

Sustainable Tourism and Community Benefits: Experiences from Yunnan Province, China

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable ecotourism has been considered an alternative approach to tourism development specifically to enhance community benefits vis-a-vis the protection of natural and cultural heritage in the indigenous settlements. This study takes the case of the indigenous communities of Xishuangbanna to examine the potential community benefits of ecotourism development and the key issues responsible for promoting sustainable development. It has adopted an exploratory approach to review secondary sources, such as previous research papers and reports specifically on eco-tourism, ethnic cultural heritage, and community development in the Dai villages of Xishuangbanna. Face-to-face and online interviews with tourism academics from China were also conducted. Empirical research conducted by both Chinese and overseas scholars, particularly in the Dai villages of Xishuangbanna, was selected as a reference to perform critical analysis. Findings revealed that local communities have received significant economic benefits from tourism development; however, their local culture and heritage values have been manipulated in the interests of capital and political needs. Indigenous authenticity has been largely influenced by the entrepreneurial interests, bureaucratic mandates, and economic necessities of the local people. As such, the prevailing model of tourism development generally favors the tourism entrepreneurs and the state with less attention to Dai ethnic people. This study suggests adopting inclusive community participation and collaborative efforts to promote sustainable ecotourism and community development in ethnic settlements around the globe especially country like Nepal. The article makes an effort to examine the case of the indigenous communities of Xishuangbanna, the Peoples' Republic of China the theoretical lens of PMPD.

Introduction

Tourism, being one of the largest industries in the world, has been immensely influenced by the rapid globalization of economies, capital, and

production. It is expanding due to population growth, increasing affluence of nations, expansion and diversification of travel motivations and expectations, and immense technological achievements in information and communications

and development in transportation. The interest of developing countries to improve their standard of living through tourism has considerably increased tourism activities in these countries.

As covered in a newspaper, the report published in 2022 by the World Bank reveals that the tourism industry contributed about 6.7% to Nepal's GDP, while its total impact was US\$2.2 billion (Republican, 2023). However, Nepal still lacks innovations, explorations, and the realizations of the full potentiality of the tourism industry. Hence, the innovative ideas as demonstrated in the Xishuangbanna tourism industry in Nepal could be a major game changer in the course of achieving prosperity and economic development as envisaged by Peoples' Leader Madan Bhandari. In line with his concept of PMPD, as MBF (2077 B.S.) records, Bhandari stresses the programs of economic reforms along with the political changes in post-1990 Nepal. He states his idea of distributing benefits of economic development among the working class while passing his comments on the newly formulated constitution of the country. He dreams of the prosperity of the common people and the nation (17-22). The geographical expansion and labor-intensive nature of tourism would be supportive of spreading spread employment in a wider range and can be relevant in remote and rural areas such as Nepal, where the majority of people live in extreme poverty conditions. Alternative tourism is usually equated with sustainable tourism or ecotourism, which has been widely advocated as a benign approach supporting conservation and community development. After the 1980s, ecotourism has been contested within the context of sustainable development and sustainability. It is considered as a tool to promote sustainable development. In this regard, developing countries have adopted ecotourism as a strategy to support rural livelihoods, reduce poverty and contribute towards sustainable development goals. Based on a critical review of previous research and reports

as well as interviews with scholars in China, this paper first highlights the concept of ecotourism and its potential consequences on the local communities followed by a critical examination of ecotourism impacts on local communities in Dai villages of Xixuangbanna, Yunnan province China.

Eco-tourism: An alternative approach to promote sustainable development

During post-World War II (1914-1918), specifically during the 1960s and 1970s, tourism was mainly characterized by large-scale development, with a large number of tourists visiting the destinations and mostly economic-centered (Smith & Eadington, 1992). In the 1980s, scholars advocated for the need for an alternative approach specifically to reduce the negative impacts of mass tourism and maximize benefits to local communities. Ecotourism, thus, received widespread attention both in academia and practice (Orams, 1995; Wall, 1997; Chan & Bhatta, 2013; Bhatta, 2019). The designation of the year 2002 as the United Nations International Year of Ecotourism and the subsequent World Ecotourism Summit held in Quebec City Canada are the testimony of the internationalization of the ecotourism concept (Bhatta, 2014). This summit stressed the development of ecotourism within the framework of sustainable development (Cater, 2004; Butcher, 2006).

