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Creativity at Work:

Chinese Tourists in Denmark

By Can-Seng Ooi

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Copenhagen
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imagine..



Abstract

Tourism is entwined in economics, politics, culture, and social life. Despite Denmark's attempt to re-brand itself as a modern, trendy and vibrant destination, the Danish tourism authorities is still selling the country's historical sights and Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales to attract a growing number of Chinese tourists. While tourism authorities want to please the Chinese, other Danish authorities are concerned with overstaying tourists who may end up as illegal immigrants. On the Chinese side, the Chinese government is concerned with the image of China and its travelling citizens; they are trying to socially engineer the Chinese into better behaved tourists. The growing China outbound tourism market offers avenues for researchers to re-evaluate some aspects of tourism studies. Earlier studies have concentrated on the domination of tourist-receiving Third World countries by tourist-supplying First World countries. Other studies have focused on tourism impacts on host societies, ignoring how tourists themselves are being socialized and managed. This article, in the case of China, shows that a class of tourists from the developing world is capable of shaping destinations but they themselves are being shaped for the global tourism market.

Keyword

Keywords: branding Denmark, place branding, tourism impact, tourism strategy, tourism politics

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Chinese Tourists in Denmark

Never before has a country with 1.3 billion people become a source of tourists. China is still a developing country but its sheer size and fast-paced economic development have resulted in a huge affluent population that has the ability to travel overseas for leisure. The growing Chinese outbound tourism market has generated excitement, leading to grand visions and strategies for various tourism destinations. For instance, thanks to Chinese tourists, Macau has overtaken Las Vegas as the biggest gambling destination in the world; although the American city is unlikely to regain that crown, it hopes to improve its fortunes if it can attract massive numbers of Chinese (Gross, S. 2007). The Ritz-Carlton Hotel wants the brand-conscious Chinese to recognize it as a premier global hotel chain; it is opening six hotels in China (out of 19 worldwide) in the next few years to heighten its brand presence in the Middle Kingdom (Gross, S. 2007). In wanting to attract more tourists to Australia, Pan and Law (2002) argue that it is necessary to make use of Chinese *guanxi* (connection); Australian inbound tour operators could improve their services by linking up with Chinese travel agencies. And in Seattle, they imagine the Chinese are like the Japanese, the city is repeating a successful campaign in Japan for the Chinese – “Living Cool, Loving Nature” (Gross, S. 2007). In most instances, destinations around the globe are anticipating a flood of Chinese tourists to their shores in the near future (Cai, L. A., Lehto, X. Y., & O’Leary, J. 2001; Pan, G. W. & Laws, E. 2002; Ryan, C. & Mo, X. 2002; Yu, X., Weiler, B., & Ham, S. 2002; Zhang, H. Q. & Heung, V. C. S. 2002).

But in order for Chinese citizens to travel overseas, they must seek official permission. In the last decade, more and more destinations have been given Approved Destination Status (ADS) by the Chinese government. An ADS country is a pre-approved destination where Chinese citizens can travel in organized groups for leisure. Most EU member states, including Denmark, attained their ADS in September 2004. The increasing number of ADS countries shows that the Chinese government is slowly allowing the outflow of foreign exchange via outbound tourism. The Chinese government is also pleased that its citizens are warmly welcomed around the world, indicating the growing global respect China has today.

Tourism, like in other international businesses, is entwined in economics, politics, culture, and social life. This paper will not only discuss some issues related to the economic and social impact of China outbound tourism market in Denmark but will also propose some rethinking of theories in relation to tourism studies. But first, I would like to accentuate four intrinsic elements of the international tourism industry that characterize the encounters of business, culture and politics.

One, the destination or the host country sells itself as a playground – its spaces, culture, amenities and facilities are to be shared with foreign guests. Like foreign investments, tourism offers economic benefits: revenue, employment, infrastructure development, skill transfer and so forth. In the case of visiting tourists, many aspects of the society’s social and cultural life are also put up for consumption – the host society is not promoted as an environment for

production but as a product for consumption. Notwithstanding, in many cases, foreign companies may invest and establish branded attractions, such as Disney theme parks, Hilton hotels and Gucci shops, in tourist destinations. Host countries vie for them, so as to enhance their location attractiveness. But in the business of tourism, the host society is essentially promoted as a site for consumption, not production.

