Social conflict in communities impacted by tourism

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HIGHLIGHTS

► It is based upon 12 months fieldwork in an ethnic community of Xinjiang in China.
► It applies Coser’s theories of social conflict to the impacts of tourism.
► Examples of social tension are provided.
► A tension-directed tourism destination development model is suggested.
► Emic approach is needed in both tourism research and destination management policies.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 29 May 2012
Accepted 12 June 2012

Keywords:
Social conflict
Tourism development
Indigenous tourism
China
Coser

ABSTRACT

This paper is based upon 12 months of ethnographic study while living among the Tuva and Kazakh people in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China. Based on observation, interviews, participation and secondary documents the paper uses Coser’s theory of Social Conflict to suggest a four part model of how tourism engenders different forms of social conflict and fluctuating alliances between stakeholders in an environment where tourism has been introduced by agents external to the indigenous community. The actors are ethnic groupings and members of those groups, governmental officials at local, regional and national level, intermediaries of the tourism industry and private sector entrepreneurs drawn from the majority and minority ethnic groups. Tensions are identified as being based on beliefs, resources and power, and a sequential pattern of primacy is identified consistent with stages of the tourist area life cycle.

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1. Introduction

This paper is derived from an ethnographic study undertaken by the first author who lived for 12 consecutive months among the Tuva and Kazakh communities of the Kanas Scenic Area of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China, and became an ‘adopted daughter’ of a Tuva family. She participated in daily life, attended various festivals, including those held away from public areas and which were accessible only by horseback, and spoke the local languages. Data were derived from observation, informal conversations, daily note taking, informal and more formal interviews among residents, outside entrepreneurs, visitors and government officials (both local and provincial). Additional reports, papers and texts were also collected. She is of the same ethnicity as the majority of tourists and government officials, and many of the external entrepreneurs who come during the summer season, but unlike them lived through the harshness of the winter when the villages are cut off from the outside world, even to the point of losing power supplies. She also speaks Tuva, and Kazakh in addition to Mandarin and English. To illustrate various aspects of local life Fig. 1 shows a winter scene from the 3rd Tuva Festival and other photographs (Figs. 6 and 7) showing Tuva life are appended to the paper.

This paper is structured around a discussion of concepts of social structure, identifying the key texts that informed an analysis of the data with respect to the role of social tensions within and between the community and outside groups. It subsequently describes some of the events that were observed and at times participated in that informed the analysis. A synthesis is finally generated in which the two prior parts of the paper come together to formulate new propositions and means of assessing the nature of tourism’s impacts upon marginalized peoples, whose very marginality forms...
...gaze and tourism development. The focus of their life and culture becoming the subject of a tourist gaze and tourism development.

The impacts of tourism upon minority peoples and their communities have attracted many studies (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Ryan & Aicken, 2005), but while reference has been made to the subsequent social and political tensions (Ryan, Chang, & Huan, 2007), relatively few such studies have had recourse to structured sociological theory. The purpose of this study is to analyze tensions found in the Kanas Scenic area of Northwest China by reference to Coser’s (1956) social conflict theory. Ryan, Zhang, and Zeng (2011) have argued that many studies of tourism impacts are heavily contextualized within the specific characteristics of the case areas, and lack a comparison with other case areas and related studies. Indeed, although making comparisons between different rural areas in China, they go so far as to argue that a meta-narrative is not possible. This paper seeks to address this claim by reference to a factor implicit in their study and others, namely that impacts generate tensions, and while the tensions may involve different actors and stakeholders, there does exist a meta-narrative that permits generalization through the characteristics of social tension. Consequently in this article a tension-directed tourism development system is proposed that provides a tool for comparing and contrasting tourism impacts in different areas. It is further suggested that it is complementary to the Butler (1980, 2006) tourism area life cycle.

The paper therefore addresses a number of gaps in studies about tourism and social conflict. First, there exists a relative lack of empirical evidence as to the functions of social conflict and its relationship with tourism development, especially with reference to locations inhabited by minority groups. Second, when such a concern does exist, it is directed primarily towards the reduction of conflict. However, social tensions and political conflict can be a necessary and positive part of all social relationships, and a requisite for social change (Coser, 1956). Third, conflict is often accompanied by cooperation, unity and the formation of alliances, but in tourism studies the relation between conflict and the emergence of cooperation/unity/alliance has rarely been discussed. Fourth, a theoretical base for social conflict is needed to support the empirical studies regarding tourism development and conflict. Fifth, although this last aspect is not the primary focus of this paper, it is suggested that this form of analysis is especially important in the context of common conflicts in China that arise over compensation for land seized for economic development such as that evidenced in Wukan Village, Guangdong Province in November and December 2011.

2. Social conflict theory

Conceptualization is important for a study. A good study needs to own not only the primary analysis of the data collected, but also the critical discussion of appropriate theories. Social conflict as a subject has a long history in sociological theory, and obviously forms a central theme in not only general sociological theory but also within Chinese sociological theory due to the Marxian–Maoist tradition. Thus, for example, Oberschall (1978, p. 291) provided an early review of social conflict theory, defining social conflict as “…result(ing) from purposeful interaction among two or more parties in a competitive setting. It refers to overt behaviour rather than to potential for action and to subjective states” and he continues to review the work of various theorists including Paij, Dahrendorf and Coser.