Ecotourism has its roots deepening in the environmental movement during the 1970s and 1980s (Orams, 1995; Honey, 1999). Some scholars argued that ecotourism however existed long ago in practice if not in name. Fennel (1999) and Blamey (2001) pointed out that ecotourism existed before the 1970s in the work of Hetzer (1965) who used it to explain the intricate relationship between tourists, the environment, and the culture in which they interact. The origin of the term ecotourism, however, seems unclear; the first definition formally used the

term 'ecotourism' was provided by Ceballos-Lascurain, a Mexican architect and conservation expert, who defines it:

Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features- both past and present) that promote conservation, has low negative visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvements of local populations. (Blamey, 2001:5)

This is one of the first commonly accepted definitions of ecotourism that stresses not only what is done in destinations (e.g., study, admire, and enjoy nature and culture) but also suggests where it is done (relatively undisturbed areas), who does it (person who believes in the value of nature, society, and culture) and how they do it (low negative impacts, non-consumptive, involvements of local populations). It reveals nature orientation and sensitive ethics both ecologically and culturally (Bhatta, 2014). In line with this definition, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defined ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people (TIES, 2015). Several scholars defined ecotourism in diverse ways; however, the core concept remains the same which includes the elements of nature-based, environmental education, protection of resources, socio-economic benefits to local communities, and tourist satisfaction (e.g., Ziffer, 1989; Whelan, 1991; Cater, 1994; Dowling & Fennell, 2003).

Thus, ecotourism is thought to be more than "just tourism to natural areas" (Ross & Wall, 1999). Above all, it is a kind of tourism that is based on the natural areas and seeks to minimize its negative impacts on that environment while maximizing benefits to local communities and the resources specifically through inclusive participation of local communities in the planning

and management process. The principles of ecotourism demand consideration for a balanced planning approach to promoting sustainable development and sustainability in the destinations (UNEP/WTO, 2002; Epler Wood, 2002).

Ecotourism impacts: Issues of benefits and costs

The impacts of ecotourism are measured in terms of benefits (positive) and costs (negative). The extensive has proved that the benefits of ecotourism can be fully realized (Norris, 1992; Hatton, 1999; Slinger, 2000; Mitchell & Reid, 2001); however, in some cases, it has also fallen short of the objectives that have been set for it (Place, 1991; Ross and Wall, 1999; Nepal, 2000; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000; & Bhatta, 2019).

It is widespread that tourism impacts may vary according to the number and nature of tourists, the characteristics of destinations, and the tourism management system. Economic impacts such as increased income, foreign exchange, employment, and economic diversification are some of the key reasons that local people are interested in ecotourism development. While the tourist contributes to sales, profits, jobs, tax revenues, and income in the destinations area (Gunn & Var, 2002); the introduction of tourism in the indigenous communities may enhance opportunities for people to work in different sectors of the tourism industry such as accommodation, restaurants, tour operation, local creative enterprises (arts and crafts) transportation, entertainment, retail trade and tourism related services. The creation of jobs for local people and supporting their livelihoods is one of the key benefits of tourism. Although portrayed as an ideal concept supporting environmental protection, ecotourism may also induce adverse impacts (costs) on the environment. Buckley (2001) pointed out that the environmental impacts of ecotourism can be classified by many criteria such as by type of activity such as hiking or Heli

touring; by the type of ecosystem such as forest and field mark; by ecosystem components such as wildlife and water quality; or by the scale, duration, and significance of impacts. The type and degree of these impacts however depend on a range of factors such as several people, group size, activity, equipment, minimal impact skills and practices, ecosystem, season, and management regime (Buckley, 2004). Dowling (2002) highlighted that there was a tremendous range of issues related to the negative impacts of tourism such as pollution, crowding and congestion, damage/destruction of heritage resources, land use loss, ecosystem effects, and loss of flora and fauna. There are also examples where ecotourism has supported biodiversity conservation and environmental protection, particularly through education, awareness, and revenue generation.