Two, foreign tourists have special needs – they visit a place for a short period of time, they lack local knowledge and most of them are there to enjoy themselves (Ooi, C.-S. 2002). As a result, tourists must be nurtured during their visits and provided for in the most mundane manner; they must be provided information on local facilities, they must be taught how to be sensitive to local customs, and they must be shown how to move around and where to feed themselves. Like local residents, tourists need access to information, the right to gaining assistance, and in case of emergencies, they must know how to be protected. In other words, a destination has to provide the resources to help and serve tourists and protect their rights and interests.

Three, as related to the above points, tourism authorities that want to attract more tourists must also deal with issues related to the commodification of local life (Cohen, E. 2002; MacCannell, D. 1976). The intertwined relationships between tourists and host country are manifested in all aspects of social life, including at the cultural, economic and political levels. While one may argue that investing in the local tourism industry is also investing in local society, local residents may lament that resources for the industry should be directed towards local needs and not towards tourists. Foreigner-local relationships are potentially tenuous. In mass tourism, the large number of curious and insensitive tourists in local society may draw angry responses from residents. Investing in the tourist market means having to placate and convince local residents about the worthiness of the tourism investment – the off-sets from resources used and daily inconveniences caused must be less than the economic and social benefits from mass tourism.

Four, as in wanting to attract foreign investors, a country wanting to attract tourists must market, brand and sell itself. Local identities are constructed and re-invented – elements are selected while others are marginalised (Ooi, C.-S. 2004a; 2004b). Seductive brand images and stories may entice potential tourists but they may alienate local residents. In some host countries, such as Singapore and China, the vision of a vibrant and exciting destination has become a blueprint for social engineering the local population. Resources used in attracting tourists may offer opportunities to direct social and cultural change in desired tourism-oriented directions.

As a result of these intrinsic characteristics, the relationship between guest and host is a central issue in tourism studies. Problems arising from mass tourism, such as traffic and parking, pollution, “wear and tear” of heritage sites and price inflation are likely to annoy and even infuriate the local population (van der Borg, J., Costa, P., & Gotti, G. 1996). Aspects of the host society may also be commodified and touristified; mass trinketization, for instance, debases local handicrafts (Cohen, E. 1988). To many local residents, foreigners do not

appreciate the host in its complexity and diversity. While foreigners enjoy themselves, locals work to serve the tourists. This is a common concern in tourism; the guests are conspicuous in their presence, not only in their odd behaviour but also in their supposedly higher spending power. As a result, Mathews argues that tourism is sometimes seen as “whorism” (1975). Based on the direction of the flow of tourists, tourism is often seen as an industry that maintains the domination of developed tourist-supplying countries over developing tourist-receiving countries (Morgan, N. & Pritchard, A. 1998; Ooi, C.-S., Kristensen, T. P., & Pedersen, Z. L. 2004; Selwyn, T. 1996; Silver, I. 1993). On the other hand, there are economic benefits from tourism. The social impact of tourism is not necessarily negative. For example, tourists bring diversity and life to street markets, they prompt the conservation of local heritage sites and they garner resources for physical and cultural development (i.e. concerts, theme parks, landscaping, illumination of monuments); improvements which also benefit locals. Researchers advocate a balanced and sensitive approach to the management of tourism’s impact (Chang, T. C. 1997; Jenkins, C. L. 1997; Newby, P. T. 1994; Teo, P. & Yeoh, B. S. A. 1997). In using Giddens’ “Third Way”, Burns (2004) paints a bipolar view of tourism planning in bringing different interested parties together. The first – the leftist “development first” – view focuses “on sustainable human development goals as defined by local people and local knowledge. The key question driving development is ‘What can tourism give us without harming us?’” (Burns, P. M. 2004). The second – “the rightist tourism first” – view aims to “maximize market spread through familiarity of the product. An undifferentiated homogenized product depends on a core with a focus on tourism goals set by outside planners and the international tourism industry” (Burns, P. M. 2004). In an attempt to bring different interests together, the Third Way conceptually bridges the two poles. These are streams of tourism impact studies. They emphasise the influence of tourists on the host society. There is, however, no study on how tourists are managed and socialised, although tourists must learn new ways to do things and to blend into the host society during their relatively short visits. This paper suggests that the China outbound tourism market offers avenues for researchers to re-evaluate some aspects of tourism studies. With the advent of the China outbound tourism market, the view that tourism is an industry that encourages the domination of developing tourist-receiving countries by developed tourist-supplying countries must be reconfigured. Similarly, tourism studies have focused only on the impact on the host society, ignoring how tourists themselves are socialised and managed in the global tourism industry.

