportunities and benefits to local residents. All these changes are directly linked to the three aspects of rural identity changes discussed previously. Therefore, there is little doubt that rural identity changes can be attributed to the local economic and environmental changes that have been facilitated by tourism development at the community level.
Micro-level: Personal interaction with urban tourists

“There are urban tourists coming here and saying ‘you are even more enjoying your life than us in the cities’” – a Chongdu Valley villager

The interaction between tourists and the local residents of a tourist destination has been a popular topic in the anthropology of tourism (Adam, 1996; Oaks, 1993; Stronza, 2008). Based on interviews with local residents, I found that there are different types of interactions between local residents and tourists, and each has different impacts on rural identity change.

The first type of interaction is “stranger-based,” which refers to first-time encounters between local residents and tourists. In Chongdu Valley, despite a growing trend of repeat tourists, the majority are still one-time visitors. Through interaction with urban tourists, local residents either reinforce their old perceptions of urban people, or break the stereotypes they had and establish a new set of opinions of and perceptions about urban people. For many local residents, their perceptions of urban people as polite, educated, and eloquent were reinforced. For others, their perceptions changed as they were exposed to a cold affect and sophistry, which was surprising and disappointing. They began to recognize the diversity of urban people: “Some of them are very polite and clean, they talk to you, sit and chat with you. Some of them are vitriolic and fussy; they don’t understand you. You treat them with [a] warm heart, but they don’t appreciate it.” Local residents’ perceptions were also affected by the degree to which urban peoples’ characteristics were salient to them. The more salient they were, the more local residents consciously distinguished themselves from urban people. Further, the very fact that strangers came to visit their Village, and shared compliments about their Village, signaled local residents that there is something special about them and their village.
The second type is the “service-based” interaction. The success of tourism is generally based on the attractiveness of a destination, and one major element of attractiveness is a distinctive and unique experience. For a rural tourism destination, local residents need to provide urban tourists with experiences that are difficult to obtain in an urban setting. When tourism was in its early stage of development in Chongdu Valley, local residents did not believe that urban people would come to their community to live in their plain houses and eat their simple food. But when they saw tourists really wanted to visit and that they were interested in rural experiences, they quickly learned to accommodate them. Chongdu Valley residents were active and fast learners; they paid attention to what tourists like and adjusted accordingly. For example, urban residents want to experience accommodations that are authentic and cuisine that is tasty. To cater to their needs, rural residents designed and decorated their houses with traditional elements (see Figure 2-2, upper right). They were also trained to cook authentic rural cuisine in a better way. Now at least one member of each family in Chongdu Valley is a skilled chef who can cook a variety of rural dishes. Overall, service-based interaction has prompted local residents to highlight the uniqueness of the rural experience, resulting in a rural identity that is enhanced.

The last type of interaction is “friend-based.” With the advancement of the resident-tourist relationship, especially with repeat tourists, residents and tourists have started to build a friendship. In Chongdu Valley many local residents have established long-term friendships with urban residents, including tour guides, bus drivers, coaches, and repeat tourists. Their relationship has grown beyond the realm of pure economic relations into a real “host” and “guest” relationship. Local residents treat their urban friends with the best food and rooms, at times for free if they are close friends. Similarly, the urban friends invite Chongdu Valley residents to visit them in the city, to live in their home or in a hotel, and treat them with equal passion and to the
best of experiences. Through this mutual and long-lasting interaction, both residents and tourists act as a “host” or a “guest,” and both of their living environments can be toured and appreciated. Unlike the previous two interactions, the friend-based interaction actually reduces the distinctions between rural and urban people.

Conclusions

In this study, I explored rural identity changes within the context of rural tourism in China and the reasons behind the changes. In line with previous studies by Rivera (2002) and Stronza (2008), I found that tourism development acted as an effective vehicle for local residents to change their perceptions of themselves and the place in which they live. The changes observed here included local residents: 1) beginning to appreciate the positive aspects of living a rural life, which they had ignored for decades when they were living in hardship; 2) seeing the shift from a rural-urban divide to a rural-urban “difference”; and 3) building a community identity to safeguard their interests and rights.

Unlike the identities described in previous studies, rural identity in China is not simply a consequence of cultural differences; it is also an outcome of political and economic disparity. Thus, changes of identity are a result of combined influences ranging across macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. It is the national policy changes at the macro level and the economic prosperity and intercultural communication at the community and individual levels that together enabled the changes of rural identity in Chongdu Valley. Indeed, as Fraser (1995, p. 72) put it, “Economic injustice and cultural injustice are usually interimbricated so as to reinforce one another dialectically.” In this context, there was no clear-cut distinction between economic identities and cultural identities and they were often times intertwined.
The study further advanced existing knowledge on the role of tourism in identity formation. In previous studies, identity formation usually comes from cultural/ethnic difference (Oakes, 1993; Stronza, 2008), so tourism often plays the role as “cultural broker” when it comes to identity changes. For rural identity in China, the results of my study indicated that although tourism still acts as a cultural broker through resident-tourist interactions, its more salient role in identity change is to improve the living standards of local residents, leading to their increased sense of pride, confidence, and community identification.

Rural identity in China is by no means the only form of identity that incorporates political and economic components. Even in tourism settings, identity has been employed as a political apparatus by many national governments to achieve political and/or economic goals. For instance, Bandyopadhyay, Morais, and Chick (2008) found that the Indian government used media representations of Indian heritage to promote a Hindu centric national identity. Lepp and Harris (2008) discovered that the Ugandan government has attempted to create a positive national identity abroad through international tourism, hoping it will help draw foreign investment and development assistance. The Croatian government has used tourism to manage its “difficult” past by selectively representing the country’s history to international audiences (Rivera, 2008). The Romanian government has focused on building a national identity through tourism and demonstrating its aspiration to “return to Europe” (Light, 2001). In the previous studies, tourism acted as a vehicle through which government policies were implemented. My study documented a different context where tourism development and government policies towards rural issues worked collaboratively in transforming identity.

My results also indicated that rural identity change is a dual process that involves both outside forces and internal participation. On the one hand, national government policies acted as
an outside force imposed on local residents. On the other hand, the success of tourism
development cannot be separated from the efforts of the local residents who have helped build
and rebuild Chongdu Valley, and who have fully involved themselves in the tourism industry. At
the very beginning of tourism development, when there was a lack of financial resources, local
residents were the ones who built the roads, the mountain steps, and other local facilities. Later
on they saw opportunities in the accommodation sector and built rural houses, which have
become one of the three attractions of Chongdu Valley (along with bamboo forests and
waterfalls).

In recent years China has undergone a rapid urbanization process; the urbanization rate
increased from 36% in 2000 to 50% in 2010 (Qin & Zhang, 2014). Simultaneously, young
people from rural areas seeking employment in the cities became a popular trend in China
of China (2011) estimated that over one-half of migrant works from rural areas were born after
1980. Along with this trend, there is a growing concern regarding the decay of many rural areas
in China due to out-migration and depopulation (Liu, Liu, Chen, & Long, 2010). Rural tourism
seems to provide a practical approach to keeping the younger generation in rural areas. Although
there is no direct statistical evidence, the results of my interviews indicated that many young
people chose to stay in Chongdu Valley to help their family businesses or set up their own.
Hence, tourism has led to a better living environment and created numerous job opportunities in
Chongdu Valley, drawing young people back to the area to pursue a career in the tourism
industry.

Nonetheless, the impacts of tourism on rural identity changes are not completely positive.
Despite the increasing sense of a unique rural identity, rural residents are increasingly being
affected by urban tourists and their culture. For example, tourism development has largely blurred the division between rural and urban landscapes in Chongdu Valley. With tourism, Chongdu Valley has gradually transferred from a land of production to a land of consumption (Shepherd 2002). It now has a karaoke store, a movie theater, and fast food restaurants. Some residents complain that Chongdu Valley is too “urbanized” to be considered a rural community. Further, as previously mentioned, most of the younger residents in Chongdu Valley are planning to purchase second homes in the cities, with the intent of living in the cities and rural areas at different times of the year. It is hard to say where their children will choose to live, cities or countryside, and whether they will embrace the rural culture and lifestyle. Hence, the rural identity is likely to continuously evolve and change in this destination.

In summation, rural tourism development provides rural residents with a new set of livelihood opportunities in transitional and urbanizing societies like China. Along with the shift in national government policies on rural issues, tourism development has helped to revitalize rural China and elicit a sense of pride in rural identities that have long been depreciated in China’s dominant discourse. However, the long-term effects of rural tourism are still unclear given the threat of rural “urbanization.” Future research should further explore identity change in rural China or in other rural tourism settings to adopt a longitudinal approach in order to gain a better understanding of the intersection of rural tourism and identity.
References


Chapter 3

Living a new rural life after tourism development: From peasants to businessmen

In this chapter I explored the everyday practices of Chongdu Valley residents as their livelihood changed from agriculture to running a rural business. The text in this chapter will be modified into a manuscript that will be submitted to *Tourism Management*.

Abstract: Drawing on a rural performance framework, I explored the transformation of local residents’ everyday life in a rural community in China, where the dominant livelihood strategy has shifted from agriculture to hospitality over the past 15 years. Through participant observation, semi-structured interviews with 50 local residents, and informal communication with various stakeholders, I found that local farmhouse owners have developed a new set of service-based rural performance that are different from their old agriculture-based rural performance, and have developed a new rural identity from being a farmer to being a businessperson. The article concludes with reflections on changing rural lives in China, the effectiveness of rural performance as a study framework in understanding both the micro- and meso-level changes of rural communities.

Keywords: rural performance; everyday life; rural tourism
Introduction

China has the biggest agrarian population in the world, thus the wellbeing of Chinese rural people has long been a challenge for its national government (Day, 2008). Since the mid 1990s, China’s central government has started advocating for rural tourism as a poverty alleviation strategy, particularly in the country’s less-developed and marginalized regions (Su, 2011; Zeng & Ryan, 2012). The advocacy appears to have made a difference: Although there is a lack of specifically designated statistics for rural tourism, scholars have estimated that over 500 million tourists visited at least one rural tourist destination in 2006, which contributed over 300 billion in revenues to the industry (Gao, Huang, & Huang, 2009; Su, 2011, 2013; Zeng, 2012). On the supply side, it is estimated that more than 20,000 villages and over 6 million rural residents benefit from tourist expenditures (Gao, Huang, & Huang, 2009).

One of the most beneficial aspects of rural tourism in China is that it often incorporates small-scale and family owned businesses that can retain the majority of economic benefits within local communities (Su, 2011, 2013). The Happy Rural House (HRH) ("Nongjiale" in Chinese) represents one of the most typical and profitable small businesses in the rural tourism sector. Equivalent to the “Bed and Breakfast” business in Europe and North America, HRH offers visitors simple accommodations and the opportunity to enjoy the rural cuisine and lifestyle. Since it was introduced, HRH has been hugely successful in many parts of rural China. As Su (2011, p. 1439) noted, HRH “has developed not only as a new style of vacationing among Chinese urban residents but also as a new form of privately owned small enterprise run by millions of Chinese farmers.” By 2009 the number of farmers operating HRH enterprises in rural China had reached an estimated 1.3 million (Su, 2011).
Although the economic benefits of rural tourism businesses, particularly HRHs, have been widely examined and acknowledged at the regional and household levels (Donaldson, 2007; Gu & Ryan, 2010; Zeng, 2008), the non-economic impacts of the HRH on local residents as a new livelihood strategy remain unexplored. Indeed, managing an HRH is quite different from what rural residents did in the past (i.e., farming, hunting, and gathering) and as such is likely affecting the meanings they associate with being rural residents and living a rural life (Edensor, 2006; Woods, 2010). To address these meanings, I conducted a case study in Chongdu Valley, China, where rural tourism has substituted agriculture to become the dominant economic driver in the last 15 years. Drawing on a rural performance framework, I explored the detailed transformation of everyday life and performance of local residents, and how it has influenced the mentality and identity of Chongdu Valley residents over the course of rural tourism development.