Extensive research has also confirmed that ecotourism not only plays an important role in economic development but also brings enormous sociocultural changes (Pizam & Milman, 1984; Smith 1989; Hall & Lew, 1998; Lindberg, Anderson & Dellaert, 2001). According to Pizam and Millman (1984), socio-cultural impacts are the “ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in value systems, individual behavior, family relationships, collective lifestyles, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies, and organizations.” Such impacts on local communities result from interaction between host and guest, and the difference in their basic values and logic systems, religious beliefs, traditions; customs; lifestyles; behavioral patterns; dress codes; a sense of time budgeting as well as attitudes towards strangers (Inskeep, 1991). Similarly, an increase in tourists and their interaction with host communities bring local benefits such as new services and facilities become accessible to the host populations which are developed to cater

to the growing number of tourists; local arts, traditions, and cultural activities are revived and preserved as a tourism product; and the attitude of local people and tourists towards each other may be enhanced (Diamantis, 2004). It provides new job opportunities to women and youths leading to their economic independence and integration into society. In some cases, cultural attractions through commoditization become overtly commercialized in nature, satisfying the visitor’s need but losing all meaning and significance for the local communities (Wearing, 2001). The cultural concern in the interaction between tourists and communities can also be viewed in terms of assimilation, acculturation, and cultural drift (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Other social problems induced by tourism are reported as increased drug use, prostitution, crime, foreign land ownership, and over-development (Campbell, 1999).

Achieving economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits together at the community level is although a difficult task, genuine and inclusive participation of local people both in decision-making and sharing of benefits would help maximize community benefits through local empowerment. The Government, NGOs, and community-based organizations need to play proactive roles to support local people in overcoming the challenges through financial support, and educational and skill development training.

Methodology

This study uses an exploratory approach to investigate the key issues and dynamics of tourism development and its potential benefits to local communities specifically about Dai ethnic Settlements from Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province of China. An in-depth review of secondary sources such as previous research papers and reports specifically on

the eco/tourism, ethnic cultural heritage, and community development in the Dai villages of Xishuangbanna was conducted. Face-to-face and online interviews with tourism academics from China were also conducted. Previous research conducted by both Chinese and overseas scholars was selected as a reference to perform the critical analysis. Specific attention is largely paid to those research papers conducted empirically in the Dai villages of Xishuangbanna. Xishuangbanna is a land of national minorities and one of the least developed regions of China with a specific geopolitical setting. The region has received specific recognition both in terms of promotion of tourism, and priority for development by the government. It has emerged as one of the unique cultural tourism destinations in China. Its unique ethnic culture and pristine natural resources are portrayed as powerful tools for development and modernization both by the state and tourism entrepreneurs. As a result, the increasing influence of tourism development has accelerated the transformation of the Dai ethnic community. Considering these facts, settlements of the Dai ethnic community from Xishuangbanna are considered for a detailed examination of tourism's impacts on community development and heritage conservation.

Results and Discussion

Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture (XAP) is located in the southern region of Yunnan Province; one of the underdeveloped provinces in the People's Republic of China. Sharing its border with Laos and Myanmar at the extreme southwest corner of mainland China; XAP consists of rich biological and cultural diversity. The tropical rainforests with diverse flora and fauna, scenic spots, and varied minority lifestyles and cultures have drawn an increasing number of domestic as well as international tourists to Xishuangbanna. It is home to several minority ethnic groups including Dai, Han, Hani, Lagu, Bulang, Jino, Bai, Yao, Miao, Hui, Zhuang, Va,

and Yi communities, of which Dai constitute the largest group (35%) followed by the Han (30%) (Nepal, 2002). It was not targeted as a major tourism destination until the 1980s (Wen & Tisdell, 2001); tourism development started only after 1982 when the government of the People's Republic of China to designate it as one of the forty-four national-level scenic sites, and allowed foreign tourists for sightseeing. In the late 1980s, when China normalized diplomatic relations with ASEAN nations and other neighboring countries, an inter-regional development plan "Economic Quadrangle" was prepared to overcome the backwardness of the Golden Triangle through cooperation with neighboring countries (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). As the plan aimed to open markets and borders; Xishuangbanna and Simao districts of Yunnan province were opened for Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos, particularly to cooperate in the field of technology, tourism, border trade, manpower export, and environmental protection through easing transportation, tariff and immigration restrictions (Wen & Tisdell, 2001). In 1992, the government of XAP adopted a tourism development plan in its Eighth Five