Forecasting the China-Outbound Tourist Market

The Chinese started travelling overseas in the early 1980s, at the start of the post-Mao economic reform (Zhang, G. R. 2006). China outbound tourism growth has been growing phenomenally. According to official statistics, in the period between 1995 and 2005, the number of Chinese travelling outside China increased from 4.5 million to 31 million; outbound travel expenditure climbed from US\$3.7 billion to US\$21.8 billion (Zhang, G. R. 2006). The vice chairman of

the China Tourism Association, Wu Wenxue, boasted that the Chinese made 34.5 million departures abroad in 2006 and that Chinese travellers are changing the tourism pattern in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world (People's Daily 2007). According to the World Tourism Organization (2003), China will provide 100 million outbound travellers by the year 2020 and would be the fourth largest source of outbound travel in the world.

At the moment, the number of organised groups of Chinese travelling for leisure remains relatively small compared to the number of Chinese who travel for business (Zhang, G. R. 2006). 90% of all outbound travels by the Chinese are within Asia; neighbouring Hong Kong and Macau make up 70% of the total (Zhang, G. R. 2006). And in terms of outbound tourist expenditures, the massive bulk are spent by business tourists; their trips are supported by the government, by companies and by other organisations. These business tourists do not necessarily reflect the spending power of the for-leisure Chinese tourists. The China tourism outbound per capita expenditure was only US\$15 in 2004: one-sixth of the world's average (Zhang, G. R. 2006). This number alerts us to the less-than-rosy reality of the Chinese outbound tourism market. On the other hand, this number alludes to the potential in the China tourism outbound market as the Chinese economy charges ahead.

Europe – a long haul and high status destination to the Chinese – attracts more affluent tourists. Travelling to Asian countries is still the first choice for the Chinese. But Europe has become popular. 1.9 million Chinese visited Europe in 2006, and the UK saw a more than 20% increase in Chinese tourists over the previous year (People's Daily 2007; People's Daily 2004b). Denmark is not the first European destination of choice for the Chinese but the Danes want a bigger slice of the growing cake as the China tourism outbound market expands. Excitement about the impending arrival of Chinese tourists was fervent in 2004, when Denmark and most other EU countries attained their ADS. During that year, Wonderful Copenhagen (WoCo) – the Danish capital city's tourism promotion agency – organized a conference to increase awareness of the potential of the Chinese outbound tourism market in Denmark. At that conference, the Danish General Manager of Global Refund – an international company facilitating tax-free refunds in numerous countries – presented a positive picture of the Chinese driving the tourism industry forward (Møller, J. 2004). Based on their tax refund data, Global Refund observed that despite the relatively high cost in Europe, the Chinese still bought many things in the continent, including perfumes, shoes, leather goods, clothing and souvenirs. In France, the Chinese spent 4300 DKK each on luxury products in 2004; 3825 DKK in Italy and 1619 DKK in Denmark. In their statistics, each trip to Europe cost the Chinese about US\$5500 and US\$2000 was spent in Europe. And between 2003 and 2004, the number of Chinese tax free refunds increased by 80% in Denmark. These numbers show that Denmark was already benefiting from the influx of Chinese tourists before the country had its ADS.

To drum up more enthusiasm in the industry during the conference, WoCo presented a survey of more than 400 Chinese tourists in Denmark in 2004. The survey found that the Chinese tourist spent an average of 900 DKK a day in

Denmark, excluding accommodation expenses (Wonderful Copenhagen 2004a). The Chinese chose to visit Denmark mainly because of recommendations from family and friends (37%) and because of advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Most of them visited various tourist attractions in the country (e.g. Tivoli, the Little Mermaid) and they shopped. The Chinese tourists had a good impression of Copenhagen. For instance, the Chinese found Copenhagen clean and environment-oriented, safe and secure, culturally rich, romantic and charming, trendy and modern, and informal and relaxed. They also found the hotels, restaurants and shops of high international standards. The Danes were perceived as friendly and helpful, Danish cultural heritage was exciting and Copenhagen was considered to be an easy city to get around. Essentially, Copenhagen fulfilled their expectations (Wonderful Copenhagen 2004b). Armed with optimism, WoCo predicts in the best case scenario that by 2020, more than half a million Chinese will visit Denmark. In the worst case scenario, WoCo predicts that about a quarter of a million Chinese will visit (Wonderful Copenhagen 2004a). These estimates by far exceed the 60 000 Chinese tourists who visited Denmark in 2004.