**Rural performance and everyday life**

In the last two decades, rurality has been a consistent focus within rural studies under the influence of postmodern and post-structural schools of thought (Panelli, 2006). Researchers focusing on this matter have addressed sociocultural features of rural life such as rural identity, rural image, rural discourse, and rural representation, adding a new analytical lens to past research on socioeconomic configurations of rural life (Cloke, 1997; Eriksson, 2010; Juska, 2007; Phillips, 1998; Philo, 1992; Rye, 2006). According to Cloke (2006, p. 18), the notion of rurality “lives on in the popular imagination and everyday practices of the contemporary world.” However, current studies have mainly focused on the intangible side of rurality (i.e., how rurality is reflected and represented in people’s mind and in popular media). The material side of rurality, especially the practice and performance of rural life, has been largely ignored (Milbourne, 2014).
Responding to the request that more attention be given to the material side of rural life, Edensor (2006) introduced the idea of “performance” to rural studies as both a research framework and an analytical tool. He stressed “it is through the relationship between the array of characters playing out particular roles, and the spaces in which they perform, that ruralities are routinely produced” (p. 484). He also noted that the idea of performance as an analytical tool can be traced back to two classic lines of research in sociology: Goffman’s (1959) sociological inquiry of the presentation of self in everyday life and Butler’s (1993) feminist approach to performativity. Goffman pioneered the examination of everyday life as a core inquiry in micro-sociology and Butler (1993) stressed the ongoing process of identity formation and its relation with deliberate and unreflective performances. Both researchers showcased the fruitfulness of documenting and analyzing the practices of everyday life (Edensor, 2006).

The lens of rural performance complements the mainstream approach to rurality wherein countryside is considered merely socially constructed and representational. Scholars who adopt this lens believe that rurality is embedded in lived experience and can’t be divorced from the rhythms of everyday life (Edensor, 2006; Woods, 2010). They also emphasize the inseparability of man’s body and mind, as Carolan’s (2008, p. 408) put it, “mind is body, consciousness is corporeal, thinking is sensuous. In short, our understanding of space is more-than-representational. It is a lived process.”

When it comes to the range of rural performance, scholars believe that it incorporates practices and enactments that are performed in different settings by different actors, which include, but are not limited to, local residents, immigrants, tourists, and academic researchers (Edensor, 2006; Woods, 2010). These actors tend to perform a diverse array of activities which all together contribute to the overall picture of rurality. For instance, Edensor (2000) examined
tourists walking in the British countryside and contended that walking is a reflective practice that requires mobilization of diverse techniques and imagination. Morse et al. (2014) undertook a study in rural Montana and found that local residents had internalized the aesthetic value of the rural landscape and devoted themselves to the protection and presentation of an ideal agrarian view. In addition, quite a few studies reflecting on the positionality of rural researchers have highlighted the active role of rural researchers in transforming and reproducing rurality (Chacko, 2004; McAreavey, 2008; Pini, 2002).

Another dimension of rural performance is the level of proficiency at which rural practices are performed (Edensor, 2006). Ideally, rural practices can be placed on a continuum of proficiency ranging from reflective behaviors that require constant learning and engagement, to unconscious enactments that can be performed without a second thought. For example, for tourists or immigrants who are not familiar with rural settings, their performance often lacks proficiency. On the other hand, for local residents who have undertaken the same array of activities for a long period of time, their performance of rurality, such as farming, hunting, and gathering, is part of daily practice and thus represents unconscious enactments. In the case of rural tourism, local residents who choose to participate in the tourism industry have to go through a learning process to gain proficiency in a new field. They will need to adopt a new form of rural performance, i.e. being a “host” for tourists.

Overall, the notion of rural performance as a research framework has drawn scholars’ attention. In tourism settings, it has been used to examine adventure tourism as a new form of rural practice and as a bodily experience for tourists (Besio et al., 2008; Cloke & Perkins, 1998, 2002, 2005; Macpherson, 2009; Waitt & Cook, 2007; Waitt & Lane, 2007). Less emphasis has been given to the rural performance of local residents who have been impacted by tourism.
development. In addition, relatively few scholars have attempted to document the changing process of rural performance. This is surprising because rural performance is not static but evolves continuously (Edensor, 2006). As a development strategy and a force of rural restructuring, rural tourism has accelerated the changing process of rural performance of rural residents, leading to reconstruction of rural identity. To fill this void, the research questions in this study are:

1. What are the detailed transformations of everyday life and performance of HRH owners in Chongdu Valley resulting from tourism development?

2. How have the changes in everyday life influenced the mentality and identity of HRH owners?

Methods

A case study in Chongdu Valley

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in 2014 in Chongdu Valley, a rural tourist destination in Luoyang, China. The Valley is a well-developed area, famous for its natural beauty, rural landscape, and country life. A township government-owned company began developing the area in 1999. In the last 15 years Chongdu Valley has become one of the most successful rural tourist destinations in Henan Province, drawing visitors from over 10 provinces in middle and northern China. Chongdu Valley Scenic Area Corporation (CVSAC), a private company that obtained the right to operate and manage the region for 50 years in 2004, manages the area.

While the CVSAC has operational control of the area, Chongdu Valley residents continue to live in the region and have become involved in the tourism economy (Cottrell, Vaske, Shen, &
Ritter, 2007). Currently, there are about 1,440 residents from 367 households permanently living in the region. According to the deputy manager of the CVSAC, more than 95% of Chongdu Valley residents work in tourism-related businesses. Their jobs range from HRH owners, to restaurant owners, to street sellers, to CVSAC staff, to tour bus drivers. Among the various occupations, running a HRH is the most profitable and thus the most popular business. It is estimated that over 90% of rural houses in Chongdu Valley receive tourists. The prevalence of HRH businesses makes Chongdu Valley an ideal case study site for the present research.

**Data collection and analysis**

The data for this study came from three sources: semi-structured interviews with 50 local households, participant observation, and informal communication with various stakeholders. The interviews were conducted in all four sub-regions of Chongdu Valley (the southern, central, front, and western regions, as shown in Figure 3-1). Most of the interviews were done with one member from each household, but sometimes other household members joined the discussion and shared their opinions. During the interviews I collected information about each family’s background, structure, trajectories running an HRH, and daily practices. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.
Participatory observation was conducted to gauge family members’ daily routines and practices. To enhance representativeness, I lived in and carefully observed the members of five rural households (Table 3-1) in all of the sub-regions from June to August 2014. Since the central region is larger than the other three regions, I observed members of two (rather than one) rural households from the region. I lived in each rural house for three to seven days to learn about the owners’ experience operating a HRH. While living in the houses, I obtained information about what family members do to run a rural house, what specific strategies they use, how work is divided among household members, and how they talk about what is going on in their HRH. Through observation and informal conversation, I also identified patterns in their weekday and weekend activities, how they cope with the off-peak season, how they interact with their children, and how they spend their leisure time. My observations and reflections were transferred into detailed field notes at the end of each day.
Table 3-1. Basic information about the five HRHs that served as sites for participatory observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Financial status</th>
<th>Opening year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Husband, wife, and two sons aged 17 and 6</td>
<td>A house with 3 floors that can accommodate 40 tourists. Annual net income ranges from 50,000 to 60,000 Yuan. No debt.</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Husband, wife, two sons aged 22 and 25, and wife of the elder son (24)¹</td>
<td>A house with 3 floors that can accommodate 50 tourists. Annual net income ranges from 100,000 to 200,000 Yuan. Has 400,000 to 500,000 Yuan of debt.</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Husband, wife, a daughter (23), and a son (12)</td>
<td>A house with 2 floors that can accommodate 30 tourists. Annual net income ranges from 100,000 Yuan. No debt.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front</td>
<td>Husband, wife, two sons (22 and 17), and wife of the elder son (20)</td>
<td>A house with 2 floors that can accommodate 25 tourists. Annual net income ranges from 30,000 to 40,000 Yuan. No debt.</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Husband, wife, and son (8)</td>
<td>A house with 2 floors that can accommodate 30 tourists. Annual net income ranges from 100,000 to 150,000 Yuan. Debt just paid off.</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹The numbers in the parenthesis indicate age.

In addition to interviews and participatory observation, I walked around Chongdu Valley to meet and talk with people who have assumed other types of jobs, which include, but are not limited to, electric vehicle drivers, restaurant owners, souvenir shop owners, street peddlers, tour guides, and CVSAC officers. These informal talks provided different views on tourism development and enriched the data I collected. Depending on the context, I either took notes and later expanded them into detailed field notes, or tape-recorded the communication and transcribed it afterwards (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

The transcription of the interviews and informal communication, and my field notes were put together for data analysis. Open coding was used to identify the themes that were related to HRH owners’ everyday life and practices (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Since local residents’ livelihood changed from agriculture to hospitality, their rural performance also changed along
with the process. To better document the changes, two stages of tourism development were distinguished and analyzed separately: the introductory stage when local residents started a HRH business and got used to it; and the mature stage when they performed their daily activities as unconscious enactments with high levels of proficiency. At the mature stage, three themes were identified to represent the major tasks HRH owners performed on a daily basis: being a businessperson, quality service in the HRH, and rebuilding and renovating rural house.

**Results**

In this section, I discuss the rural performance of HRH owners over two time periods: the introductory stage and the mature stage. Based on the data collected, I also depict their non-work activities in three ways: leisure, consumption, and education behavior. I will use “owners” hereafter to refer to the entire household that is responsible for the HRH, unless otherwise noted.

**The introductory stage: Starting the business**

The transformation of local residents’ everyday performance in Chongdu Valley did not take place over night; it was an evolving process of adjustment influenced by regional opportunities, internal and external efforts, and the larger economic context of China. It was the end result of changes in the overall dominant economy of the area. Over merely 15 years, the area evolved from an agricultural dominant economy to a modernized, service-based tourism economy. Unclear is how running a HRH has become the major form of livelihood in Chongdu Valley. Successfully addressing this issue required exploration of the introductory stage of tourism development.
Historically, the geographical location of Chongdu Valley made it difficult for residents to improve upon their standard of living. The valley is a naturally formed area surrounded by 500 to 1,000 meter mountains with only one access road to the outside. Because of limited, workable land within the Valley, most of the farmland is scattered among the nearby mountains. During farming season, the farmers of the family (usually male) often spent two hours on average going back and forth to their farmland. The crops they grew were mainly used to sustain the family. While the husband or male family members worked on the farmland, the wife typically stayed at home and did all the housework, took care of parents and children, grew vegetables for daily consumption, and raised pigs and chickens to sell.