Year Plan (1991-1995) with its high priority to the promotion of tourism development using the folkways and customs of ethnic minorities, and the natural resources of Xishuangbanna (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). Subsequently, the Tourism Bureau of XAP designated many folk villages as scenic sites for tourists. Emphasis was given to the cooperation with Southeast Asian countries for the development of the tourism industry and border trade (Wen & Tisdell, 2001). As a result, the Lancang-Mekong corridor development plan was initiated by China and Thailand, and the construction of a national-level trading port and resort was started at Jinghong. Thereafter, a strong wave of infrastructure construction such as hotels, roads and traffic, airport, and communication networks was started in Xishuangbanna.

The gradual improvement in transport infrastructure, accommodation services, and tourism facilities in Xishuangbanna has significantly increased the number of visitors and tourism revenue (Yang & Wall, 2008). More specifically, tourism, with its main focus

on natural and ethnic resources, has emerged as an effective means of regional economic development specifically for underdeveloped regions that are mostly inhabited by ethnic minority communities having harsh but scenic mountain environments (Oakes, 1998).



Figure 1: Map of Xishuangbanna (Yang & Wall, 2008), Figure 2: Mengbala Naxi Arts Theatre, Figure 3: Dai Settlement and Architecture, Figure 4: Dai Traditional House Form

The government and the private sector (tourism entrepreneurs) have been marketing the exotic culture and traditional ethnic identity of the Dai people as a resource for attracting tourists and investments as well as for promoting economic and cultural development (Yang & Wall, 2008). Several ethnic villages have been designated as scenic sites by the Tourism Bureau of XAP, Dai Ethnic Park is one of the most popular attractions for domestic and foreign tourists (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). Yang and Wall (2008) further pointed out that the government has strongly promoted the park with its designation as a ‘must-see site’, as well as by providing funding to improve the road network and develop more facilities in the park.

Eco-tourism in Xishuangbanna Dai minority park (Dai village)

Xishuangbanna Dai Ethnic Park, also known as Dai village, is situated at Menghan Township in Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture (XAP), 27 km. away from Jinghong City; the capital city of XAP. Known as the first ecological village in China, the Dai ethnic park is an ecotourism zone integrated with natural scenery and Dai culture with five well-preserved natural villages alongside the river Lancang (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). The community lifestyle and cultural heritage of the Dai people are the major tourist

attractions that feature displays of Dai religion, culture, traditions, customs, architecture, and production system (Sun & Bao, 2007). These are referred to as living museums of Dai ethnicity and culture. The five villages are now under the administrative jurisdiction of the Manting Village neighborhood committee of Menghan Township (Sun & Bao, 2007). According to UNWTO (2009), there were 314 households with a total population of 1487 in 2002, of which Dai people accounted for 99.26%. With its unique cultural and natural heritage, Dai village has become a key tourist destination in the Xishuangbanna. The management of tourism is not undertaken by the local people, nor solely by the government. Acknowledging the scarcity of local capital and lack of expertise on tourism entrepreneurship among the Dai people, a joint business model “enterprise plus households” was advocated by the government and applied in tourist villages to inject external capital into the local economy (Yang & Wall, 2008). It enhanced mutual economic development and benefits as well as promoted cooperation between tourism entrepreneurs and local villagers. Yang and Wall (2008:531) further pointed out that entrepreneurs usually invest in tourism facilities and village infrastructure, whereas the village provides its resources including

stilt bamboo and wooden houses, natural landscapes, Buddhist temples, and traditional life style for tourist's consumption. In addition, villagers rent their land to tourism entrepreneurs specifically with the expectation of getting jobs in the tourism sector. Tourism in the Dai village is jointly managed by the two stakeholders 'Ganlamba Firm' and 'Kunming Architecture Company' (Sun & Bao, 2007). Opened in 1999 for the tourism business, Dai village was rated as an A-category tourist destination in China. According to UNWTO (2009), this area was successful in receiving 2.69 million inbound and outbound tourists by 2006 which generated a total income of approximately 63.65 million Yuan. The nature of tourism is usually group tourism; however, in recent years there has been a gradual increase in the number of independent tourists (Sun & Bao, 2007). The rapid increase in tourism has significantly increased the annual income of Dai villagers (UNWTO, 2009). Despite economic benefits, tourism has also brought environmental and socio-cultural consequences.