From a Western perspective, a study of Leninist–Maoist conflict approaches was provided by Meissner (1971) who critiqued Maoist concepts of social conflict within the wider Marxian–Leninist paradigms by noting “The whole question of the relationship between Leninism and Maoism is filled with ambiguities and the historic tie between the two has become exceedingly tenuous” (p. 2). Contemporary Chinese writing is now imbued by reference to older Confucian traditions as the Chinese Communist Party seeks ‘social harmony’ and writers such as Hwang (1998) refer to symbolic interaction and social exchange as the means of solving disputes between in- and out-groups, while, in the hospitality literature, Gu, Ryan, Bin, and Wei (2013) argue that Guanxi provides a social glue for settling disputes in the absence of a western tradition of social and commercial contractual law as China exists as a transitional state.

For its part this study rejects these multiple approaches and solely applies the classical propositions of Coser’s (1956) Functions of Social Conflict that are derived from the classical work of Georg Simmel (1955), Conflict. Three reasons exist for this approach. The first is an entirely pragmatic one: “It seemed more convenient, for purposes of exposition, to follow an author with a consistent general orientation rather than to shift between writers whose orientations may be divergent” (Coser, 1956, p. 30). Second, the theories noted above tend to perceive social conflict from either a perspective whereby it should be mitigated (the social harmony approach) or radicalized to purposely generate change. Simmel and Coser’s perspective of social tensions and conflicts as a process inherent in social relationships and one conducive to non-violent transformative change seemed more in keeping with what was observed during the fieldwork that informed this paper. In short, a theoretical structure providing a means of analysis and explanation for the conflicts arising in a community experiencing a developmental process better met the purpose of this study: namely the social transformation and cultural change of a society.

As just noted, studies about social conflict theory have a long history and are deeply rooted in human thought: “Conflict provides many sociologists the central explanatory category for the analysis of social change and of ‘progress’” (Coser, 1956, p. 16). The social process is defined as “incessant reaction of persons prompted by interests that in part conflict with the interests of their fellows, and in part comport with the interests of others” (Small, 1905, p. 205). Over the years, the study of social conflict has received attention from economists, historians, anthropologists, novelists, philosophers, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, and theologians.

Many of the contributions to social conflict theory come from philosophy and sociology, and some are derived from other disciplines, such as the biological sciences. The sociology of conflict is partially concerned with how social order is challenged and maintained (Easterbrook et al., 1993). Georg Simmel, Talcott Parsons, and Lewis A. Coser, among other classical sociologists, have made a significant contribution to the study of social conflict.
theory. Particular theories or hypotheses about conflict in general have been applied to various types of conflict. It is generally agreed that social conflict has both functional and dysfunctional consequences. If a social system is to benefit from conflict, the negative effects of conflict must be reduced and positive effects must be enhanced.

Lewis A. Coser's (1956) *The Functions of Social Conflict* was one work that critiqued the then dominant sociological paradigm — structural functionalism, and contributed to its subsequently diminishing influence in the discipline. Coser (1956) depicts conflict as "a form of socialization" (p. 31) and analyzes conflict in terms of interactive processes. Some certain degree of conflict is an essential element in group formation, resulting in both association and dissociation which serve a social function. Coser (1956) reveals functionalism's conservative biases and its inability to capture the conflict, competition, and tension that characterize group life, but he does not impetuously dismiss this paradigm's insights. Based on Durkheimian premises, Coser suggests that conflict is a persistent phenomenon and serves some latent social functions. However, by departing from functionalism's assumptions of stability and harmony, Coser also facilitates the shift towards the conflict paradigm by suggesting that conflict is ubiquitous and an inherent part of social relations. In order to devise a theory of social conflict, Coser re-formulated and analyzed sixteen of Simmel's (1955) dimensions regarding conflict, which may be classified as follows:

- Conflict and group boundaries
- Hostility and tensions in conflict relationships
- In-group conflict and group structure
- Conflict with out-group and group structure
- Conflict — The unifier
- Conflict calls for allies

These hypotheses apply to a wide range of conflicts from racial tensions to religious differences. They have valuable explanatory power for analysts of contemporary social relations, including the arena of tourism impacts on minority peoples. For example, Coser states that social conflict often acts as a 'safety valve' releasing tension while preserving social relations, and that conflict with an out-group enhances identity and consciousness for the in-group. Coser's (1956) work meets the purpose of studies of tourism impacts: to discuss the social transformation and cultural change of a society. To test these propositions' validity in contemporary society, the first author spent 12 months among the Tuva and Kazakh people of the Kanas Scenic Area in Xinjiang to generate data by which to assess the extent that Coser's (1956) 16 suppositions can apply to tourism impact studies. In undertaking the study, Coser's (1956) 16 propositions are extended by making comparisons between Western and Chinese societies, by applying those concepts to an ethnic community, and by looking at the administrative realities of the Kanas Scenic Area.

3. Literature review

3.1. Tourism impacts on ethnic communities

The impacts of tourism on ethnic peoples have attracted attention among scholars in sociology (e.g. Cohen, 1996), anthropology (e.g. Chambers, 2000; Greenwood, 1977, 1989; Nash, 1977, 1989; Smith, 1977a, 1977b, 1996; Swain, 1977) and tourism (e.g. Fisher, 2000; McIntosh, 2004; McIntosh & Johnson, 2005; Ryan & Aicken, 2005; Ryan et al., 2007; Sofield, 1996; Tucker, 2003). Most of the reviewed studies focus on a specific group at a specific location, such as the hunter-gatherers in Thailand (Cohen, 1996) or Maori in New Zealand (Carr, 2007; McIntosh & Johnson, 2005; McIntosh & Ryan, 2007).