This self-sufficient way of living did not bother locals much despite their very low annual income; only when they traveled out of the Valley or interacted with outsiders did they recognize the inconvenience of their location, their limited access to transportation, and their level of poverty. Indeed, Chongdu Valley was one of the poorest areas in the county prior to tourism development and local residents consistently received food aid from the central government due to the low volume of crop production on mountain land. Their average annual household income was 400 Yuan (around 50 dollars). As local residents recalled, life back then was hard but simple, laborious but limited in social pressure, and isolated but self-contained. Daily performance was repetitive, and there was a clear boundary between farm work and housework and a clear division of men’s and women’s work.

The geographical location of the Valley and the quality of its land limited the growth of the agricultural economy. With repositioning of the Valley as natural, beautiful and mysterious, however, new economic opportunities were created for local residents. The repositioning and the introduction of tourism were not initiated by external developers or local residents. Instead, an
officer from the local township government who insisted on developing Chongdu Valley into a tourist destination is given credit for the Valley’s transformation. Haiming Ma, who was then a deputy town chief, came to the area to persuade local residents to turn Chongdu Valley into a rural tourist destination that would entice tourists from nearby cities to experience rural life and enjoy its beauty. None of the residents believed him. In fact, they gave him a new name, “Braggart Ma,” for his “unrealistic” proposal. However, what then happened changed their mind; local residents gradually accepted, pursued, and finally chose to rely on the tourism economy that they had once known very little about. A villager recalled:

Tourism development was proposed by a deputy town chief. Back then, needless to say, the local residents, the village leaders doubted his proposal and said: ‘How could it be possible? Who will come to Chongdu Valley? There is just a stream of water. No one will want to see it.’ The deputy chief finally managed to persuade local villagers build a few basic tourist facilities. Urban people then started to come to Chongdu Valley. They drove cars, good cars that the elder people in the village had never seen before.

With the arrival of tourists, local residents began to see the possibility of making money from tourists. Initially the easiest way to make money was to sell instant noodles with hot water. Then some residents expand their businesses to sell bamboo-related tools and souvenirs, and others discovered the appeal of hospitality. Chongdu Valley residents realized that with the increased number of tourists they could benefit from renting one or more rooms in their houses.
Unfortunately, villagers were so poor that most had no money to purchase new beds and bedding to start their business. They were also not sure how quickly the tourism industry would develop and were hesitant to borrow money to put themselves at risk. A villager told me: “We dare not; even to borrow 5,000 Yuan, we were hesitant. Will we be able to pay the debt back? But the result was we succeeded. It has to be attributed to the whole tourism economy boom. And we were gradually changing our attitude from fearful to optimistic.”

In addition to the financial barriers and attitudinal challenges, local residents had to overcome the dramatic cultural difference between themselves and tourists. Living in a geographically isolated area from birth, Chongdu Valley residents still follow many traditional customs and rules. Hence, local residents have experienced culture shock with the introduction of tourism development. For instance, the most famous story among local residents revolves around a tourist couple’s visit and one-night stay in the area. At that time the local custom only allowed same-sex guests to sleep in the same room; even couples could not stay in the same room. To ensure that couples did not sleep together, the wife of one HRH slept in the room connecting the room for males and the room for females. However, as the story is told, the wife of the household slept very soundly one night and did not detect a couple getting together. In the morning, when she found out that a couple had slept in the same room she was very mad and berated them. This famous story is still popular and shared as a funny and silly anecdote among local villagers. Nowadays local residents are accepting of such behavior: “We are very open now. We don’t even care whether you are couple or not. You give me the money, and I open the room for you.”

To summarize the introductory stage, the changing of livelihoods from agriculture to running an HRH was difficult at first for local residents. They encountered and managed to
overcome various attitudinal, financial, and cultural barriers before they finally accepted “running a rural house” as a livelihood strategy. Their openness to the challenges and their willingness to adapt to the new environment set the stage for the fundamental transformations of their daily lives and performances that have gradually taken place over time.

**Maturation: Acquiring skills and becoming proficient**

Over the past 15 years Chongdu Valley residents have acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to run a HRH. Based on the interviews and participatory observation, I identified three major areas of rural performance as they relate to running a HRH: the ability to be a businessperson, providing quality service in the HRH, and (re)building or renovating HRHs. Each of these areas is associated with a range of activities and enactments that are distinct from those necessary for agricultural work.

**Being a businessperson**

For Chongdu Valley residents, running a HRH represents an identity shift from being a peasant to being a businessperson. A villager noted: “*We did farm work before, but now we don’t need to work on farmland any more. Previously we earned money by doing part-time work, but now we do business at home. We worked for others before, but now, no matter how small our businesses are, we are the ‘bosses’.*” According to Carolan (2008), the mind and body are inseparable from each other. Thus, a mental identity shift is closely associated with what residents do on a daily basis, and is exemplified by a new set of rural performances enabled by running a HRH.
For HRH owners, the key to conducting a HRH business is building good and long-term connections with outsiders, especially other stakeholders (i.e., tour guides, tour agency staff, tour bus drivers, and tourists) in the tourism industry who directly impact the quality and quantity of tourists they receive, including tour guides, tour agency staff, tour bus drivers, and tourists. Building a connection with stakeholders was initially a big challenge for local residents due to their long-term disconnection from the outside. But the pressures associated with conducting business forced them to become active and fast learners. Over 15 years of learning and networking, most of the local residents have accumulated a nice group of external “friends” who help them to maintain a healthy and steadily growing rural-house business. For example, a HRH owner told me: “I mostly have good personal and business relations with tour agency managers. I worked in this field for 14 years, and those who were tour guides have become tour agency managers. If I don’t have connection with them, my business must be in difficulty.”

In addition to building connections with tour agencies, local residents have realized the importance of tapping into the big and constantly-growing market of independent tourists. Independent tourists tend to spend more than group tourists who have purchased a fixed package. As a rural house owner told me, “the profit of 30 group tourists is equivalent to 10 independent tourists for me.” Thus, there is a trend in Chongdu Valley towards networking with independent tourists so as to draw them back in the future. Independent tourists also play an important role in word-of-mouth advertising. All of the HRH owners now have business cards with their contact information, the picture of their house, and a slogan. Young HRH owners also have learned to use mobile technology to promote their house and keep in touch with their customers.

HRH owners have also developed strategies to attract first time tourists who travel to Chongdu Valley without booking rooms in advance. During weekdays most HRHs have
vacancies, so owners will go to the entrance to the Valley or to parking lots to look for tourists. This strategy is most often used by those whose houses are built away from the most popular locations. They usually approach tourists politely, asking if they have booked a room and, if not, whether they have interest in checking out their rural houses. They do not pressure tourists who have no interest. They also have set up certain rules for the process so there is no conflict between owners. If HRH owners see other owners approaching a group of tourists, they will step away and find other tourists.

**Quality service in the HRH**

Another key issue of running a HRH is to provide quality service to tourists. After 15 years of development many rural houses in Chongdu Valley are comparable to a mid-sized rural “hotel” that can serve a fairly large number of tourists every year. The average capacity of the HRHs I visited was 40 tourists per day; a few HRHs have the capacity to serve as many as 100 tourists per day. As noted earlier, the transition to a tourism- from an agriculturally-based economy was different and, for many, quite difficult. With the growing number of tourists HRHs have received per day, the difficulties shifted from culture shock to providing quality services to tourists.

Generally speaking, to be successful HRH owners must: serve tasty and authentic rural meals and provide clean and comfortable rooms. To provide these amenities, especially during the peak season, each house must have at least one good cook, a good server, a good housekeeper, and a coordinator who can arrange tasks among family members and be available when needed. The following information is extracted from my field notes describing how the family in the second HRH I stayed in made breakfast and prepared lunch for two groups of
tourists (30 tourists who had stayed overnight or Group 1, and 50 tourists who had just arrived, or Group 2).

Every family member was on duty. Once they finishing cooking breakfast for Group 2, the older son started cooking another round of breakfast as fast as he could for Group 1. The dining room was cleaned up as soon as Group 2 finished their breakfast and left. Once the room was ready, hungry tourists from Group 1 rushed in. It was an incredibly busy morning that was completely beyond my imagination. After the breakfast, Group 2 soon dropped their bags in an empty room and left to climb the mountains. Group 1 was asked to pack up all their belongings and vacate their rooms for Group 2. Once all the rooms were empty, the mother and her helper started to clean the rooms and change the bedding. At the same time, the two sons acted quickly to buy and prepare the food for lunch. Because this time they had to prepare food for both groups (i.e., a total of 80 tourists) at the same time, they rode a tricycle to purchase all the vegetables, fish, and meat they needed. They then went on to clean, chop, and blend the raw food. Four big plates of rice were put into a steamer. Everything was ready to cook. All they needed was to get messages from the tour guides of the two groups telling them to start cooking.

When residents’ livelihoods were dependent on agriculture, there was a clear gendered division of work space: men worked outside on the farmland while women worked in the home.
Now that residents’ livelihoods are dependent on tourism, particularly the HRH business, the gendered division has become contextual and less clear. Take cooking, for example. In the first and fourth HRHs in which I stayed, cooking was done by the mother of the family; in the second HRH the family’s elder son did all the cooking; in the third and fourth HRHs, both the husbands and the wives worked in the kitchen. This varied pattern also was observed with the recruitment of tourists at the entrance to the Valley and in the parking lots. For the second and fifth HRHs, the fathers/husbands were responsible for the work. While at all the other three HRHs, the mothers/wives went outside every weekday to attract potential tourists.

To provide tourists with a satisfying experience, HRH owners have developed a set of guidelines for their rooms and food. For instance, all the houses I stayed in always provide tourists with standardized, clean, white bedding. The owners believe a clean and cozy room environment is more important than fancy facilities. They also ensure that their menus include a variety of local dishes, because they know that tourists prefer organic, fresh food, and home-style cooking. However, in an effort to be competitive, they make the exteriors of their houses look more traditional by renovating them with antique style gates, handrails, and windows. They also serve large portions at a low price because they believe that they must maintain an image of HRHs as “cheap and affordable.”

(Re)building and renovating HRHs

While conducting business and providing quality amenities are the two major performances associated with running a HRH in the peak season, (re)building and/or renovating the house has become the main theme for owners in the off-season. The reasons for them to invest money into the (re)construction of their houses every year were multifold. Most HRH
owners did not have enough money to build a multilevel house when they started their business so they chose to build one level or floor at a time. In addition, most of the owners did not anticipate how fast the tourism economy would grow, so many initially built a small house. When they realized that they could increase their revenue with more room capacity, they began to slowly expand their HRHs. Owners’ decisions were also affected by governmental policies. Initially, HRHs in Chongdu Valley were only allowed to have one or two floors, so most of the HRHs built early on followed this rule. Recently this rule was abandoned and most HRHs were renovated through the addition of one to two more floors of rooms.

The on-going renovation of HRHs in Chongdu Valley is also due to increased competition. A HRH owner told me: "the market changes very fast. This year is different from last year. Last year our rooms looked pretty good, but this year tourists think our rooms are not nice enough. I feel doing rural-house business is getting harder and harder. Competition is fierce." To distinguish one HRH from another and meet the needs of tourists, owners upgrade their HRH(s) almost every year. I was told that a couple of young men in the village tore down their old HRH and invested 4 to 5 million Yuan to build a new HRH on the same site last year.