In 2005, Denmark celebrated the 200th birthday of Hans Christian Andersen. A big campaign to promote Denmark was launched in China. Symposia, operas, exhibitions and competitions were organised to generate awareness of Denmark via the famous author Andersen, with whom Chinese pupils are already familiar since they read his fairy tales in school.

Contextual constraints on the China outbound market

While the statistics are generally promising, the forecasts may still be too forward-looking. There are many challenges in the China outbound tourism market. One, the Chinese may be getting richer but they have limited time resources for leisure travel. Workers in China are given three week-long national holiday periods built around the following occasions: Chinese New Year (January/February), Labour Day (1 May) and National Day (1 October). Traditionally, the Chinese New Year is for family reunions and thus the Chinese do not normally use this time for overseas travel. The Chinese authorities have suggested that workers should be given flexibility in taking their holiday leave, instead of having their days off dictated by these holiday periods. Until this practice becomes widespread, however, longer trips overseas will be difficult to arrange.

Two, China is still a developing country. While there is a class of affluent Chinese, the large majority finds it too expensive to take a holiday overseas. Global Refund estimated the potential China outbound tourism market to be only 3% (60 million) of the population (Møller, J. 2004). According to the World Tourism Organization (2003), 100 million Chinese will travel overseas annually by 2020. These numbers are still large in absolute terms, but they are relatively small compared to the population of China. The large majority of Chinese cannot afford to travel overseas.

Three, while the number of ADS countries increases, the Chinese still face visa application problems, an issue to be elaborated on later. Many destinations fear that human trafficking gangs are making use of travel agencies to illegally

move Chinese out of the country. Foreign governments must sort out the genuine tourists from the potential illegal immigrants, a process which results in lengthy and difficult visa applications. Thus, the ADS is only one of many administrative obstacles removed from the outbound Chinese traveller. Four, while many people around the world speak Mandarin, most do not. The majority of the Chinese population has very little or no command of the global tourism lingua franca: English. Furthermore, many Chinese tourists are relatively inexperienced travellers. Many complaints made about the Chinese boil down to their lack of travel experience (The Straits Times 2005f). Thus, the Chinese outbound tourist is relatively nervous because s/he would inevitably feel insecure in the unfamiliar environment and would have difficulties communicating with the locals.

Danish responses to the Chinese outbound tourism market

As mentioned earlier, Denmark has already benefited from the increase in Chinese tourists even before it attained its ADS. Because of the expectations of even more Chinese tourists, Denmark already prepares itself to welcome the Chinese. Regardless, rolling out the red carpet is a complex affair; there are concerns about how to manage the new China outbound tourism market. These concerns include the threat of illegal immigration, the fear of unscrupulous travel agents and the discouragement of ugly tourist behaviour. Some of these issues will be discussed in the next section.

Re-re-Packaging Denmark

In a study conducted by WoCo, Chinese tourists like Copenhagen but had some reservations (Wonderful Copenhagen 2004b):

1. Chinese tourists are impressed by the historical architecture of the city but do not find the European heritage to be as rich and exciting as other European cities, such as Rome, Paris or London.
2. They find their experiences have been hindered by language. There are few signs marked in Chinese.
3. Hans Christian Andersen is a significant figure to them but they could not experience him or his fairy tales in Copenhagen
4. There are few perceived opportunities for the Chinese tourists to buy souvenirs.

In response to feedback, a new Hans Christian Andersen museum has opened at the Copenhagen town hall square. There are also plans to incorporate Chinese signage at appropriate places around the city. While there are a number of souvenir shops where tourists can buy cheaper products, businesses are trying to generate another class of souvenirs that Chinese tourists could appreciate since minimalistic Danish design and the high cost of goods do not necessarily appeal to the Chinese.

Since 2000, the Danish tourism authorities have tried to move away from the historical and romantic images of Denmark as reflected through their earlier

marketing campaigns (Ooi, C.-S. 2004b). The current branding campaign accentuates and re-packages Denmark as a modern, chic and cool country, in contrast to popular traditional tourism images associated with the nation. Images of the statue of the Little Mermaid, Hans Christian Andersen, castles, churches and fairy tales will be sidelined, while images of modern buildings, Danish design and relaxing Danes enjoying themselves will be accentuated. The campaign wants to draw out positive emotions from audiences. The branding campaign is thus meant to change the world's perception of Denmark as essentially historical and classical to Denmark as basically contemporary and trendy.