The majority of these early studies follow the ‘cautionary platform’ established by Jafari (1989). Researchers were largely concerned about the negative impacts of tourism, such as those of social conflict, crime, commercialization and degradation of indigenous culture, the decrease of values and sacrilege of religion, belief and symbols (e.g. Greenwood, 1977; Pi-Sunyer, 1977). Kent (1975) defines tourism in Hawaii as a ‘new kind of sugar’, representing a parody on their premier agricultural export. On the other hand, some studies reflect the characteristics of the Advocacy platform. McKeen's (1977) study about Bali in Indonesia and Deitch's (1977) study about Indians in southwestern United States, among others, emphasize tourism's positive impacts, such as the preservation and production of traditional arts and crafts, and enhancement of pride in heritage and ethnic identity. After, the research flows into the knowledge-based platform. The re-study of some communities and re-thinking about some earlier research sought to make the research more objective and holistic in the broader context that generated it, such as the studies of Smith (1989) and Greenwood (1989, 2004). Over time the studies have become both more critical as researchers have sought to address past wrongs and give voice to minorities (Swain, 1977; Swanson & De Vereaux, 2012), and more polyvalent as the complexities and differing value systems between stakeholders are highlighted (Greenwood, 2004).

The determinants of tourism impacts are complex. According to Prasad (1987), the magnitude of the impact is dependent upon a number of factors such as the nature of the society, its flexibility or resilience to change, the size of the host population relative to the number of visitors, the degree of dependence of the society upon tourism, and the economic state of the society. Ryan (2003, pp. 152–158) suggests several variables that should be considered in discussing tourism economic impacts: tourism development of the destination area, the level of economic development of the destination area, the nature of the tourist facilities and their attractiveness, the degree of foreign or out-of-region ownership of hotels and tourism infrastructure, the employment of non-indigenous labour, the infrastructure provided by government, tourist types, and their association with other parts of economy.

The impacts of tourism on ethnic peoples have been well researched but there is a lack of a holistic view and systematic research for better understanding tourism's impacts. More studies considering the multiple factors including tourists, government, tourism enterprises, local people, and tourism development of the destinations are needed.

3.2. Social conflict and destination development

As discussed above, the study of social conflict has received attention from a variety of disciplines. In contrast, the social conflict issues in tourism destinations have not been systematically investigated by tourism scholars, or if analyzing issues of power, they have chosen not to use the concepts of conflict resolution, being drawn more to the concepts of network theory (Dredge, 2006, 2010). However, in many tourism-directed communities, tourism development largely influences social conflict; tourism brings more groups and subgroups, varies and complicates conflict nature and forms, and therein influences social structure and cultural change in the communities.

Social conflict was mentioned in the early tourism studies that characterized the ‘cautionary platform’ (Jafari, 1989). Conflict of interest, values and goals happens between stakeholders. Examples are the conflict between the indigenous owners of the land and the foreign investor over tourism development (Sofield, 1996), the conflict between ethnic community and outsider entrepreneurs over economic benefits from tourism (Crystal, 1989; Goering, 1990),
and the conflict between tourists and locals towards limited resources (Urbanowicz, 1977).

Cultural conflict, as one of the themes of tourism impact studies, has been addressed by researchers, such as the studies in the book Tourism and Cultural Conflicts (Robinson & Boniface, 1999). According to Robinson (1999, p. 7), cultural conflicts occur on a regular basis at different levels and between different interest groups in tourism. Robinson (1999) provides four dimensions in which cultural conflict happens: tourism industry—host conflicts, tourist—host conflicts, tourism—tourist conflicts, and host—host conflict. The determinants which influence the conflict between tourism industry and host community are: (1) the nature and the extent of the commodification of the host culture; (2) the utilization of natural resources and its cultural resources; and (3) the degree of economic dependency of the host community on tourism.

Economic benefit has been a major subject of conflict. It has been commonly believed that tourism brings economic benefit to tourism destinations; however, the economic benefits may not be distributed evenly across different groups. In Toops’s (1992) discussion about the relationship between Han tourist guides and ethnic groups in Xinjiang, China, the direct tourism income accrued disproportionately to Hanas middlemen. Current research in China points to many instances where structural capital is developed as a consequence of compulsory purchases of land by governmental bodies who on-sell to private corporations that effectively deny the original farmers access to land, yet who have inadequate compensation (Feng, 2008; Li, Wang, & Ryan, 2012; Shepherd, 2011). Who should be the main beneficiaries from tourism development is always the subject of conflict and tensions in developing countries. Conflict and tensions over economic benefits derived from tourism commonly happen between ethnic community and outsider entrepreneurs (Crystal, 1989; Feng, 2008; Goering, 1990), between local people and local tourism administration (Feng, 2008), and between other different groups and subgroups. From a political and social perspective some evidence suggests that conflict between a predominant and minority ethnic group may reduce the citizenship rights of particular groups and further reduce the multicultural character of a particular society (Medrano, 1996). On the other hand, community bonds have been enhanced because local groups become united against outside enterprises and against the local government, such as in Fenghuang County of China (Feng, 2008).