Local community and tourism activities in Dai village

The five Dai villages present a combination of Dai culture, environment and tropical beauty (Sun & Bao, 2007). With the opening of Xishuangbanna for cross-border tourism, Dai people have been actively engaging in different tourism activities that have enhanced the integration of tourism with the local community. In addition to tangible cultural heritage such as Buddhist temples, vernacular buildings, and historical remnants, the intangible attributes of Dai culture such as festivals, religious ceremonies, ethnic plays and re-enactments of historical events have also been used as tourism products (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). Eco-museums have been created to preserve and showcase authentic facets of ethnic culture in the Xishuangbanna specifically with the involvement of Dai minorities. The state, tourism entrepreneurs, and ethnic minorities all engage in selecting, packaging, and selling ethnic culture

to tourists (Yang & Wall, 2008). In recent years, tourism has become an integral part of the Dai community.

Community involvement in eco-tourism activities

The local community is considered the developer of tourism, an integral part of tourism resources, and the beneficiary of tourism (Sun & Bao, 2004). Acknowledging the significance of the role of community involvement, tourism scholars pointed out that the inclusive participation of local people throughout ecotourism planning is key to promoting sustainable community development (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). In the case of Dai village, the attempts to integrate scenic spots and local communities have encouraged the involvement of Dai people in tourism activities, such as operating the Dai-house, managing Dai Jia Le, and working as a member of the company (Sun & Bao, 2007). Community involvement in tourism activities is essentially motivated by economic benefits, whereas the company aims to preserve ethnic and cultural heritage to attract tourists and thus financial revenue (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). In this regard, ethnic lifestyle and local products have been promoted by the company demonstrated at the various cultural sites of the community premises such as Dai temple. As the tourism development approach follows a joint-venture model between local people and the company, a mutually supportive relationship between local villagers and the company is inevitable to sustain eco-tourism (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). The key tourism activities in the Dai village where local people have been involved are (i) the Water Sprinkling Festival; (ii) the Seasonal Festivals of Dai; (iii) the Demonstration of Folk Arts and Crafts; (iv) the Hinayana Culture Show; (v) Song and Dance Show; and (vi) Dai Home Visiting (UNWTO,2009). Sun and Bao (2007) noted that there is a symbiotic relationship between the Dai people and the tourism entrepreneurs that have helped to share benefits among them. However, scholars such as Yang and Wall (2008), Yang, Wall

and Smith (2008); and Cable (2008) argued that tourism entrepreneurs (the company) have exploited the local culture and values of the Dai people to receive immediate economic benefits.

Economic and business activities

Dai village Company has played an instrumental role in managing a better economic and natural environment in each village. It also played a role in managing conflicts and fractions between and within communities (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). The operation model of “Home Visiting of Dai” was originally copied from Han Chinese (UNWTO, 2009). The managing company registered the buildings as “Site of Residential Building of Dai”, and tourists are invited to explore local culture, architecture, and heritage. Selling of local arts and crafts such as sand silver and gold sand is common in Dai villages. These business activities are mainly operated by villagers. With the leadership of the Village Committee or senior member of the village, 108 households were divided into two groups, receiving tourists every other day (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). Households of each group ranged from 28-30 and within each household, one family member normally a woman under age 50, is responsible for business operations (UNWTO, 2009). Since the business was normally run every other day; on the following day these members would either sell fruits or collect rubber resin (Sun & Bao, 2007). It is praiseworthy that the amount of money received from selling souvenirs is shared equally among the group members, and the account is settled on a daily base. It has provided a feeling of ownership and stewardship toward the conservation of heritage, culture, and traditional practices (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). Similarly, the Dai family provides accommodation, food, and entertainment to tourists. Tourists enjoy the Dai family life in a home-based service. According to UNWTO (2009), altogether 27 households, including 7 unlicensed households, were working in this

business which provided 100 jobs annually for the community. Within the period of Golden Week, around 200 villagers were employed for tourism services, and 50,000 tourists were attracted by the business.