Constant rebuilding and renovation of HRHs has led to an increased prevalence of family debt in Chongdu Valley. The wife of the elder son helping to manage the second rural house I stayed in told me that most of the HRH owners in Chongdu Valley, despite having fancy houses and a stable and relatively high income, have debt more or less. Her father-in-law, for example, owes 400,000 Yuan to the banks. Another family I interviewed had just rebuilt their house and indicated that they had incurred a debt of 1.1 million Yuan. Having this debt has created extensive pressure and led to doubt about whether their family should have started a HRH business in the first place. During my interview, the wife kept complaining about how hard it is
to run a HRH. They have to literally rebuild their HRH every five years because tourists feel it is out of date. This requires that they put all of the money they earn back into the rural house or, at times, borrow more to keep it attractive to tourists.

Overall, owners have developed a new set of rural performances necessary to run their HRH. Some have shown the ability and courage to build a HRH worth 5 million Yuan, or borrowed 1.1 million Yuan for rural house renovation. They are brave businesspeople who believe in the future of Chongdu Valley. They are no longer timid, thrifty, and prudent peasants who tried to make ends meet. Today they are businesspeople working hard to move resources around and make the best use of them. Early on the laborious work on the farmed land harmed many rural residents’ physical health, but today the economic pressure and operational challenges associated with owning an HRH impact not only their physical, but their mental health as well. Their future success no longer solely depends on their physical abilities but increasingly depends on their knowledge and their vision for the future.

**Off-work activities and mentalities**

In the previous section I discussed the daily work-related performance of HRH owners. But work-related activities only comprise one part of their rural performance. In this section I will focus on owners’ free-time activities and mentalities. I do so because it helps provide a more holistic picture of how HRH owners live their lives with a new identity as rural businesspeople.

**Leisure**

Based on my observation and interviews, working in the tourism industry has changed HRH owners’ leisure performance in two ways. First, it has changed their view towards leisure
and increased the frequency with which they participate in leisure activities. A villager noted: “Before, no one thought about leisure. Now almost every week after busy Sundays, a couple of families will get together, mostly drive to a nearby place, take a small break, and do something fun.” The reason behind this is that tourism has significantly raised local residents’ living standards and given them more freedom to enjoy leisure activities without worrying about its opportunity and actual costs. The demonstration effect of urban tourists has also prompted a recognition of the importance of leisure in one’s life and the various benefits leisure can bring to one’s mental and physical health.

Second, running a HRH increases the chance of residents choosing tourism as a leisure activity. They use tourism as an opportunity to learn from other tourism service providers, particularly in terms of how they can improve their own services. Several HRH owners indicated that the design of their houses was inspired by another house or architecture they saw during a past trip. During the off-season, village leaders organize educational trips for HRH owners to famous tourist destinations in China. These trips are not only relaxing, but eye-opening. A rural house owner told me: “During the off-season, even if the village leaders do not organize, we will organize a few trips on our own. Many of us even brought pens and papers; when seeing their houses and specialties, we already take some photos and draw some pictures.”

Consumption

Tourism has significantly increased the consumption behavior of Chongdu Valley residents, leading to changes in the local consumer culture. Previously, Chongdu Valley residents lived a frugal life and were more interested in saving than consuming. With steady growth in household wealth and a stable family income, Chongdu Valley residents have shown
an increased interest in consumption, and have become quite picky about the quality of products they purchase. A villager noted, “When we go to the town center to buy stuff, if they know we are from Chongdu Valley, the salesman will increase the price for us, because some of us disdain cheap products. They think clothes less than one hundred Yuan are too cheap to buy. ‘Do you have better clothes?’ they always ask. Some people even go to the county center, or the cities for shopping.”

Their choice of expensive and high-quality products is also a result of peer pressure and increasing interaction with outsiders. A HRH owner said: “Now most of my clothes are of famous brand. Pants, shirts, and shoes. A pair of shoes usually costs me five to six hundred Yuan. Since I like to go to the cities to meet with my friends, sometimes it is just about ‘face’. My friends are all wearing good clothes, and I have the ability as well, why shouldn’t I?”

However, in some cases, pursuing high-quality products and a different lifestyle has led to an extreme which Veblen (1936) called, “conspicuous consumption.” Spending money on expensive products is no longer for necessity or to better one’s quality of life. Instead, it is to show off or not be defeated by one’s neighbors. Conspicuous consumption is not limited to rich families, middle-income and low-income families have also adopted the behavior. For instance, quite a few families in Chongdu Valley have borrowed money not to invest in their rural houses, but to buy fancy new cars. The father/husband of the third rural house I stayed in told me very proudly that he had spent almost 10,000 Yuan to get a driver license. He was proud to be a VIP customer of a driving school and to have been provided exclusive services when other ordinary customers had to wait in line for services.
Education

Although tourism development has improved certain aspects of Chongdu Valley residents’ quality of life, it has largely destroyed the area’s education system. Before tourism development, Chongdu Valley had elementary, secondary and high schools, but now only the elementary school is left. The demise of the school system started when local teachers began devoting their efforts to running HRHs and neglecting their teaching duties. This led to a decline in the quality of students’ education, lower student attendance, and finally to school closures. Some residents feel that the elementary school may soon close due to low student attendance. Nowadays almost all of the children in the Valley are sent to boarding schools in other villages and towns, not only because of the quality of education in the boarding schools, but also because running a rural house is so demanding that families do not have time to take care of their children.

Further, the children living in Chongdu Valley do not value education, particularly college education, as they did before. Their logic is that there are so many college students who can’t find a good job after graduation, why should they bother going to college? The older son of the second rural house I stayed in told me that a few years ago young people were proud to be admitted to college, but nowadays going to college is not perceived to be their best option. Young people prefer to start working as early as possible to gain experience and earn money. They typically do this by moving to a city and working for a few years. If they fit in well and have the ability to live a good life in the city, they may choose to stay there. If not, they move back to the Valley with their years of experience and social connections, take on their family’s HRH business, and look for other money-making opportunities in the tourism industry. However, this career path will only be viable as long as the tourism industry continues to prosper in Chongdu Valley.
Discussion and conclusions

Using rural performance as a guiding research framework, I examined changes in the activities and mentalities of Chongdu Valley residents as they experienced a shift in their livelihood from agriculture to tourism. I focused on the micro-scope impacts of tourism development on local residents’ everyday life with a detailed analysis of how HRH owners have overcome various barriers and acquired the necessary skills to start their business. Non-work related activities and mentalities with respect to leisure, consumption, and education were also explored as they were directly influenced by residents’ changes in livelihood.

In line with previous research (Edensor, 2006), the rural performance discovered in this study rendered a clear and unique picture of how rurality in a rural tourist destination has changed along with tourism development. This rurality is not extracted from the mind of local residents, i.e. what they “perceive” rural life is, nor is it extracted from popular media, i.e. what the dominant discourses think of rural life, but is embedded in the everyday practices of the local residents that are real and alive in the material world (Carolan, 2008). It focuses on the “material dimensions of the rural condition that have a real impact on the experiences of people living, working and playing in rural space” (Woods, 2010: 836).

The study results indicated that tourism has provided local residents with an alternative way of living that has greatly changed their life as a rural resident. Along with the process, they have developed a new rural identity from being a farmer to being a businessperson (Bye, 2009). The work-related everyday performance of HRH owners were shifting from agriculture to hospitality. As their experiences accumulated, they were able to acquire a new set of skills, which included but were not limited to external networking, marketing, cooking, room service, house and room design, and managing debt.
Meanwhile, local residents have been gradually integrated into the free market, the service economy, and the financial systems of the modern society. Their life has shifted from a pristine, pure, and simple one, to a modern, pressed, and complicated one. On the one hand, their living standards have increased dramatically after operating a HRH business; their pride and self-confidence has grown along with their economic status; they’ve felt more freedom and independence to expand their life experiences through purchasing more and better products; and they have begun participating more often in diverse leisure activities. On the other hand, fierce competition in running an HRH has increased their stress, pushed them to constantly reconstruct/renovate their houses to attract tourists; and led to greater consumption of unnecessary products to enhance their psychological identity (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). Also, the youth have started to lose faith in education and simply want to take advantage of the tourism economy.

Overall, the study results indicated that the process of modernization has permeated the remote rural areas of China via tourism (Oakes, 2012), and has taken local residents into the era of modernity wherein new skills, values, and ideas are adopted. The continuity and stability that the countryside used to represent do not hold true in the new era of rural restructuring; it is now change and dynamism that rurality characterizes.

In addition, I found that documentation of everyday life not only presented the lived experiences of rurality, but turned out to be a valuable tool in understanding many community-level phenomena such as community structure, and social inequality (Iorio & Corsale, 2010; Williams & Hall, 2000). For instance, the demographic characteristics of Chongdu Valley residents showed a balanced age distribution. Unlike many other rural communities in China where young people choose to seek job opportunities in the cities (Chiang, Hannum, & Kao,
2015; Gui, Berry, & Zheng, 2012), most of the younger generation in Chongdu Valley has chosen to stay in the community and work in the tourism industry. This decision may be due to the demands of the family to operate the HRH business. The labor-intensive work during the peak season and the increasing competitiveness of the HRH market require that the entire family be intricately involved in maintaining a well-functioning and profitable family business.

Rural performances also helped to explain the decreasing community solidarity in Chongdu Valley. Prior to tourism development, people were poor and resources were limited. So local residents had developed a set of labor- and resource-sharing rules to plant, grow, and harvest crops. This sharing system was extended from agriculture to other areas such as building a house, travelling outside the Valley, and family emergencies. But now, running a HRH is a private business, and neighbors in some sense have become competitors in the tourism market. Increasingly residents prefer relying on themselves instead of seeking help from their neighbors. Also, local residents have gotten used to the power of money. If they find that spending money can solve their problems, they likely will hesitate to ask for help from others.

Last but not least, the rising inequality in Chongdu Valley can also be explained by the findings in rural performance. As noted earlier, running a HRH is the most profitable business in Chongdu Valley and its success in many ways depends on the vision of its owners. For example, if owners had anticipated how successful they would be with a HRH, they would have invested earlier and more heavily to generate more profit. In addition, residents’ ability to develop a strong external network also varies significantly among Chongdu Valley residents. Those who had experience working in the cities and/or working on village committees, or simply are more eloquent, made more profit from their HRH business than others because of their advantages in attracting tourists and maintaining good relationships with them.
In conclusion, this study demonstrated the effectiveness of rural performance as a study framework for understanding rurality in the context of rural tourism in China. It also showcased a way to present the changing dynamics of rural performance through inclusion of both the introductory and mature stages of rural performance. Third, it showcased the role of this framework in explaining community-level changes. Despite these contributions, the study falls short in its coverage of other tourism-related professions in the Valley, and its dependence on memory to document the rural performances of residents during the introductory stage of tourism development. I recommend that future research focus on exploring the applicability of “performance” as a research tool in other tourism contexts, and apply a longitudinal approach to understanding the ever-changing nature of performance in general.
References


Chapter 4

Discourse and power relations in community tourism

In this chapter I employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore the power relations in Chongdu Valley over the course of tourism development. The text in this chapter is prepared for submission to *Annals of Tourism Research*.