In China, VisitDenmark – the Danish national tourism promotion agency – cooperates with other Scandinavian countries to promote the region, which is framed as “Uptown Europe: New Scandinavia”. The Danes still promote their new trendy and funkier image in “Uptown Europe” (Wu, T. 2005). But, as mentioned earlier, in 2005 Denmark celebrated H.C. Andersen's 200th birthday; the poet and fairy tale writer was used to enhance the country's image around the world. China received much attention in the celebrations because H.C. Andersen is a popular icon in China and the authorities want to draw the Chinese to Andersen's country. To the Chinese, H.C. Andersen is the quintessential icon of Denmark; Chinese pupils are familiar with the writer. They have read his fairy tales in school. It is thus considered wise to tap into the preconceived ideas of the Chinese and build an awareness of and affinity for Denmark. But as one tourism official lamented, celebrating H.C. Andersen and his fairy tales is not consistent with the attempt to brand Denmark as a cool, modern and trendy country. Andersen's works may be updated in the marketing events but the writer remains a centuries-old icon. While this strategy makes marketing sense, it also shows the tension between tapping into “dated” preconceptions that have strong commercial value and cultivating a new desired destination identity. Not all tourism officials were pleased with the tampering of the new destination brand identity. The branding of Denmark re-packages the country, and with accentuation of H.C. Andersen, the country has been re-re-packaged.

Preconceived ideas and demands on Denmark

As alluded to earlier, tourists' preconceptions affect their experiences. Tourists seek out and affirm their preconceptions during their travels (McLean, F. & Cooke, S. 2003; Prentice, R. 2004; Prentice, R. & Andersen, V. 2000). Often, 'authentic' cultural products are also created and staged for tourists. These products range from 'Voodoo' shows in Haiti (Goldberg, A. 1983), the sale of Jewish 'religious' objects (such as skull cap and candles) in Israel (Shenhav-Keller, S. 1995), to visiting an 'original' Manggarai village in Indonesia (Allerton, C. 2003). Many exotic images freeze the host society in the past and ignore the development that society has achieved. These images and reifications feed into the caricaturized tourist imagination. Researchers such as Echtner and Prasad (2003) and Silver (1993) have suggested that Third World

representations in tourism foster a particular ideological position which place developing countries in an inferior position. These places are perceived to be backward, the people are perceived to be eager to serve and the destination is considered to be “just” a cultural playground.

Such arguments are being challenged now because China as a developing country is placing similar demands on developed countries like Denmark. The example of how H.C. Andersen is used to re-brand Denmark for the Chinese market is a case in mind. Another example is that the Chinese (along with many other people in the world) perceive Denmark to be country with many beautiful blonde people. Denmark is also seen as an open and tolerant society: the sense of sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll. A travel operator who brought in Chinese tourists found a persistent problem with this image; her male customers always want to visit the infamous strip clubs in Copenhagen but are always disappointed. Many Chinese male tourists want to see tall, beautiful, blonde girls performing in clubs but instead, they mostly see girls from Asian countries. The tourists complain about this mismatch in expectations to the travel agent. Many Danes do not support the sex trade. Many Danes also find it offensive that the monthly tourist guide Copenhagen This Week offers a massive advertising section on escort, massage and strip club services. Politicians have withdrawn their support for the monthly publication, but the advertisements provide valuable revenue for the publisher. Those who are against the advertisements – including the tourism authorities – do not want to continue propagating sleazy images of the city. To others, the sex trade is part and parcel of the city and the country. As the Chinese case shows, Chinese tourists actively seek out these services for which they perceive Denmark to be infamous. Foreign and local interests may differ and paying tourists can beef up demands on products and services that many locals do not want.

Tourism and human trafficking

Political debates in a country may also affect tourism. The development of the tourism industry requires cooperation amongst various agencies. Tourism authorities, local government, land control authorities, cultural management agencies and others need to cooperate to develop the industry. How different agencies and political institutions within a country coordinate themselves to plan, develop and promote the place affect the manner of support for the tourism industry (Elliot, J. 1983; Leheny, D. 1995; Ooi, C.-S. 2004b; Pearce, D. 1997; Richter, L. K. 1985; Wanhill, S. R. C. 1987). But each of these agencies has its own interests and agendas. Consequently, the tourism policy in a destination may not be consistent.