4. The study

As noted in the opening paragraph, the data were derived from a 12 month residency among the Kanas Tuva and Kazakh settlements, Xinjiang, China. Before tourism development, the main stakeholders in the Kanas Scenic Area were only two groups, governments and local people. Tourism introduced the other two groups, tourism entrepreneurs and tourists. The former social structure was replaced by a new structure designed to meet the economic and social development of the local society as perceived by China’s Central Government. The four groups together contribute to the social system of the community in the tourism season. The common interests and positions in the society of each group and the reciprocal antagonisms conserve social divisions and systems of stratification. Governments, entrepreneurs, tourists, and local ethnic people each play their own roles in the system with their own goals and interests.

Tourism in the Kanas is highly seasonal, but growing in numbers as the provincial and local governments promote the area for its scenic values and cultural differences, while additionally it is away from the Uyghur areas of the south. Tourism is centred upon three small villages, each of which has its own characteristics and a differing duration of involvement in the industry. The main areas of accommodation are located some distance away from the villages, primarily to reduce potential negative social demonstration effects (Sofield, pers. comm.). The tourist activity is primarily based upon day trip activity (albeit not wholly as some will stay in the village under some legal pretense) and a main feature is the Tuva home stay visit. These visits primarily comprise of a visit to a minority style home, a welcome in a traditional manner, a performance of local music, especially on the suer, singing, dance (that will often involve the visitors) and some snack based on local traditional foodstuffs. In addition tourists may hire horses and go on accompanied horse rides across the grasslands, and can occasionally observe local festivities.

The culture that is featured in the brochures and the discourse of the tour guides is that of the Tuva people, but in practice many of the Tuva retain a traditional summer nomadic life-style to graze their cattle. This is beginning to change, due not only to tourism, but also to other factors such as the need for children to attend schools and for there to be representation in consultations with government officials. Nonetheless traditional practices remain strong. The outcome of this is that Tuva people lease their homes to mainly Kazakh entrepreneurs (but also some Han) who replicate the culture of the Tuva and generally will act as if Tuva hosts. Tuva gain from rental income from tourism and retain for the most part a preferred traditional life-style, entrepreneurs and tour guides earn an income, tourists are satisfied and local officials condone ‘illegal’ practices to write reports to superiors of economic development. On some occasions the first author participated in these Home Visit properties in different guises, including being a performer handing out food.

The social setting is thus one of shifting liaisons and arrangements as each stakeholder seeks to sustain an income while working within and around local tourism regulations. For the most part these arrangements are functional, generally friendly as both Tuva and Kazakh live in the same region, but on rare occasions violence was observed. It is not possible within this paper to describe all the events and incidents recorded, but the following provide some examples.

4.1. Exploration stage: belief-centered

As in many ethnic communities around the world, the intrusion of tourists and outsider entrepreneurs generated a cultural shock for this formerly isolated community. The opposition in the exploration stage of the Kanas Scenic Area can be characterized with reference to belief and value systems. According to an outsider who married a local lady and lived in Hanas Village for over 20 years, “At the beginning of the tourism development, locals did not know how to adjust to the new environment, since so many outsiders suddenly came (to this isolated area)”. Locals could not understand the outsiders’ behaviours and lifestyles that were too far removed from their own. Strictly speaking, this stage is characterized by cultural difference and curiosity, and few tensions and struggles were involved.

With reference to direct interaction between visitors and locals, visitors were impressed by the simplicity, kindness and primitive lifestyle of locals. According to some who visited Kanas in this period, the locals even tried to ‘feed’ grass to the vehicles, because in their mind, the vehicles would be very hungry after a whole day running on the road. On the other hand, tourists’ dress, behaviour, lifestyle, the ‘advanced’ cameras, cars etc., were a surprise to the locals.

The private outsider entrepreneurs were another source of culture shock. At this stage, locals had little sense of direct
participation in tourism. Some local Kazakhs even regarded operating a business as a source of shame. According to a local Kazakh,

In the early stage of the tourism development, the restaurant operators asked tourists 1000 RMB for a rooster which was worth at most 50 RMB. The boss told the tourists that the wild rooster was caught from forest and was very good for health. They talked nonsense.

The business tricks used by outsiders surprised the local ethnic people. On the other hand, locals also saw that these operators obtained significant profits from tourism. This represented another shock, but one which gradually led the locals to participate in tourism in the following stages, although initially, especially the Tuva, they were lacking in social capital. These deficiencies included no knowledge of commercial business methods and specifically little in the way of contacts with the travel agencies, tour guides and other industry intermediaries, and certainly no direct access to the tourist generating regions.

It may also be noted that differences of values and beliefs existed between tourists and the local government. Local governmental staff failed to anticipate the rapid increase of tourist numbers, and many failed to understand why so many tourists should come to this ‘small place’. It was the politicians and high ranking officials from the Central and Xinjiang governments who provided details of the significance of tourism when they officially visited the area, and it was this visit that prompted the formation of the local tourism administrative institutions and measures. In 1987, the Buerjin Tourism Bureau was founded, enforcing the initial development and subsequent construction of facilities in the region and duly commencing the administration of Kanas tourism.

4.2. Involvement stage: resource-centered

In this stage, many groups including national and regional bureaus, public sector organisations, private enterprises and entrepreneurs from the nearby counties and cities established facilities and commenced operating tourism businesses in Kanas. The process was probably at its peak between 1996 and 2000 when the local government called for ‘the whole of society to develop tourism’. Consequently, resources became the subject of tensions between different parties.