My initial plan was to write an article comparing and contrasting official, popular, and touristic discourses of rurality in Chongdu Valley and to explore how these discourses were reflected in the lay discourse of local residents. But after data collection, I found that there was a great deal of overlap between the three discourses and I had difficulty distinguishing them from each other. For example, the touristic discourse and many “official” reports were generally made and published by the Chongdu Valley Scenic Area Corporation. So, instead of comparing and contrasting the three types of discourse, I ended up comparing the Corporation’s discourse with the lay discourse. I also found that if I only focused on comparing the two discourses as related to rurality, this article would not provide much new insight in addition to the other two articles. Thus, I expanded my focus from rurality to a variety of development issues, including “destination image,” which can be linked to rurality. All these changes have led to a study on the power relations in Chongdu Valley, rather than the initial topic on rurality, discourse, and identity.

**Abstract:** Based on a case study of Chongdu Valley, China, I compared and contrasted the managerial discourses of a private company and lay discourses of local residents on the rural tourist destination with respect to three themes: destination image, development outcomes, and
institutions and regulations. Adopting a mixed method of ethnographic fieldwork and critical discourse analysis, I examined the inclusion/exclusion and congruence/incongruence between the two discourses, its implications for the power relations of the community, and its potential effects on future challenges. I concluded with a series of suggestions on how power structure of Chongdu Valley should be changed to mitigate the relationship between the community and a private company, and the effectiveness of discourse analysis as a research tool in understanding power relations at the community level.

**Keywords:** discourse analysis, rural tourism, congruence, incongruence
Introduction

Despite the fact that there is still no shared conceptual understanding of “community” by social scientists (Flint, Luloff, & Finley, 2008), community tourism has been a central topic in tourism studies for decades and has continuously drawn the attention of tourism scholars and practitioners (Salazar, 2012). In 2014, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) celebrated World Tourism Day (WTD) with the theme *Tourism and Community Development* to advocate for the beneficial intersection of tourism and community. According to the UNWTO (2014), tourism “can be conducive to advancing sustainable development from the grassroots level” and can serve as “a catalyst of social cohesion, going beyond the immediate impact of job creation and its positive economic consequences and enhances, for instance, local governance capabilities which multiply the tourism impact even further” (para, 3).

For tourism scholars, community provides a valuable unit of analysis for examining tourism phenomena from a local and indigenous point of view (Murphy, 2013). Since community can be defined as a group of people tied to a particular place “by their shared values, concerns, interests, and actions” (Flint, Luloff, & Finley, 2008, p. 528), it helps narrow the focus of a study onto a relatively small segment of population that is most directly impacted by tourism (Williams & Lawson, 2001). The growing body of research on community tourism has not only helped practitioners plan and implement better tourism projects to improve the quality of life and well-being of local residents in host communities (Simpson, 2008; Goodwin, & Santilli, 2009; Okazaki, 2008;), it has also advanced knowledge in the areas of tourism impacts, planning, policymaking, and management (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Choi & Murray, 2010; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Jamal & Getz, 1995). Of
particular interest in this study was the political aspect of community tourism due to the critical role it plays in tourism development and sustainability.

The politics of community tourism directly and indirectly determine the formation of tourism policies and the way in which they get implemented (Vernon, Essex, Pinder, & Curry, 2005), who gets to experience the benefits from tourism and in what proportions (Ying, & Zhou, 2007), and, eventually, the success and sustainability of community tourism as a whole (Kibicho, 2008). Despite substantial research on this topic, there is still room for methodological innovation that will lead to a more holistic understanding of the politics of community tourism. In particular, discourse analysis, a critical approach from mainstream social sciences that is used to understand power relations and dynamics, has yet to be employed in the community tourism setting. The present study aims to fill this gap by adopting discourse analysis to examine the power relations between local residents and the private sector in Chongdu Valley, China, a rural community that has been exposed to tourism development over the past 15 years.

Fairclough (2003, p. 16) suggested discourse should be analyzed with consideration to how it “practically figure(s) in particular areas of social life” and “is best framed within ethnography.” Adopting a mixed method of ethnographic fieldwork and discourse approach, I compared and contrasted the language, values and attitudes of local residents and a private company in Chongdu Valley over the course of tourism development. This mixed method allowed for an examination of discourses within the social context they are embedded, and of how power relations are represented in languages and opinions as related to a variety of community issues.

Unlike traditional approaches towards community politics whereby power relations are examined by looking at explicit power structures and configurations of local political system
(Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Reed, 1997), discourse analysis focuses on patterns and changes of linguistic practices that can exemplify changes at the social level (Richardson, 1996). It provides a unique lens to examine power relations that are associated with congruence and incongruence of values, theories and attitudes of different social groups (Fairclough, 2003).

**Discourse analysis on power relations**

Discourse analysis, employed and popularized by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1972), opened up a new window for social scientists to understand the power dynamics of the world within which humans exist. According to Richardson (1996), power does not only exist in political structures, institutions, and social relations, it also exists in languages and texts that are created by different agencies and are embedded in particular historical contexts (Richardson, 1996). Years of input by philosophers, sociologists, linguists, and political scientists has resulted in a mature research technique with rich theoretical basis and sophisticated analytic instruments (Coulthard, 2014; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2014; Van Dijk, 1993).

The underlying thesis of discourse analysis is that "power is exercised from innumerable points" (Foucault, 1990, p. 94), and human politics do not only incorporate “overt power struggles,” but also aspects of linguistic practices (Richardson, 1996). So, instead of focusing on explicit institutions and interactions, discourse analysis draws evidence from languages, texts, and ideas to showcase implicit power dynamics that otherwise might not be detected. In a review of studies on environmental politics, Hajer and Versteeg (2005, p. 175) identified three features and strengths of discourse analysis in comparison to other analytical methods: “Its capacity to reveal the role of language in politics, its capacity to reveal the embeddedness of language in practices and its capacity to answer ‘how’ questions and to illuminate mechanisms.”
Among various forms of discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed for this study because of its focus on the intersection of language use and social practices (Van Dijk, 1993). Fairclough (2003, p. 2) noted, “Language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language.” CDA centered on the language of social reality that can be viewed as interpretations of the world. Since discourses are always associated with different groups of people (social agents) (Fairclough, 2003), it is necessary to explore linguistic practices of different social agents in terms of how they construct social events, processes, actors, and relations (Hastings, 1999). In community tourism, social agents may include people from local communities, different levels of governments, private sectors, and/or non-government organizations.

In CDA, language and text can be analyzed with a variety of techniques and procedures. For example, “intertextuality” is a technique that examines inclusion of one group’s texts such as direct quotations, paraphrases, and summaries into the text created by another social group (Fairclough, 2003). Depending on the forms and contexts of the inclusion, intertextuality can provide direct evidence of the kinds of influence one group exerts on another group. However, inclusion by itself is not sufficient for interpreting power relations between different groups, since what is said is always grounded in what is unsaid (Fairclough, 2003). It is also necessary to explore exclusion of texts, and to determine the social meanings behind exclusions. In this study, intertextuality was used to compare and contrast values, theories, and assumptions adopted by two different groups so as to identify instances of change that have been caused by an exercising of power.
In terms of the tourism literature, discourse analysis has been adopted frequently as a tool to explore the image and social representation of tourist destinations (Santos, Belhassen, & Caton, 2006; Stamou & Paraskevopoulos, 2004; Yan & Santos, 2009), whereas its application in a politics-of-tourism context is rare. Only Xiao (2006) has employed the method to explore China’s tourism development and policy at the national level. Given the inherent linkage between discourse and power, and the method’s wide applications in fields such as urban planning, organization studies, and international relations (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Hastings, 1999; Milliken, 1999), there is an urgent need to introduce the method to study the politics of community tourism. Doing so will add a new and valuable lens for understanding power relations at the grassroots level.

Employing critical discourse analysis, the study seeks to answer two questions: first, what the managerial and lay discourses in Chongdu Valley are as related to a variety of development issues; Second, what kind of implications for community power relations can be drawn from the congruence/incongruence of the two discourses.

Study method

The study area

Chongdu Valley Resort, located in Henan province, China, is a popular rural tourism destination famous for its natural beauty, rural landscape, and country life. Chongdu Valley is the only village located in the Resort with approximately 367 households and 1,455 residents in 2013. It has been estimated that more than 95% of the local residents work in the tourism industry. In terms of administration, the village-level government is under the jurisdiction of, from lowest to highest level, Tantou town, Luanchuan county, and Luoyang municipality. Since
the Resort was opened in 1999, Chongdu Valley has gradually gained in popularity and has become one of the most famous rural tourist destinations in the middle of China. According to the Resort’s 2014 official work report, the Resort attracted 573,700 visits in 2013, which generated about 200 million Yuan (33 million USD) in revenue to the village.

The development of Chongdu Valley Resort can be divided into two phases. The first phase took place from 1999 to 2004, when the Resort was managed by a newly established company owned by Tantou township government. By 2004 the local tourism economy was struggling due to a lack of financial support. To attract more urban residents to the Resort, township officers decided to upgrade the infrastructure and environment. This was accomplished by soliciting private developers. A deal was reached with a private company which later established Chongdu Valley Scenic Area Corporation (mentioned as the Company hereafter). According to the deal, the Company has the right to operate and manage the Resort for 50 years (i.e., until 2054).

Despite acquisition by the company, Chongdu Valley residents have been allowed to continue to live in the Resort and become involved in the tourism economy. The Company has no right to displace Chongdu Valley residents because they collectively owned the land within the resort. The ambiguous property rights of the Resort have set the stage for a variety of development challenges. For example, the Resort requires constant upgrades of the infrastructure and facilities, which inevitably leads to resettlement of some local residents. Many other issues such as water use, garbage disposal, wastewater treatment, house style, and room prices require negotiation and cooperation between the Company and local residents. It is against this background that the politics of Chongdu Valley are reviewed.
Chongdu Valley Resort is an ideal case for this study because, apart from sharing many typical characteristics of community tourism such as small, isolated, and self-reliant, it has experienced fast, smooth tourism development as well as political stability over the past 11 years. The rapid growth of the tourism economy and the continuous improvement of local residents’ living standards have to a large extent hidden and postponed the political confrontations within the community. To date, the Company has made a large amount of community-level development strategies, all of which were supported and assisted by local residents when it comes to implementations.

Traditional approaches to power relations tend to examine explicit political actions by asking questions such as “who participates, who gains, and who prevails in decision-making about key issues” (Gaventa, 1982, p. vii). Such an approach is inadequate in Chongdu Valley where interactions between different groups on political issues are lacking. A less traditional approach needs to be adopted to dig into the values and views held by different groups in order to uncover the real political relations within the community. Discourse analysis is an ideal approach because it focuses on languages and texts rather than explicit actions, and has the ability to identify the interplay of differing perspectives in spite of surface consensus and agreement.

**Data collection and analysis**

Data were collected through interviews, informal conservation, participant observation, and onsite and online material collection. This mixed method approach took into account the social circumstances in which discourses are formed, and thus enabled analysis of discourse within its real world context. In line with rural studies (Jones, 1995), “lay discourse” was
adopted to represent the collective everyday discourse of the local population. “Managerial discourse” was selected to represent the discourse of the Company (i.e., the dominant managerial entity of the Resort).