For example, since 2001, the right-wing Danish People’s Party is a supporting partner party for the minority Danish government. As a result, immigration policies have been toughened and laws related to foreigners living in Denmark have been changed. Some policy changes include the shift in legislation governing permanent residency. Previously, foreign spouses of Danes could apply for permanent residency after three years of marriage/residence in Denmark. It has now been extended to seven years of marriage/residence.

Immigration laws also require a foreigner to be at least 24 years of age before s/he can marry a Dane in Denmark. There is also concern with illegal immigrants disguised as tourists to enter the country; these people are most likely to come from developing countries; since China is a developing country, this is a concern.

While China offers a massive outbound tourism market, many Chinese citizens could not afford to leave the country for the pursuit of pleasure. On the other hand, there are many who want to leave China to seek a better future. The Chinese government acknowledges the problem of illegal immigration and is trying to crack down on travel agencies that are fronts for human traffickers (People's Daily 2004c; People's Daily 2004a). To show the scale of the problem, for example in 2005, there were at least 50 000 Chinese tourists who did not leave Malaysia (The Straits Times 2005a). There was also an increase in the number of illegal Chinese migrants found working in Malaysia, including in criminal activities. The Malaysian authorities claim that many have left for a third country after procurement of fake passports in Malaysia.

Because of the possibility of using tourism as a guise for human trafficking, many countries including Denmark, have been cautious in welcoming the Chinese. Although many European countries have ADS, the immigration formalities remain tedious. The strict processes to acquire EU visas cross several official levels. If there were members of tour groups who did not leave the country, the inbound travel agencies who brought in those tourists will be penalised. This policy is practised in Denmark. As a result, many Chinese outbound travel agencies collect a 50 000 Yuan deposit (35 000 DKK) from each tourist. This is an additional burden for Chinese tourists (People's Daily 2004b). Welcoming genuine Chinese tourists and at the same time, stopping overstayers is a problem faced by many countries. So, at the time of writing this article, the Danish embassy in Beijing had yet to issue any tourist visa for a Chinese person under the ADS scheme; visas have been issued for technical, educational and business visits. The Danish immigration authorities have also penalised inbound tour agencies that have brought in Chinese tourists who have disappeared in Denmark. One travel agent quit the business because two of her Chinese tourists disappeared during a technical visit; the investigations were lengthy, and she was not allowed to bring in more Chinese visitors until the investigations were complete. Thus, this tour operator was forced to close the business.

On the other hand, many Chinese apply for entry into Europe through the Finnish embassy. Finnair and Finland have not only promoted themselves aggressively in China, the Finnish authorities have also made it relatively easy for the Chinese to get visas. So, many Chinese tourists visiting Denmark travel via Helsinki as part of their grand Nordic tour.

Helping and protecting tourists

There is a general belief that tourists should visit a destination to enjoy and appreciate local cultures. They should also accept the local way of life. Such a view tends to ignore the fact that tourists are rather anxious when they travel. They do not have the local knowledge and thus, they feel alien to the

destination. They are vulnerable and gullible in the foreign place. Tourists worry about being cheated by shopkeepers, they fear for their safety and they are anxious about finding reliable help. Their rights to information, their personal safety and their access fair treatment must be protected in the host society (Ooi, C. S. 2005).

There are travel agents that cheat and are unprofessional (People's Daily 2004a; People's Daily 2004c). It was reported that guides are forced to cut costs and lower service quality levels, resulting in sight-seeing activities being removed from and shopping programmes added to itineraries, so that agents can earn commissions from tourist purchases in overpriced outlets. In Denmark, a number of tour agencies use unlicensed guides for Chinese tourists; many Chinese students function as drivers and guides. These agencies can get into trouble for cheating the tourists. Many tourists do not seem to know that they are being short changed.

Chinese tourists do complain, however. For example, a shop keeper in Singapore experienced shouting and a big row because a group of Chinese tourists changed their minds on a diamond pendant they purchased; they wanted a cash refund but the shop could only offer exchanges for other items (The Straits Times 2005f). A tourist explained that in her country, persons become aggressive when they feel “snubbed”; these tourists may perceive that the sales staff think the tourists are not worthy of their services, reflecting how Shanghai sales staff treat customers from poorer provinces (The Straits Times 2005f). A fundamental concern about such behaviour is that the Chinese tourists are unaware of how they may direct their grievances in the foreign place.