It is concluded that Dai villages have great potential for eco-tourism development and enhancing community livelihoods. Sun and Bao (2007) mentioned that during the Golden Week of Chinese National Day, two families, Aungang and Aiyue in Manzha village, on a daily base accommodated 100 tourists and served food for 600 visitors with an average income of 3000 Yuan per day by each family. Most of the families worked as a cooperative group and engaged as host families in the “Enjoying Dai Family Life” program. The net profit was shared among families after deducting their initial investment (UNWTO, 2009). In addition, more than 200 stalls were operated in Dai village in 2006, of which 80% of the slots run by Dai village Company were provided free of charge. These stalls include a variety of fruits, farm commodities, barbecue shops, small food stores, and souvenir shops, providing flexible job opportunities to the residents of the five villages (UNWTO, 2009).

Employment and encouragement for local people

The Dai village Company had 463 employees in 2005 including 248 local employees from five villages. They worked in different departments mainly for undertaking labor-intensive jobs such as porters and gardeners. More than 40% of local employees work as folk artists (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). About one-third of the employees from local villages work in the resort management department though in a lower-level job. Only one of them is working in the office of the administration. None of the villagers are working in the decision-making or at the management level of the Company. UNWTO (2009) pointed out that the monthly

wage of employees from local villages ranged from 400-600 Yuan; the tour guides however earned the most such as about 1000 Yuan during peak season. The folk artists are paid lower wages.

The company is obliged to arrange jobs for folk artists from local villages. Local people are employed in the Company; the majority of them work as laborers or in low-wage jobs (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). This type of activity leads to employment and encouragement for local people which helps with overall ecotourism promotion.

Eco-tourism impacts: Does it benefit Dai community?

Over the years of the development process, eco-tourism or alternative tourism has brought both positive and negative impacts on the Dai community. It accelerated the transformation of population structure creating more off-farming jobs; facilitated the diversification of economic structure; transforming traditional agriculture into a more commercial and modern mode; and also enabled agriculture to occur along with the development of tourism and industry (Sun & Bao,2007; UNWTO,2009; Bhatta & Chan,2013). Tourism development has also brought changes in the socio-cultural life of local communities (Yang & Wall, 2008; Cable, 2008). These changes have been discussed below with the conservation and revival of Dai culture; conservation of Dai vernacular architecture; promotion of the local economy; and community participation and awareness.

Conservation and revival of Dai ethnic culture

Tourism specifically eco-tourism has encouraged local people to inherit and study their music and dances. It has also regenerated lost pieces of traditional music and songs of the Dai community. Many residents from Dai villages are involved in making handicrafts and demonstrating their folk customs. Hand-made sweets, bamboo-made souvenirs, grinding rice, and other customs such as elephant feet drum dancing, dancing with a knife, water-sprinkling show, bamboo rocket launching,

chicken fighting as well as wedding and love-matching rituals are popular activities supplied by the local community to tourists (Sun & Bao,2007; Yang & Wall, 2008, UNWTO,2009; Bhatta & Chan,2013). Folk customs and arts of the Dai community used to be regarded as their special way of life which is now recognized by markets and tourists. They are encouraged to revive Dai culture and maintain ethnic characteristics (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). So, the rediscovering process promotes the survival of the traditional customs of the Dai ethnic community which is significant for attracting tourists.

Alternatively, tourism being a part of modernization has provided opportunities for Dai people to integrate with the market economy and mainstream Chinese society (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). In this regard, Dai people's desire for a better life pushes them to be involved in tourism activities such as cultural performances. These cultural activities are often advocated as "authentic Dai culture" by tourism entrepreneurs. However, in many cases, their 'authenticity' has been exploited by entrepreneurs through modifications to fit the tourism market (Yang & Wall, 2008; Cable, 2008). Tourism entrepreneurs are the key actors in selecting the features of ethnic culture to produce 'authentic' cultural images, traditions, and lifestyles that meet commercial needs (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). It means non-locals (Han Entrepreneurs) take control of the staging and representation of ethnic culture in tourist sites. The tourism activities, as operated by the companies, have often neglected the authentic values of the Dai lifestyle. They are mostly profit-driven, and ethnic culture and values are being commoditized (Yang & Wall, 2008). In this regard, although there seems to be a good intention of promoting local culture and heritage conservation by the Company, in reality, only Han managers (non- ethnic) can decide what should be protected, and how to protect and use ethnic resources (Yang &

Wall, 2009). In addition, the company advocates for mutual engagement and development between the park and villagers; but the manager is more concerned about the maximization of its economic benefits and expansion of its business enterprises than about the development of the village (Yang & Wall, 2008; Bhatta & Chan, 2013). Despite the revival of some attributes of ethnic culture, exploitation and unethical use of local resources have also increased in recent years.