Lay discourses were collected through 50 formal interviews with local residents and informal conversations during participant observation. Local residents’ opinions about various aspects of tourism development were gathered during the interviews and conversations (see a list of interview questions in Table 4-1). Managerial discourses were obtained via electronic documents and printed materials provided by a deputy manager of the Company. The materials included annual performance reports, resort planning documents, tourism promotion materials, and tour guides’ speeches. Two interviews were also conducted with the deputy manager, which contributed to the data pool for managerial discourses. Finally, online materials, including the official website of the Resort and news articles about Chongdu Valley, were examined and categorized into one of the two types of discourses.

To analyze the data, Fairclough’s (2003) CDA was applied. According to Fairclough, examining texts is not enough to understand their power, researchers must also interpret how texts “practically figure in particular areas of social life” (p. 15). Thus, a historical approach was adapted to examine whether there were changes in discourses along with tourism development. To do this, the interviewees were asked to recall their perceptions of tourism and Chongdu Valley as a tourist destination at the beginning of tourism development. Common themes were identified through constant reflection and examination of the data. For example, both local residents and the Company’s documents mentioned the various impacts of tourism development, which were grouped into development outcomes. The relations and interactions of the Company and local residents were found to be mainly a result of institutions and regulations. Techniques
including exclusion/inclusion and congruence/incongruence were used to compare and contrast the two discourses. For example, contents from the Company’s documents were mentioned by local residents during interviews and were coded as “inclusion.” Depending on whether the interviewees agreed or disagreed with the contents, the relation between the two discourses were coded as “congruence” or “incongruence.”

Table 4-1. List of interview questions with local residents

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<td>1</td>
<td>Please recall the time when tourism development began in Chongdu Valley. What did you do for a living then? What was your life like then? What was the village like then?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What did you think of tourism then? Can you remember what others in the village thought about tourism?</td>
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| 3 | Do you feel your life has changed since you began working in the tourism sector (or since tourism started being developed in Chongdu Valley)? If yes, can you recall the changes in chronological order?  
   a. Probing\(^1\): income, values, social network, kinship ties, lifestyle, etc. |
| 4 | Do you feel the Village has changed along with tourism development? If yes, can you recall the changes in chronological order?  
   a. Probing: natural environment, built environment, interpersonal relationships, governance, etc. |
| 5 | What things do you think represent Chongdu Valley? |
| 6 | What do you know about the company’s descriptions of Chongdu Valley? Do you agree with them? If yes, why? If no, why not? |
| 7 | What do you think of your relation with the Company? |
| 8 | What do you think of tourism as a livelihood strategy for your family right now and in the future? |
| 9 | What do you think of tourism as the major industry for Chongdu Valley right now and in the future? |

\(^1\) “Probing” was used when interviewees could not properly put their thoughts into words.

Findings

Based on the data collected, three overarching themes were identified in both the managerial and lay discourses: destination image, development outcomes, and institutions and
regulations. In this section, each theme will be presented with the congruence and incongruence between the two discourses, and their underlying reasons and associated effects.

**Destination image**

The image of Chongdu Valley as a rural tourist destination is portrayed in the planning documents as well as the tourism promotion materials created by the Company. In general, Chongdu Valley has been portrayed as an ideal retreat from urban chaos and daily routines. The tourism promotion materials focused on the natural landscape and the traditional lifestyle in Chongdu Valley, presenting sharp distinctions from that which people experience in the cities. In particular, water or the springs flowing down from the mountains around the Valley, and bamboo forests amid and surrounding the Valley were heavily promoted. In addition, capitalizing on the traditional lifestyle ever present in the Valley, the farmhouses run by local residents were highlighted as a “must-see” when visiting the area. The following translated description, drawn from the home page of Chongdu Valley Resort’s official website, is typical of the discourse found in the planning materials:

Chongdu Valley is blessed with three special attractions. The first is water. Northern China lacks water, but not in Chongdu Valley. Here, hundreds of springs come out from the deep earth, and merge into the steady stream of Lan River. The stream carved a variety of shapes of springs and waterfalls running through the mountains. The second is bamboo. Visitors coming for sightseeing and relaxation can enjoy the pleasing scenery of the “Bamboo Sea,” and live in the bright and spacious bamboo inns. Before
leaving, they can also take home some delicate bamboo utensils and handicrafts as souvenirs. The last is the farmhouse. Rural and mountain-style farmhouses, scattered alongside Lan River, can accommodate the needs of 13,800 tourists simultaneously. The farmhouse businesses also open the door for local farmers to economic prosperity.

The three attractions (i.e., water, bamboo, farmhouses) have become symbolic features of Chongdu Valley and have been mentioned in different promotional materials created over time by the Company. While I was not able to find out who decided these three attractions should be promoted and used to position Chongdu Valley, it is clear from the results of the interviews and informal conversations that the decision did not come from local residents. The collective perceptions of Chongdu Valley by local residents were very negative and pessimistic at the initial stage of tourism development. Local residents resisted tourism development because of their history of economic hardship and their disbelief that urban people would visit the Village they considered to be “poor,” “dirty,” and “lagging behind.” Their negativity and pessimism did not begin to change until a deputy town chief, who was later deemed the pioneer of the community’s tourism development, influenced their thinking. An older local resident who had been actively involved in the tourism development process from its inception told the following story:

*He (the deputy town chief) is the kind of person with foresight and vision.*

*One day (before 1996), he gathered a group of smart and knowledgeable local residents for a meeting. He proposed the idea of tourism, local*
people said: ‘Impossible! What you said is impossible! Tourists have gone to famous scenic spots, why would they come to our village? What would they look for, the poor remote mountain area? What could we offer them for food’ He replied, ‘They will eat what we eat.’ [Residents replied.] ‘They have chicken, duck, fish and meat in the cities, everything is better than ours.’ He said, ‘You have no idea! Time is different, people have begun to feel nostalgic and look for a return to nature. They feel bored living in high-rise buildings. They are bored of eating chicken, duck, fish and meat. They want to go to rural areas to live in farmhouses, and eat local cuisine, especially wild vegetables. Now pollution is quite serious in the cities, and wild vegetables are considered good for health.’

However, his argument alone was not persuasive enough for the local residents to accept tourism as a new way of living. The influx of urban tourists into Chongdu Valley and their interest in the local cuisine, the farmhouses, and various forms of entertainment, eventually opened their eyes to the alternative livelihood and strengthened their commitment to participate in the tourism economy. At present, local residents have adopted the rhetoric of the managerial discourse to promote the natural beauty of Chongdu Valley. Throughout my interviews with local residents, the three symbolic features—water, bamboo, and farmhouse—were repeatedly mentioned when asked what things they think represent Chongdu Valley. However, if they were asked 15 years ago, they would likely have given a completely different set of features.

Local residents’ adoption of the managerial discourse into their daily language indicates that they agree with management’s use of the three attractions to position Chongdu Valley. The
change in lay discourse reflects the locals’ changing attitudes towards tourism, and the
acknowledgement of their initial misinterpretation of Chongdu Valley as a tourist destination.
The dominant role of managerial discourses on destination image can be partly explained by
Foucault’s (1990) thesis on power and knowledge, whereby knowledge is denoted as a general
foundation on which power can be formed. In the case of destination image, those who are
perceived to have more knowledge of tourism get to construct the current image of Chongdu
Valley. Because of the initial misinterpretation, local residents tend to belittle their own
knowledge of Chongdu Valley and the tourism market, and give the Company the full power to
decide the image of Chongdu Valley.

**Development outcomes**

In Chongdu Valley, tourism development has led to dramatic changes at both the
community and household levels. At the community level, roads connecting Chongdu Valley
with nearby major cities have been hardened and, in 2013, a highway transecting through
Chongdu Valley was built. Tourism development has also led to improvements in the
community’s infrastructure (e.g., garbage disposal, water supply, and public restrooms) and,
ultimately, a clean and pleasant environment. At the household level, tourism development has
contributed to increases in the annual average household income from an estimated 400 Yuan in
1999 to an estimated 100,000 Yuan in 2014. Most families have developed small businesses in
the tourism industry. Over 90% of households run farmhouses, a small business that provides
accommodation to urban tourists. All of these community and household level changes were
reflected in reports produced by the Company and mentioned by most interviewees.
In spite of the agreement on overall changes, the managerial discourse and lay discourse differed on a variety of details. For example, the tone of the managerial discourse stressed tourism as a top-down “pro-poor” strategy that has been able to diminish poverty and increase the living standards of rural residents. It also emphasized that without higher-level government authority, and without the lead and investment of the Company, the current changes would have been impossible. The description below was obtained from a document produced by the Company:

In August 2004, the government of Luanchuan County showed great foresight to transfer the Resort from township ownership to private ownership. Since the transfer, the Company has invested 660 million Yuan to infrastructures, entertainment facilities, marketing, and conservation to make Chongdu Valley not only a leading resort in Luanchuan County, but also a famous rural tourist destination in Luoyang municipal area and Henan province.

However, in recognition of the efforts the Company has taken to develop the Resort, local residents indicated that tourism’s success and the improvement of their living standards should be attributed primarily to their own hard work. They discussed the courage it took to obtain a loan for the first 1,000 Yuan they needed to renovate their houses for tourists; how they collectively built the village roads, stone steps, and other tourism facilities when the government did not have funding; how they quickly adjust themselves to accommodate the needs of tourists; and how they worked hard every year to make sure farmhouse an attraction of Chongdu Valley.
While the arguments of Chongdu Valley suggests that both the Company and local residents may contribute to the success of tourism, however each group focuses on different aspects of development, which lean towards their own experiences and interests.

In addition, managerial discourses tended to exaggerate the “bad” condition of the village so as to amplify the changes introduced through tourism development. For example, the Company document mentioned in the previous paragraph also indicated that before 1999 Chongdu Valley was not only famous for its poverty, but for having “a lot of bachelors unable to find a wife, a lot of villagers gathering for gambling, a lot of family living on credit, and a lot of children unable to go to school.” However, local residents’ discourse challenged this statement. They said the truth is that there were bachelors, but only a few. There also was no gambling, only locals playing Mahjong (a traditional game in China). And, although they were very poor, they normally could make ends meet, and they tried their best to send their children to school.

Divergence also existed with respect to the current economic status of local residents. During my fieldwork, the village head, in consultation with the Company, wrote a thank you letter to a vice prime minister of China who had, in the previous year, visited Chongdu Valley to view its success with tourism development. In the letter the village head wrote that the average household income of Chongdu Valley was reaching 230,000 Yuan. The deputy manager later confirmed this number. However, several local residents cited the letter during their interviews, and disagreed with the annual income. They argued that the average household income should be around 100,000 Yuan at most, and considering growing economic disparity, a lot of families earned much lower than 100,000 Yuan. They also indicated that many families have no savings because they have to re-pay their loans or invest their money back in to upgrades and/or renovations of their farmhouse.
In terms of the natural environment, the managerial discourses only mentioned positive changes such as sanitation and new bamboo plantations; they never touched on the negative impacts of tourism development. On the other hand, local residents were pretty straightforward when expressing their concerns about the environment. The issues they raised included polluted water, a lack of water, noise, increased temperature, and air pollution, all of which came along with the mounting arrivals of tourists. A female resident said, “[the] environment is certainly not as good as before, because we got more people using this place. Before, the air was very clean and fresh, and it was quiet and we could hear birds singing everywhere, especially in this area,” but now the area has “people, vehicles, and air pollution.” Another woman commented, “compared to cities, the pollution here is much less serious. But [when] compared to other rural villages, [this village] should be considered polluted. Thinking about the street with restaurants, all kinds of barbecue, smoke going up, floating in the air, will all be pushed down to the ground with the rain.”