Some complaints of mistreatment can reach a national level. For instance, in a rather embarrassing incident in Malaysia, a video clip of a Chinese tourist being stripped and searched by immigration officers surfaced. The video clip caused a furore in China and Malaysia (The Straits Times 2005b; The Straits Times 2005c). The Malaysian deputy security minister defended his country, saying that if foreigners think Malaysia is cruel, then they should not visit the country (The Straits Times 2005d). This ministerial outburst reflects a prevalent view that many Chinese female tourists enter Malaysia to work illegally, especially in vice. The prime minister however immediately chastised the minister and apologized to the Chinese government (The Straits Times 2005e). Eventually, after an investigation, the woman turned out to be a local non-Chinese citizen. The bad publicity resulted in a sharp drop of tourists visiting Malaysia.

The status of tourists in a destination is more than a commercial one. While they are there to enjoy the local host society, they also have special needs. The host society has the responsibility to protect and help them. Some destinations do. For example, in Singapore, Members of Parliament and the Cabinet minister often champion tourist interests (Ooi, C.-S. 2005). In other countries, such as Thailand, there is a “tourist police force” which tourists can call upon for help. Shopowners and taxi drivers have been known to lose their licenses because of tourist complaints. But in Denmark, tourism is not a priority industry and few politicians are enthusiastic about tourism issues. Tourists in Denmark have access to help from the police and other authorities. Chinese tourists who can

not speak English, much less Danish, they do not feel protected nor do they have access to assistance when needed. As a Danish official in local government confided, tourists do not receive much attention from political leaders because they do not consider tourists important – “tourists do not vote”. While individual tourists come and go, there will always be tourists in the country; they are a constituency in this society (Ooi, C.-S. 2005). Regardless, the Chinese government does involve itself when its citizens are not treated properly.

A Chinese government response: socialising the Chinese

The Chinese government, as with most other governments, wants to protect its citizens’ rights when they travel abroad. The Chinese government, however, seems to go a step further to chastise its citizens for their bad behaviour. The Chinese authorities, including the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Construction and the General Administration of civil Aviation of China, have launched a campaign to educate Chinese outbound tourists (The Straits Times 2006a). According to the Spiritual Civilisation Steering Committee, certain widespread complaints about Chinese tourists have hurt the image of China as a civilised country and they have generated negative attention. These complaints include how Chinese tourists clear their throats loudly, how they squat and smoke in public places, how they remove their shoes aboard planes and trains and how they jump queues (The Straits Times 2006a). Such complaints are found in many international media reports, including “Ugly China tourists: Why are they like that?” which presents several accounts of bad social behaviour of Chinese tourists (The Straits Times 2005f). For example, about 200 Chinese tourists were upset because their flight was delayed in Bangkok because of a technical glitch. As a result, they had to miss the day tour in Singapore. The passengers refused to disembark and the airline (Cathay Pacific) must promise to compensate them with US\$50 each before they would agree to leave the plane. Hotels also complained about Chinese tourists spitting on the floor in rooms and leaving burn holes in beds and blankets. In interviews with Chinese tourists in the report, one tourist said that such behaviour is true and particularly stark from “backward areas”. Although the report ended by suggesting that service staff in Singapore should not misunderstand the Chinese, the Chinese authorities want to get rid of the ugly Chinese tourist perception.

The Deputy Director of the Spiritual Civilisation Steering Committee, Zhai Weihua, claims, “[t]he behaviour of some Chinese travellers is not compatible with the nation’s economic strength and its growing international status” (The Straits Times 2006a). As a result, the CNTA is issuing a guide book to Chinese outbound tourists when they purchase tickets from travel agencies. Picking up international social conventions and etiquette is considered good for China’s image and a way to self-improvement for the Chinese (The Straits Times 2006a). This so-called educational campaign will run until the Beijing Olympics in 2008. The Chinese authorities also demand that travel agencies educate and guide their customers. If these agencies fail to do so, they will be “criticised, educated and ordered to reform” (The Straits Times 2006b).

Discussions

The beginning of this paper presented four intrinsic characteristics of tourism: the destination is a playground for tourists, the destination is a site for consumption, local residents may not be welcoming of tourists and tourism offers resources for local development. The literature on tourism impact research tends to emphasise on how tourists have come to exploit, impose and corrupt the host society. There is also a prominent view that the developed world – via tourism – influences and dominates the tourist-receiving third world. The issues raised above present a more complex picture – Denmark is a first world country that wants to please third world China; tourists do not get “their way” in many instances, and in the case of Chinese tourists, their government wants to reform and socialise them into the global tourism culture. The direction of influence is thus not only from guest to host. Let us evaluate the empirical and theoretical issues.