Conservation of Dai vernacular architecture

In the Dai community, residents were largely involved in tourism activities, became aware of their cultural values and heritage, and supported resource conservation (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). The Dai company aimed to protect the Dai architecture characterized by the stilt bamboo or wooden houses. These are usually two-story buildings, and people live upstairs, while the lower space is used as a storehouse for farm implements or as pens for livestock. Roofs are designed to protect the house from the intense sun as well as frequent rainstorms (Yang & Wall, 2008). Dai people proudly show off their distinctive houses that are generally airy, spacious, and perched 5 to 6 feet off the ground on thick support timber (Cable, 2008). Cable (2008: 271) noted that these traditional bamboo and wooden houses are more than just shelters for the Dai people; the ritual importance of the support beams and residence of the household's god in the family's sleeping quarters are vital concerns in Dai culture. These intangible values associated with indigenous architecture have a dominant role in deciding the construction of houses.

In general, the advocacy for the conservation of historical buildings and Dai vernacular architecture has contributed to the preservation and promotion of heritage values and the importance of Dai buildings. Yang and Wall (2008: 532) highlighted that the Park management company has adopted the slogan

“preservation is development” as a guiding principle in the ten-year development plan (2004–2014), which aims to maintain the rich folk customs of Dai; preserve traditional stilt bamboo/ wooden houses; retain the traditional lifestyle of Dai and their warm guest-receiving etiquette; preserve historical relics and religious culture. However, with the increase in disposable income and demand for the accoutrement of modern life, the traditional stilt houses of Dai people have been transforming into Han-style brick houses, forming a striking contrast with surrounding stilt bamboo houses (Sun & Bao, 2007; Yang & Wall, 2008; Bhatta & Chan, 2013). With the disappearance of traditional houses, villages are losing their image of exoticism to visitors (Yang, Wall & Smith, 2008: 763). It often increases conflicts between entrepreneurs and villagers.

Considering the demand of Han tourists, tourism entrepreneurs tended to preserve the Dai architecture in its original style; however, villagers are interested to introducing alien architecture (brick or concrete buildings). The tourism management company tried to eliminate these alien houses, but the Dai people insisted on their right to build houses as per their needs. It has heightened the conflict of interests among the stakeholders. To control local architecture, the Company formulated new park regulations in 2004 that requires villagers to maintain stilt wooden structure while renovating and building new houses. In addition, the Company promised to provide financial compensation to the homeowners if they build traditional stilt wooden/ bamboo houses (Yang & Wall, 2008). However, the compensation is a small amount, and many villagers complained about the delay in the payment of compensation (Yang & Wall, 2008). Therefore, on one hand, eco-tourism has brought economic opportunities to local people while on the other side, increased economic benefits have become an instigator of the transformation of local architecture (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). As there are tensions between

the Company and local villagers about the control of architecture and tourism; cooperation and collaboration are crucial to resolve the tensions among the stakeholders and to promote sustainable ecotourism.

Promotion of the local economy through promotion

Of Indigenous Knowledge and Skills Shifting from subsistence farming to a more diversified economy and market-based systems, ethnic people have experienced changes and improvements in their living conditions (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). A study by Sun and Bao (2007) reveals that tourism has brought several economic opportunities to local people, for example, employment for Dai people, a market for selling local products, and, increased entrepreneurial skills. As an alternative to farming activities, tourism has contributed to the promotion of the local economy of the Dai people. On the other hand, as the non-local tourism entrepreneurs such as the Park Company are provided authority to plan and manage tourism development in the region, a large amount of economic benefits is mostly accrued to the company with only a small portion going to Dai people (Chan and Bhatta, 2013; Bhatta, 2014). It is admirable that significant numbers of Dai people work in the company; however, the majority of are involved in low-rank jobs with low- wages. Many local people are employed as folk artists to demonstrate cultural performances; however, they are also paid low wages. In addition, while the village and its inhabitants are the primary attraction of the Park, they receive no portion of the Park's ticket sales, only the rental payments which are fixed for 50 years, and a yearly donation by the Park to the village temple go to local communities (Cable, 2008). Therefore, the current model of eco-tourism development in Dai village has largely provided economic benefits to the company (tourism entrepreneurs) rather than the local people. Ironically, tourism entrepreneurs who are mainly non-local make money by selling Dai culture, architecture, and

their lifestyle, without ensuring proper benefits to local people and the local economy. This has become possible due to the construction of sustainable roads and connectivity by preserving indigenous knowledge-based community participation, utilization of local resources, and improved technology.