The difference in the two discourses regarding the environment can be explained by their distinctive relationship with tourism. For the Company, tourism is a means by which it can generate revenue and make a profit. Their contract lasts for 50 years, so the primary goal is to make as much profit as possible during that time. Environmental degradation may reduce the sustainability of tourism in Chongdu Valley, but its effects may only become salient 50 years later. However, for local residents, tourism is their major livelihood, and the community is the place where their ancestors, they, and future generations live. Environmental issues are intricately associated with everyday life and thus cannot be jeopardized for economic development.
In summary, the managerial and lay discourses tended to agree upon the macro-level development outcomes, but showed incongruence at the micro level. Both discourses aligned with the groups’ self interests as well as their values and attitudes towards tourism. Because managerial discourses came from written text and lay discourses were attained through conversations with local residents, it is reasonable to believe that the managerial discourses will have a longer and wider influence than the latter. For the long run, how the story of Chongdu Valley development will be told depends on whether the lay discourses can be documented in stored media such as text, audio, or video, and the degree to which the media are accessible to the public.

**Institutions and regulations**

As mentioned earlier, the 2004 contract gave the Company 50-years to manage and operate the Resort. Yet, the land is still collectively owned by the community despite the transfer of use rights. As a result, the relationship between the community and the Company can be considered as that of a landlord-tenant. However, with the support of higher-level governments, the Company has become the primary decision maker over tourism development issues. Neither the community nor the village-level government has the power to challenge or disobey the Company’s decisions and actions. They also have no avenues for public participation and are excluded from the entire decision making process. This situation has directly impacted the businesses, properties, and living environment of local residents.

On the surface, the Company seemingly has been able to manage the Resort quite well over the past 11 years because of the continuous increase in tourist arrivals and improvements in the community infrastructure, the environment, and the living standards of local residents. In
addition, there were few challenges from the community despite a series of big projects executed by the Company. For example, the Company has acquired land for the construction of a large hotel, a manmade lake, several parking lots, entertainment plaza, and streets with restaurants and souvenir shops. Affected residents were compensated satisfactorily with a new house or a new house site plus a certain amount of money so they did not feel a direct loss from the land acquisition. Thus, despite the imbalance of power relations, it appears that the Company and the community have coexisted peacefully in the past 11 years.

However, discourse analysis revealed that beneath the surface the two groups hold conflicting values towards a variety of issues that may challenge their future relationship. At the beginning of their relationship, many interviewees did not want to rent the Resort to the Company. Although they did not have any evidence, many believed that the township and village-level government officers gained personal benefits from the deal. Examples of lay discourses included: “There were a lot of problems in the process. They (the Company) only needed to feed the officers and leaders, what else can we ordinary people say?” and “They (the Company) were not treating us well. They are a private company, and they think of their own interests.”

Value conflict was especially prominent with respect to farmhouse management. According to residents, the farmhouse is their private property and the Company has no right to interfere with it. But the Company has insisted that farmhouse businesses are a critical component of Chongdu Valley’s tourism industry; and, as a result, the owners need to obey a series of regulations imposed by the Company. For example, the Company put forth detailed regulations on the way farmhouses should be constructed, such as the maximum number of floors and options for external and internal appearance. The Company also unified (a) the room
price of farmhouses with two standards, a higher one and a lower one, as well as (b) meal options and prices. The Company believes that these regulations have helped to regulate the farmhouse market and to enhance the image of Chongdu Valley. In a document distributed by the Company, the goal of the farmhouse regulations was to create “unified construction, unified standards, unified prices, and unified service.”

Another divergence resides in the way the Company has exercised its power on a daily basis. To implement regulations, the Company hired a number of staff to monitor the way local residents run their businesses. According to residents, when staff notices violations they try to deal with them on site, but are often quite rude. As one resident said, “those staffs throw away my stuff, flip things around, and never speak to us kindly.” But in the rhetoric of the staff, they were not at fault. A staff member commented on the tension between local residents and his colleagues: “They (local residents) see us as a nail in the eye, and we see them as a thorn in the flesh. We tell them what they should do but they never listen to us.”

The Company has also used different standards with residents when it comes to regulation implementation. The Company was accused of giving special treatment to elite members of the community and outside investors. For example, ordinary residents were allowed to build up to three floors in their farmhouse, but quite a few outside investors were able to build four floors in their farmhouse. Further, local residents were prohibited from destroying even a single bamboo plant, but outside investors were allowed to build their farmhouse in the middle of the bamboo forest causing damage to a large number of bamboo plants. The Company itself the damaged bamboo forest to build the street on which restaurants are located. According to one resident, “our income is increasing on average, but inequality is huge, and distribution is unfair.”
The governments and the Company work together to abuse power and appropriate public resources."

Overall, in the area of institutional arrangements and regulations, disputes and friction between the two discourses are profound, far more serious than with destination image and in development outcomes. Although the current, dominant position of the Company is still stable given the support of higher-level governments, discourses from local residents indicated that discontent is present and prevalent. The verbal complaints of local residents might finally lead to confrontation and rebellion if the two groups’ values and actions continue to diverge from each other.

Discussion and conclusions

Using discourse analysis, the power relations between a private company and residents of the local community in Chongdu Valley, China were explored. The analysis revealed that, in spite of congruence on destination image and the overall development outcomes, the two groups hold conflicting values, theories, and attitudes, and thus divergent discourses towards a range of community and tourism development issues. Since 2004, the Company has occupied an influential and dominant position when it comes to decision making, practices, and implementation of development strategies. On the surface, residents have cooperated and followed the rules established by the Company, but their discourses illustrated that there was growing discontent among local residents towards the Company. Economically, the Company has performed well, but environmental degradation, growing inequality, and the feeling of powerlessness amongst local residents may eventually lead to a fragmented community and failure of the tourism industry.
Although the current discontent of the community is still represented in the form of language, it has the potential to translate to social practices and actions. According to the theory of discourse, language can affect social facts and have the power to cause social change. As Fairclough (2003, p. 8) noted, “Texts have causal effects upon, and contribute to change in, people (beliefs, attitudes, etc), actions, social relations, and the material world.” If the transfer from language to social facts is underway in Chongdu Valley, the interested groups (i.e., the Company, the community, and the various levels of government) must take action to prevent head-on confrontation between the Company and the community. Following are a few practical suggestions that have been drawn from the results of the study.

First, a clear, bi-partisan property rights agreement needs to be created, demarcating the rights and obligations of the Company and the community. All impacted groups should be involved in creating the agreement including the governments. Currently, the Resort’s ownership and use rights are held separately by the community and the Company. So, while local residents consider their relationship with the Company to be like that of a “landlord-tenant,” the Company considers their relationship to be more like that of a “manager-employee.” While local residents expected the Company to focus on bringing more tourists to the Resort, rather than interfering with their private businesses, the Company insisted that business owners involved in the tourism industry obey their regulations. Therefore, a property rights agreement needs to be established to clarify the existing ambiguity regarding the rights of the Company and the local residents.

Second, the village-level government should act as a mediator between the Company and local residents to balance the power relations between them, rather than take advantage of the imbalance by cooperating with the Company. Right now, the image of the village-level government is very negative among local residents, and village officers are accused of conspiring
with the Company to damage the interests of the community. The village-level government should also act as a representative of the community to negotiate with the Company when disputes occur. Meanwhile, the township government should be responsible for supervising and urging the village-level government to put the community’s interests first.

Last, but not least, opportunities for community participation should be created in a timely manner in order to integrate local residents in the planning, development, and management of Chongdu Valley. Although China’s political environment does not provide an ideal setting for public participation (Li, 2004), it has proven to be successful at the community level in various places in China (Palmer, Perkins, & Xu, 2011; Su & Wall, 2014; Wang, Chen, Chen, Yang, & Li, 2010). For example, the Company in Chongdu Valley holds bi-weekly meetings with local residents to deliver important information and decisions; however, the communication is kept unidirectional (i.e., from the Company to the community). If the meeting could be turned into a discussion format where critical issues regarding community development are put on the table and local residents are allowed to express their opinions, it would be a great start to community integration and empowerment. Once effective dialogue between the Company and the community is established, environmental problems and social inequality can be talked through and addressed through collective efforts.

In terms of discourse analysis, the results indicated that it is a valuable tool for understanding community politics, especially in social contexts where explicit political actions are lacking. While traditional approaches, such as stakeholder, institutional, and collaboration analysis (Caffyn & Jobbins, 2003; Jamal & Getz 1995; Reed & Gill 1997), still focused on the navigation and negotiation of key political actors in decision making and implementations,
discourse analysis can identify more intricate power dynamics that are beneath the surface of political practices and actions (Foucault, 1972; Hastings, 1999).

While the contributions of this study have merit, the study does have two limitations. First, it only covers lay and managerial discourses, leaving out official discourses of the township and village-level governments from analysis. This is limiting because both levels of government have played crucial roles in the tourism development of Chongdu Valley. The second drawback is that the sources from which the two discourses were drawn used inconsistent formats. While the lay discourses were drawn primarily from interviews and informal talks, the managerial discourses drew primarily from the text documents. According to Fairclough (2003), discourse is constructed by the particular format of languages and texts, so the study’s results should be viewed in light of these inconsistent formats.

In conclusion, discourse analysis is a valuable analytical tool for understanding political issues at the community level, and more research should be conducted in tourism studies with the help of this technique. While the present study attempted to examine the power relations between two groups in Chongdu Valley, future research should extend to include the full range of participants to draw a holistic picture of power structure and practices. Another direction is to focus on a specific tourism development event rather than the whole process. Doing this will allow for a more detailed comparison between different discourses on a particular issue, leading to a better understanding of the nuanced relations between different interest groups.
References


Chapter 5

Conclusion

In this chapter I begin by summarizing the main findings of my study. I then link my results to the literature and discuss the various contributions I’ve made to existing knowledge regarding identity, everyday life, and community politics in a rural tourism setting. This is followed by a review of the managerial and political implications of my study to tourism development in rural areas of China. I end this chapter with a discussion about the limitations of my study.

Summary of key findings

My study is built upon a hypothesis that rural identities of residents change along with rural tourism development. The specific purpose of my study was to uncover rural identity and how it has been (re)constructed in the changing context of tourism development. Following are brief summaries of the main findings.

Changes in rural identity

My study results provide support for the hypothesis that rural identities experience change over the course of tourism development. Three major types of change were identified based on interviews with local residents: recognition of the good associated with living a rural life, a change from rural-urban inequality to rural-urban difference, and a rise in community identity. These changes can be attributed to the shift in national government policies towards rural populations and the local economic and environmental changes brought by tourism.
development. Daily interaction between rural residents and urban tourists also helped to reconstruct rural identities as it either reinforced or diminished rural-urban difference.

**Changes in everyday life and livelihood**

I also explored changes in the everyday life of residents through the lens of rural performance (Edensor, 2006). I documented in detail how everyday life and the practices of local residents have changed along with their livelihood shift from working on farmland to running a happy rural house (HRH). Two stages were involved in the changes. First, in the introductory stage, residents overcame attitudinal, financial, and cultural barriers to starting a HRH business. Second, as they accumulated experiences they acquired a new set of skills related to running a HRH, including external networking, marketing, cooking, room service, house and room design, and managing debt. Their mentalities and non-work related activities with respect to leisure, consumption, and education were also found to experience changes. Overall, their life has shifted from a pristine, pure, and simple one, to a modern, pressed, and complicated one.