Inter-group and intra-group tension coexisted during this period. Tension existed between outside entrepreneurs and locals, between administrative institutions, and even between tourists. Entrepreneurs (primarily small and medium in size), in open competition with each other, ‘grabbed’ places at which to establish tourist facilities. The shortage of tourism facilities forced the tour guides to ‘grab’ accommodation and food for their own group members, often at very short notice, thereby stressing what organisational arrangements that had been made, and creating at least short-term annoyances and grievances. One of the consequences of this resource-centered tension was a degradation of tourism products and service quality, while at the same time there was some unconstrained building of tourist assets, especially those of small retail and catering outlets.

4.3. Development stage: power-centered

As the area moved into a more sustainable and increasingly ordered development stage under government remit, the profit motive as a determinant of policies became more apparent. Tension, therefore, is now characterized by who holds the power of influencing decision making in the area. This power represents both economic and administrative advantage, and is closely related in the Chinese context. The administration of the area experienced frequent changes in this stage. The administration and licensing of a horsemen team in each village and the Home Visit cultural performance businesses also experienced changes that represent changes in the balance of power between different level administrative initiatives and the local villagers’ committees, and between village headmen, committee members and Han government officials.

5. Proposing a new tension-driven social conflict tourism development model

As noted previously, theories and hypotheses of social conflict have been applied in the discussion of various disciplines and subjects, such as religion, race, and ethnicity (Dodson, 1958; Hager, 1956; Hines, 1966), inter-tribal relations (Murphy, 1957) and international relations (North, Koch, & Zinnes, 1960; Timasheff, 1965). According to Arzencek (1972), a model for studying social conflict must contain at least three factors: (1) institutional identification of the society; (2) identification of social conflict; (3) identification of institutional change.

Based on social conflict theory and in line with tourism development (especially in ethnic communities), a tension-directed tourism development model for studying tourism impacts can now be suggested.

A tension-directed tourism development system consists of four parts.

- A tension-directed evolution of some ethnic tourism areas (Fig. 2)
- The emergence of key power clusters (Fig. 3)
- A community tension-directed mechanism of tourism impact (community development perspective) (Fig. 4)
- An inter-personal tension-directed mechanism of tourism impact (Fig. 5).

The four parts are detailed as follows.

5.1. A tension-directed evolution of some ethnic tourism areas

An evolutionary model generally demonstrates the development of some ethnic tourism areas directed by different types of tensions at different stages in destination development. Coser (1968, p. 232) defines conflict as “a struggle over claims to resources, power and status, beliefs, and other preferences and

![Fig. 2. The tension-directed evolution of some ethnic tourism areas.](image-url)
It is suggested that, using the typologies of the Butler (1980) Tourist Area Life Cycle model the exploration, involvement and development stages are sequentially centered upon beliefs, resource and power respectively as shown in Fig. 2, although a degree of co-existence of each conflict sources are present in each of the destination stages.

In many ethnic communities around the world, the intrusion of tourists and outside entrepreneurs brings cultural shock to those formerly isolated communities. The opposition in the exploration stage can be characterized by processes of negotiation between the parties based upon their respective belief and value systems. In the subsequent involvement stage, various segments of both public and private public sectors come to participate in tourism. Consequently, resources become the object of tensions between different parties. The indigenous community commands the cultural resource but the other stakeholders general control access to the other resources of tourist supply and external capital. The public sector retains the resource of granting licences and permissions through planning processes that may be entirely formal or subject to degrees of corrupt practices. This also means that the private sector also has the resource of policy enforcement. Both inter-group and intra-group tension may coexist during this period.
As areas enter into the development stage, the profit motive as a determinant of policies becomes more apparent. Tension, therefore, is characterized by who holds the power of influencing decision making in the area. Each party has by this stage engaged in processes of change. The indigenous community (or some part of it) may have acquired political and social connections in past dealings, but equally may have become more fractured unless held together by very strong belief systems. They may also have acquired some small financial capital. Such gains however increasingly bind them to the value systems of the dominant groups. As in Kanas the process may at times be accompanied by latent and actual violence through a riot, but the very act of increasing compensation actually reinforces and furthers the legitimisation of government as the body able to make such concessions. Such concessions cannot be legally gained from other parties. For their part private entrepreneurs gain economic returns, further the legitimacy of government as providing the success regional government requires in reporting to more senior levels of government in Beijing, but equally are dependent upon the forms of policy implementation required by government, or alternatively seek their ends by trying to subvert government regulations by entering into informal arrangements with local peoples.

Conflicts’ functions of establishing and maintaining power are mainly presented in the involvement and development stages. Individuals and groups may assert their claims when they feel discrepancies between the amount of power, status and wealth that they command and the amount that they feel to be due to them (Coser, 1956, p. 134). Failure to assert such claims may mean they fail to advance, and others may fail to consider claims on their behalf (Coser, 1956).

5.2. The emergence of key power clusters

Governments, tourism entrepreneurs, tourists and locals are identified as the four main stakeholders in tourism destinations as shown in Fig. 3. The unique elements and general positions of each group serve to establish the identity lines of societal groups; the conflict with other groups contributes to the reaffirmation of the identity of the group and the maintaining of its boundaries against the surrounding social world. They are the core features of the tension-directed tourism development system and determine the nature, extents, and forms of tension in tourism development.