Denmark, like many other countries, is repackaging and re-branding itself to attract tourists. Danes decided to make use of Chinese pre-conceptions of Denmark to sell their country. The new cool and trendy brand identity had to be re-packaged vis à vis classical images which the authorities wanted to marginalise and forget. Some products that many Danes want to eradicate are popular with Chinese – and other – tourists. While such destination problems are not unique to Denmark, they show that the Danish tourism authorities do not have the power to push for a definitive direction for branding the country. There is also limited coordination between different governmental agencies; the celebration of H.C. Andersen’s 200th birthday was lauded but some Danish tourism officials were baffled because Andersen is not a major item in the new branding campaign. Regardless, resources were made available for the celebrations and the tourism authorities naturally wanted to tap into those resources. While the Chinese tourists seem to “get their way” in wanting more H.C. Andersen in branding Denmark, they did not succeed in other – and significant – ways: for instance, in visa procurement. Denmark usually has a minority government. Policy formulations and implementations are subjected to negotiation among many political parties. The divergence of interests and policies among political parties often result in the inconveniences of democracy, which may delay efforts in bringing about intended actions. As tourists do not vote, few Danish politicians champion for them. As a result, catching illegal immigrants (a populist political stance) takes precedence over offering a seamless visa application process to welcome potential Chinese tourists. While some Chinese tourists are cheated without their knowledge, many Chinese tourists complain too, especially when they perceive they have been cheated and treated unfairly. As in the case with the video clip in Malaysia, the Chinese government demanded appropriate actions from the Malaysian government. Possibly rather unique to the Chinese government’s obsession with how China is perceived in the world, Chinese tourists are now being socialized into the global tourism culture. Many guest societies have to endure and tolerate unpleasant tourist behaviour, such as those of the brutish British football hooligans, noisy Swedish teenage drunkards and arrogant rich guests

from different parts of the world. The Chinese government takes the responsibility for its citizens and wants them to behave in a more gracious manner – according to “global standards”. Complaints from various destinations have spurred the Chinese government into action. Tourists may have the economic power to demand services, but they are also subjected to demands by the host society and possibly by its government.

The interactions between tourists and hosts are dynamic and complex. The direction of influence does not just come from the first world to the third world or just from tourists to hosts. The economic and social impact of tourism has been well researched, but as we can see above, tourism has political and international relations dimensions, as well. Mapping out the web of interplay amongst individual tourists, different industry actors and state authorities would demonstrate how international tourism has enriched the social life of the guest society, how it has generated local political concerns and how it has entrenched global tourism behaviour in individual tourists.

In the next few years, when the China outbound tourism market expands further, tourism researchers will need to develop new views and theories on power relations in tourism. The social impact of the Chinese on a host society may be significant, but the Chinese themselves would be trained and socialized for the global tourism industry.

Conclusions

Chinese tourists have a prevalent complaint in Europe; they prefer to visit Chinese restaurants. But they find the Chinese food is not “authentic” enough (People's Daily 2004b). With the influx of Chinese tourists to Denmark, perhaps Danes will experience an increased quality of Chinese restaurants in the future. While this case have a positive influence on European Chinese restaurants, researchers have argued whether tourism can be seen as a form of domination. Tourists’ preconceptions must be considered when promoting the destination and when selling tourism products. As for the Chinese tourists visiting Denmark, H.C. Andersen, romantic Copenhagen and the sleazy bits of the country are offered because of tourist demands. This article has shown that Denmark – as a developed country – is subjected to the demands of the China tourism inbound market, even though China is still a developing country. Thus, earlier tourism studies which have concentrated on how the developed world has affected the developing world through tourism should be re-evaluated. There is a rising affluent class of consumers in the developing world that will bring their demands and wealth into the global tourism industry. Also, in all tourism studies, the tourist is assumed to be a powerful group of individuals that can devastate, enrich and impose upon a host society; we can see that is not necessarily the case. The Chinese government is concerned with how its citizens behave abroad; effectively, the relatively inexperienced Chinese tourist is being socialised into the global tourism culture. In other words, new tourists have to learn how to be good guests.

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