**Power relations of the community**

My third article took a slightly different approach by exploring the power relations of Chongdu Valley since the introduction of tourism development. Employing critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003), I found that the harmony and peace displayed by local residents and the private company in charge of the Chongdu Valley area to be misleading; both groups have different values and opinions towards a variety of community and tourism development issues. The private company, which occupies an influential and dominant position when it comes to decision making and strategy implementations, is dealing with the issues in its own way, but it
may not take long for residents to challenge the authority of the private company. Further, without community participation, Chongdu Valley faces environmental degradation and growing problems with inequality, both of which need to be addressed in a timely manner through institutional rearrangements.

**Theoretical contributions**

The theoretical contributions of my study are multifold. First, my study in rural China focused on a less conventional scenario to examine identity shift in a tourism setting. According to various researchers, identity formation usually comes from cultural/ethnic difference (Oakes, 1993; Stronza, 2008). Tourism often serves as the “cultural broker” when it comes to identity changes. For example, drawing on a case study in Peru, Stronza (2008) discovered that tourism provides a platform through which local ethnic minorities played an active role in increasing their pride, enhancing their indigenous culture, and heightening their native identity in response to the needs and expectations of tourists. However, rural identity in China is more than an outcome of cultural differences. It is impacted by national policy bias and long-term social and economic discrimination. Hence, the results of my study indicated that, although tourism still serves as the cultural broker through resident-tourist interactions, its major contribution to identity change is through improving the living standards of local residents, which leads to their increased sense of pride, confidence, and community identification.

My second theoretical contribution is related to rural performance. In the past, researchers have examined rural performance as a set of static practices. For example, researchers have documented in detail how tourists engage in adventure tourism as a bodily experience (Besio et al., 2008; Macpherson, 2009; Waitt & Cook, 2007; Waitt & Lane, 2007).
However, Edensor (2006) challenged their thinking by suggesting that rural performance evolves continuously, I built off of Edensor’s proposal by asking residents to review the previous 15 years of their life during which daily practices changed from working on farmland to running a HRH business. In so doing I was able to document locals’ increasing skill proficiency related to running a HRH.

My findings related to rural performance also highlighted that detailed documentation of everyday practices at the individual level can help explain a variety of phenomena that occur at the community level. Previous studies have shown no attempt in exploring such exploratory relations between meso and micro level phenomena. My study has provided evidences of how rural performance related to running a HRH helped to explain retention of the younger generation, decreasing community solidarity, and rising inequality in Chongdu Valley.

Lastly, my third article contributed to the existing literature by using a unique research approach to examine power relations at the community level—critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). I used this approach to uncover the power structures in Chongdu Valley that are underlying explicit political actions and practices. This method has seldom been used to study community tourism despite the inherent relations between discourse and power (Foucault, 1972, 1990). Using discourse analysis I uncovered discontent and disagreement lying beneath what appeared to be consensus and cooperation between stakeholders. Based on the findings, a series of suggestions were drawn to prevent conflicts in values and attitudes from transferring to confrontations in actions. I feel strongly that using discourse analysis in community-based tourism studies can help detect potential problems in community issues, and thus prevent serious plights and drawbacks in community sustainability. Overall, my study showcased that discourse analysis is a valuable tool for understanding power relations at the community level.
Managerial and political implications

My results also rendered a few managerial and political implications for practitioners who work with community tourism and tourism development in rural areas. First, rural tourism has been shown to be a very effective tool in alleviating poverty in a rural area of China. Unlike developed countries where rural tourism has mainly been used as a strategy to counter the effects of a decline in agriculture or the loss of traditional extractive industries (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Cawley & Gillmor, 2008), China provide a developing-country scenario where rural tourism serves as an avenue for economic development and prosperity in extremely poor regions. Particularly in areas with an extraordinary natural landscape and/or cultural heritage, rural tourism should be considered a competitive option for economic development.

While researchers have identified limitations to rural tourism as an economic strategy (Pina & Delfa, 2005; Reichel, Lowengart, & Milman, 2000), the tourism development process that took place in Chongdu Valley demonstrated that even with an isolated location, limited initial capital investment, and limited business experience amongst local residents, rural tourism development can be successful. For Chongdu Valley, geographical isolation was promoted positively as a rural destination with tradition, mystery, and rurality; limited financial resources were enhanced through the free labor of local residents; and human capital was gradually accumulated via self-education and training. Further, the Valley’s developmental path was closely associated with growth in the country’s domestic tourism market and increased interest of urban residents in the countryside. In developing countries where the domestic tourism market is still in its early stages, but is expected to grow, rural areas should seek the opportunity to develop rural tourism regardless of potential challenges.
Despite these positive outcomes of rural tourism development, efforts to alleviate poverty in rural areas should not ignore the potential cultural impacts of tourism development. In this study, economic prosperity contributed to an overall positive change in rural identity in Chongdu Valley (as shown in chapter 2). However, rural tourism development also imposed a more modern and stressful way of living on local residents; they had to get used to the modern market economy, compete with their neighbors, and obtain loans, which put them at financial risk (as shown in chapter 3). These changes in their lifestyles are irreversible, but not completely inevitable. One strategy for practitioners is to try to encourage a slow pace of tourism growth, so that local residents have enough time to adjust to a new way of living. Slowing down tourism development may reduce the degree of culture shock and economic stress. In addition, the local tourism economy should be restrained to a reasonable size so local residents can maintain a sustainable livelihood with less demand for growth and less pressure to compete with their neighbors. After all, the wellbeing of local residents is not solely linked to their economic status; it is also tied to their mental health and life satisfaction (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013).

The environmental impact of tourism development was not a major focus of my study, but it was uncovered when I addressed managerial and lay discourses about tourism development in Chongdu Valley. In the Valley environmental problems are not salient and are disguised by achievements in economic prosperity. But if environmental problems continue to grow, they may destroy all that has been accomplished economically. For local residents, economic development tends to be the priority over other issues when they are living a subsistence life and longing for higher incomes. But as their living standard increases, environmental issues will gain more significance. As a result, tourism planners and policymakers should aim to find a balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability from the very beginning.
Political and institutional arrangements are also critical for tourism development in rural areas. I found that economic prosperity is not necessarily associated with a set of clear and sound political arrangements; on the contrary, it helps hide political problems and delay the process of political reform. Local residents may choose to sacrifice their political rights for the sake of economic benefits when they are enduring hardship, but soon after, their need to participate in planning and decision making, and to take charge of their own future, will increase. Thus, practitioners should encourage and maintain public participation at the inception of the introductory stage of tourism development.

Overall, for extremely poor areas in developing countries, locals’ need for economic prosperity tends to surpass their need for cultural integrity, environmental sustainability, and political rights, but as soon as their living standards reach a certain level, their longing for a healthy and balanced life, for a high quality environment, and for the right to participate in the decision making process, will become their primary concerns. Practitioners should seek to plan and implement a balanced tourism development strategy to take into account the different needs of local residents; in particular, they should avoid prioritizing economic growth over all other issues.

Limitations of my research

Despite its various contributions, the study also has a few limitations that may influence the credibility of the results. First, the results of my study may have been more valid had I stayed in Chongdu Valley for a longer period of time. Although summer is the best season for data collection because it allowed me to engage with local residents during tourism’s peak season to observe their daily routines and interaction with tourists, it also limited by ability to build close
relationships with them because they were busy with their businesses. During my fieldwork, my offers to interview them were at times rejected because they were busy preparing meals or cleaning rooms. Had I come during the off season when they had more free time, I might have had more opportunities to talk to them. Also, collecting data during the summer prevented me from directly observing how residents spend their life during the off season. If I could have stayed in Chongdu Valley during the off season, I could have observed and learned about how their daily activities vary across different seasons.

Second, while I considered myself to be a “visitor” to Chongdu Valley who was exploring a new “world,” I was not a complete stranger to Chongdu Valley. I had visited Chongdu Valley in 2001 and again in 2013. During the 2013 visit I built a few local connections, which helped me get used to the new environment quickly. I also conducted 40 unstructured interviews with local residents during the same visit, which helped me to pin down my research topic and led me back to Chongdu Valley for more thorough fieldwork. On the flip side, the visit left me with a lot of memories about Chongdu Valley, which may have (a) prevented me from asking meaningful and deep questions and (b) contributed to my reaching a point of saturation quickly because I already knew a lot about the Valley. Even though I was not an “insider” strictly speaking (Bernard, 2012), my familiarity with Chongdu Valley may have still hindered me from paying enough attention to detail and reduced my level of curiosity and/or exploration.

Third, due to the large amount of data I collected, including interview transcriptions, printed materials, and field notes, I was not able to translate everything into English. Rather, I coded and analyzed the data directly into Chinese and translated only the quotations I included in my articles. It saved me a lot of time but prevented other English-speaking researchers to look at
the complete dataset. Without other researchers’ input in data analysis, my study results may fall short of trustworthiness and validity (Golafshani, 2003).
References


Appendix: Interview questions for local residents

These interview questions were prepared for local residents of Chongdu Valley. However, depending on the characteristics of participants, such as livelihood, gender, age, and family situation, adjustments were made for each participant.

Background information

- How old are you?
- What do you do for a living?
- What is your highest level of education?
- How many people are in your family? What do they do now?
- How much does your family earn per year? What is the percentage gained from the tourism sector, if any?
- What major expenditures has your family made in the past five years?

Family history

- Please recall the time when tourism development began in Chongdu Valley. What did you do for a living then? What was your life like then? What was the village like then?
- Are you currently working/involved in the tourism industry? If yes, when and why did you become involved in the tourism industry? What kinds of jobs have you had since then? If no, why not?
- Do you feel your life has changed since you began working in the tourism sector (or since tourism started being developed in Chongdu Valley if their answer for the above question is no)? If yes, can you recall the changes in chronological order?
  - Probing: income, values, social network, kinship ties, lifestyle, etc.

Community issues and changes

- Do you feel the village has changed along with tourism development? If yes, can you recall the changes in chronological order?
  - Probing: natural environment, built environment, interpersonal relationships, governance, etc.
- What did you think of tourism at the beginning of tourism development? Can you remember what others in the village thought about tourism?
- What do you think of tourism now?
- What things do you think represent Chongdu Valley?
- What do you know about the company’s descriptions of Chongdu Valley? Do you agree with them? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- What do you think of your relation with the Company?
Rural identities

- Do you think of yourself as a rural resident? If yes, how do you feel to be a rural resident? If not, why?
- Do you feel being a rural resident (or living in rural areas) has changed over time? If yes, how has being a rural resident changed?
- What do you think living a rural life versus living an urban life was like before tourism development? What do you think of both now?
- Do you and/or your family members plan to move to a city in the future? If yes, where do you want to move and why? If no, why not?
- What do you think makes urban dwellers come to visit Chongdu Valley?
- Do you think Chongdu Valley is different from other villages in Tantou town? If yes, what are the differences?
- What do you think of tourism as a livelihood strategy for your family right now and in the future?
- What do you think of tourism as the major industry for Chongdu Valley right now and in the future?
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