These main groups play different roles in the tourism development. For the government, tourism development has sought to package and standardize ethnic culture into an exploitable resource for modernization, thus necessitating the production, preservation, and representation of an ‘authentic’ cultural heritage that contributes to nation building (Oakes, 1998). For tourism entrepreneurs, they are more interested in economic benefits. Economic motives often outweigh other goals in a tourism business. As Oakes (1998, p. 158) suggests, whether propagated as poverty alleviation or legitimized as cultural development, tourism for those most actively involved in its development is simply about “making money”. For tourists, they visit ethnic destinations for multiple purposes, and their real motivations are often inconsistent with those they express verbally or in response to a survey (Yang, 2012; Yang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2012). Their gazing and travel behaviours influence locals. For local ethnic people, they are often marginalized or disadvantaged economically and politically and they have a low level of control over their resources and tourism activities. Noticeably, tourism permits the occurrence of more sub-groups with different demands and broadens the differences and demands between sub-groups.

It should be acknowledged that there is some overlap among the groups defined. Members of one group may have multiple interests which draw them into a second or even third group, as in the example of a local who is involved in government and is also involved with a small enterprise. Conflict may arise from this notion of multiple memberships. From the perspective of network theory such persons can hold central positions and thus also acquire a communicative power as a resource in addition to those other powers noted above. Equally outliers in the network may also possess social and network capital by being links with networks outside of the local or regional network within Kanas, as may be the case of tour guides accompanying groups from Beijing.

A complicating factor is the relationship between resident groups of Kazakh and Tuva who live within the same village all year round. A symbiotic relationship of pecuniary interests and close proximity is woven into a system of ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences. Boundary maintenance becomes fuzzy, and the fuzziness is itself a source of both tension and strength in the fluidity of inter- and intra-group negotiations. It is however the tensions that act as creative forces, but the need for the changes in the status quo is due to the catalyst of tourism development. It is these social groups that together contribute to the social system of the community and the reciprocal tensions create a balance between various groups therein maintaining the total social system (Simmel, 1955).

5.3. A community tension-directed mechanism of tourism impact (community development perspective)

The intra- and inter-group conflicts and co-operations contribute to the changes of societal structure which therein, reiteratively, permits the changes of group positions in impacted society. These promote a subsequent community development stage. Meanwhile, stakeholders’ positions in society and demands resulting from and on them may also change in the subsequent development stage. This perspective is consistent with the schema suggested by Yang and Sun (in press) in their application of complexity theory to tourist destination evolution in China. Adopting the principle of small changes causing significant outcomes they envisage a process of continuing feedback mechanisms in the development of a destination where each part of the sub-system (tourists, capital, government, local and external actors) all initiate and respond to small and increasingly larger changes in the initial status quo. The system thus comprises continuing responses, but from the perspective of this paper, such response patterns emerge from the inequalities of the social, political and economic capital of the varying parties.

5.4. An inter-personal tension-directed mechanism of tourism impact

Mach and Snyder (1957) list the characteristics of and empirical conditions for the identification and characterization of conflict phenomena and situations; namely: (1) at least two parties or analytically distinct units (actors, groups, collectivities, etc) are necessary for social conflict, and (2) social conflict derives from two types of scarcity, ‘position scarcity’ and ‘resource scarcity’. Position scarcity prevails when a certain object cannot be in two places at the same time or cannot perform two different functions simultaneously. Scarcity of resources prevails when the desired object is limited in such a way that the actors cannot obtain as much as they would like. A third condition is conflict behaviour that is oriented towards destroying, thwarting, or otherwise controlling the opposing side. Fourth, social conflict requires interaction between the sides so that actions and counteractions are mutually opposed and last, conflict relations always include the striving for control of scarce resources or the striving to influence behaviours in a desired direction.
Amongst the communal changes, the inter-personal relationships of the stakeholders may also change. Under the conditions of behavioural, demographic and structural differences, tensions/conflict occurs between individuals and leads to behavioural and attitudinal changes. The tension/conflict aftermath will further influence the antecedent conditions and create new interpersonal relationships in the subsequent development stage of the community.

6. Theoretical implications of the system

It is suggested that the proposed model possesses six implications, each of which is described below.

6.1. The functions of conflict/tension in relation to social change in the community

Conflict is important in terms of “interactive processes” and is a “form of socialization” (Coser, 1956, p. 31). It is a necessary and positive part of all social relationships, and a necessity for social change. Group formation is a result of both association and disassociation, so that both conflict and cooperation serve a social function and contribute to changes of a society.

6.2. Stakeholders in tourism development

A society consists of groups with different demands. While tensions serve to establish the identity and boundary lines of the four groups (governments, tourism entrepreneurs, tourists and locals), more generally it is the unique elements and general positions of such groups that individually and together serve to establish the identity lines of societal groups. In this instance the four groups of locals, governments, tourists and entrepreneurs together contribute to the social system of the community and the reciprocal tensions create a balance between the various groups thereby maintaining the total social system (Simmel, 1955). This requires a commonality of purpose, and in this case that commonality was served by a need for income on the part of locals and tourism intermediaries, and for government, approval from Beijing and Urumqi. A symbiotic relationship was generated whereby tourism permitted additional incomes to be gained from a peaceful set of relationships secured that process, the threat of disquiet won concessions, and concessions further confirmed legitimacy on the part of government.

6.3. The heterogeneity of a community/group

The extents, approaches, and results of tourism impacts on different populations of any one community are different within a heterogeneous social structure. It is argued that over time the inter-personal relationships would change and the structure of the community would be influenced by the area's tourism development. Tourism development of an area may contribute to the changing relationships between sub-groups and the structure of the community. The result is that tourism generates an increasing amount of congruence between parties in the absence of an intrusion by external forces with which the local system cannot cope. The process reinforces the identification of joint interests, which in turn begins to link with external factors such as tourism companies located in large cities. A tension thereby exists between maintaining a homogeneity of linked local interests to deal with externally imposed change, and the need for permitting some external change to continue dynamism within the system.

6.4. The distinction between behaviour (conflict) and attitude (hostility)

Behavioural changes may differ from attitudinal changes in that the former may, at least initially, be latent while the latter may become overt. There is thus a temporal component to the changes. Hostile feelings may arise in the interplay of ‘impulses of hostility’ and opposing groups, and interaction greatly contributes to the potential occurrence of conflict (Simmel, 1955). Tourism has increased the levels of interaction between groups, and has also increased competition, hostility and jealousy, which can be confined within acceptable levels by shifting alliances designed to achieve group benefits so long as those benefits continue to be generated and are valued by the recipients.

6.5. Pre-existing conditions for conflict/tension

Pre-existing conditions, such as social positions, cultural norms, demographics, and social structure, should be considered in the analysis of conflict (Coser, 1956). These factors influence the occurrence, modes, extents and also the resolution of conflict. Social structure is a key factor in determining whether the conflict will threaten the legitimacy of the social system (Coser, 1956).

6.6. The correlation between conflict and unification

Conflict is often accompanied by cooperation/unity/alliance. Conflict may create alliance between individuals/groups when they are faced with a common threat. The conflict with out-groups may increase the cohesion of the in-groups; it may even permit alliance between individuals of different groups if they are faced with a common threat. It is suggested that conflict fulfils a functional role by establishing and maintaining a balance of power between the stakeholders.

7. Practical implications of the system

In line with the theoretical implications of the system above, a series of issues emerge for the management of tourism development in areas where such tourism is based upon the culture of local ethnic and cultural minorities.

7.1. An objective attitude towards conflict

It is suggested that the social conflict inherent in tourism development needs to be viewed objectively, especially by governments. The governments need to have an objective understanding about the nature of potential conflicts and to distinguish realistic from unrealistic conflict in order to resolve tensions. Coser (1956) suggests that realistic conflict takes place with the frustrating agents themselves in expectation of attaining specific results, while unrealistic conflict consists of a release of tension in aggressive action directed against shifting objects. Although the distinctions between realistic and unrealistic conflict theoretically show that the social phenomena of conflict can be potentially explained in terms of tension release, its reality is commonplace in the real world and not simply an abstract theoretical concept. There is a danger that if the local government overlooks the possibility of realistic conflict as a factor inherent in any social system, the local administration will only look for “therapeutic measures” of a short-term nature (Coser, 1956, p. 52) instead of investigating the causes of conflict. They see all conflict as a “social disease” and the lack of conflict as “social health” (Coser, 1956, p. 53). The functions of conflict in contributing to the social development should be considered and emphasized. This requires local administrations to
become knowledgeable about the cultures they wish to promote as tourism product, to be patient with cultural difference, to be prepared to negotiate and to value difference. Equally, while it may be claimed that ethnic minorities have the right to reject tourism, in practice most societies will welcome it for the opportunities that it generates for their children and the improvements it can bring to their daily lives. In the case of poor marginalized communities such as those of Kanas these can be quite basic such as the provision of power supplies in the winter and better access to basic provisions. What is required is a vision of what is required, and what is not. In the Chinese situation however, the political reality is that such visions are centrally determined, but there remains evidence that the powerless do possess power, as evidenced by the albeit patchy success of rural riots such as those at Wukan in 2011.

7.2. A balance of stakeholders’ interest

The ‘merit’ in conflict largely depends on the ability to assert a perspective considered by others to be legitimate. Conflict can be regarded as a balance of the comparative strengths of two or more parties. If conflict is to be avoided, some other means for measuring relative power must be available as a counterpoint to the basis of the original claim (Coser, 1956). Posner (1979, 1983, 2000) suggests that the Kaldor–Hicks model of efficiency (Hicks, 1939; Kaldor, 1939) whereby participants seek to maximize monetary returns has a proven ability to quantify power relationships between stakeholders. The ‘optimal outcome’ is reached when the administration, entrepreneurs, and tourists arrange sufficient compensation to those who are made worse off so that all end up no worse off than before the introduction of change (Zhang & Yang, 2012). This quantification of change offers a measure by which the success of management can be gauged, and even indeed budgeted for.

7.3. An attention to sub-groups’ interests

In practice, groups, such as governments, are often regarded as homogeneous. Locals may view tourists as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, rather than considering what kinds of tourists are ‘good’ and what kinds of tourists are ‘bad’. The government may consider the community as a whole, and thereby ignores the different interests and demands of different segments. Many residents of Kanas do not hope to be involved in regional tourism decision-making and management (Wang, Yang, Chen, Yang, & Li, 2010). On the other hand, there is a minority willing to participate in tourism decision making. Furthermore, the locals who are engaged in local government aspire to gain more decision-making power; one reason is that such power is closely related with personal benefit. This issue is especially important for planning. Different subgroups and their needs and desires should not be ignored or overly advantaged.

7.4. When poverty is the major concern of the people

In under-developed and/or developing countries and regions, especially among indigenous communities with a very low level economic development, poverty is still the major concern of the people. The gain or loss of income largely determines the reactions of locals towards the conflict with outer-groups. Within China, an issue exists with reference to relative political and economic power centres in the wider nexus of groups, and in some situations where the government makes concessions in relating to economic profits, the very concession may (as noted above) paradoxically reinforce the role of government as the source of economic benefit. Certainly observation during the fieldwork found several examples where changes in regulations gained acceptance because of pecuniary advantage accruing to affected parties. However, the long-term sustainability of this policy may be open to question, but at this stage of development increasing tourist numbers more or less guarantees increasing government, corporate and private revenues.

7.5. Ethnic people’s psychological problems during social change

The social transformational process of ethnic communities, such as from nomadic to an agricultural life-style and from subsistence farming to business operations and management requires a change of attitudes, norms and other psychological adjustments for some ethnic peoples. Such issues must be addressed by governments, researchers, and related non-governmental organisations. These issues may influence long-term national and regional stability and have significance for social development. The practical management implications again point to the need for an emic approach to the management of change, and that the etic will not be wholly satisfactory in the outcomes it will achieve.

7.6. Antecedent conditions for tension need to be considered

Factors such as social positions, cultural norms, demographics, and social structure require consideration when dealing with conflict. The consideration of such factors permits thorough analysis of conflict and right conflict resolution measures.

7.7. Conflict and cooperation/unity/alliance

Cooperation/unity/alliance between individuals/groups is important for conflict resolution. In addition, when launching policies and measures thought undesirable by other stakeholders, government may be required to consider the potential cooperation/unity/alliance of those stakeholders who seek to oppose these policies and measures. Such opposition may cause the policies and measures not to be implemented and thereby undermine governmental credibility. One practical implication for the Chinese situation is that the need for ‘social harmony’ may create potential tortuous negotiations in the search for a solution — and the more practical process of sustaining mianzi (face) represents a mid-point between a more western perspective where it is simply recognized that not all can be equally satisfied and, on the other hand, an ideal of harmonious relationships being realized. Realpolitik has a role to play, even in China because political realities cannot be ignored.

One problem in Chinese administration is that the more able administrators in marginal areas quickly seek promotion to the more powerful centres of decision-making, and thus this can impede policies based on the emic unless a civil service can achieve recruitment of local ethnic people. However, unfortunately at this stage, the ethnic minorities may not have the necessary educational qualifications or understandings as their traditional pre-modern world of nomadic cattle grazing in this example does not prepare one for a career in governmental circles. However, again observation reveals change occurring as both old and young, for example, adopt cell phone technologies in those centres where cell-phone towers exist.

8. Conclusions

This study employs Coser’s (1956) social conflict theory for a discussion of tourism impacts on the ethnic communities, and proposes a tension-directed tourism development system with which to analyze tourism impacts. This system involves both macro and micro perspectives of tourism impacts. It embodies the evolutionary mechanism of tourism destinations, an emphasis on, in this case, four primary groups (tourists, governments, tourism entrepreneurs, and local community) and sub-groups, and the
changes of inner-personal relationships during tourism development. Not only are the consequences of tourism on the locals assessed, but also the determinants and the mechanism of tourism impacts involved. It demonstrates the conflict and negotiations between the groups and subgroups, thereby contributing to an understanding of the functions of social conflict on tourism destination development.

Many tourism impact studies are empirical studies that emphasize the specific characteristics of the case areas, and lack a comparison with other case areas and related studies. The framework of analysis and the tension-directed tourism development system provide a tool for comparing and contrasting tourism impacts on different areas. It permits a discussion of the determinants of different tourism impacts on different destinations. It permits cross case study analysis from which generalization becomes possible.

The evidence is restricted to the Kanas Scenic area. To research tourism development in multi-ethnic destinations and to compare and contrast issues in eastern and western countries is one direction for future. In contrast to the minority peoples in the Kanas Scenic Area having little power in politics, the native Fijians have political power and to some extent take advantage of the Indians by denying them a full range of political rights (Sofield, pers. comm.) even while wishing to retain their entrepreneurial business capabilities. The application of this system in other countries will permit to extend and improve the proposed system of analysis.

As an exploratory analysis of the functions of social conflict in tourism, this study discusses groups in tourism, the hostility and tensions in conflict relationships, and also intra- and inter-group conflict. However, there remains a lack of a more comprehensive analysis of conflict management and conflict resolution in tourism. This is both a limitation of this study, and a future research direction. There is a need to establish a systematic theory about social conflict in tourism that comprises such elements as the nature of conflict, conflict management, conflict resolution, etc. Hopefully, this research will attract interest from researchers and scholars on conflict in tourism and contribute to this domain.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by a grant titled 2010 Chinese Government Award for Outstanding Self-financed Students Abroad from China Scholarship Council (to Jingying Yang) (No.2010-409).

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jtouman.2012.06.002.

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Hwang, K.-K. (1998). Guanxi and Mientze: conflict characteristics of the case areas, and lack of conflict resolution, etc. Hopefully this research will attract interest from researchers and scholars on conflict in tourism and contribute to this domain.

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