Community participation and awareness

The inclusive participation of local people in the development and planning of ecotourism activities is crucial to promoting community development (Chan and Bhatta, 2013). It provides more opportunities for the local people to raise their voices in the planning and management of the projects. In the case of Dai village, local people are encouraged to engage in different tourism activities to meet the demand of the tourism industry. In comparison with "the other", the Dai community has perceived higher value and importance of their culture and identified themselves with a strong cultural identity (UNWTO, 2009). It has further increased the pride and feeling of ownership of local people, which contributed to enhancing harmony among community members. However, regarding the relationship between local people and tourism entrepreneurs, scholars (Cable, 2008; Yang & Wall, 2008; Yang, Wall & Smith, 2008; Yang & Wall, 2009; Bhatta & Chan, 2013) pointed out that tensions existed among stakeholders specifically on the issues of conservation of cultural heritage, economic benefits, and decision making. Although active participation of Dai people has been generally advocated in the development of tourism; decisions about local culture and heritage in the majority of tourism activities are mainly decided by the tourism entrepreneurs i.e. the Han Chinese people with less knowledge about Dai ethnicity and heritage values. In some cases, Dai culture has been exploited by the Han entrepreneurs who undermined the Dai ethnic values, and their authenticity.

Local people often tend to preserve their traditions and customs but entrepreneurs tend

to modify them to receive economic benefits. On the other hand, the conservation of Dai vernacular architecture is largely controlled by the tourism entrepreneurs who tend to preserve the stilt bamboo/ wooden house of the Dai people in their original state, but the local people, with an increase in economic benefits, tend to construct new houses with brick and concrete materials similar to Han Chinese houses specifically to receive larger space and rental value. It has created a dilemma for the conservation of heritage values (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). With the changing paradigm of development communicative participation for sustainable development is vital under the rapid development of web technology (Ananda et. al. 2023). Regarding economic benefits, no local people are included in the higher-level jobs such as in management level; they are mostly employed in low-paying jobs, such as dancers, tour guides, cleaners, and security guards. Decisions about ethnic culture, heritage values, and tourism promotion are mostly undertaken by the Han Chinese entrepreneurs, as well as the state rather than local Dai people (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). With the Economic liberalization and the decentralization of administrative power since the mid-1980s, Chinese entrepreneurs are actively participating and playing a critical role in tourism development, whereby the ethnic people, one of the key tourism resources and actors, are being largely neglected in the decision making both by the entrepreneurs and the state policies.

Contextualizing Xishuangbanna in Nepal: A PMPD viewpoint

Pokhrel et. al. (2021) also argue for smart development in the context of Nepal with a case of village assures the function of architecture involvement strongly to make economically feasible (Mishra & Pokharel, 2023). Followed Mishra and Rai (2017) for Eco-friendly development, It is most likely to draw the attention of tourists from all over the world to

sell the unique beauty of Nepal along with a healthy environment.

As recorded in a document of MBF (2078 B.S.), Bhandari states that the first stage of peoples' multiparty democracy would be an elimination of the residues of the exploitations of the old system from every sector of society. He also states that the policy would not be against foreign investment and technology. With the nation-first policy, foreign investment and technology would be protected and utilized (14). Hence, entrepreneurship and a quest for industrial development, such as tourism industries, lie at the heart of PMPD.

As recorded in a document of MBF (2021) Bhandari presents an outline of the PMPD economic and development model:

It is our firm belief that all types of opposition are not destructive. We are, however, aware of the likely adverse effect of the competitive system, especially on the distributional pattern and therefore we have envisaged such an economic program that ensures the development of productive forces and no polarization and exploitation exists in the society. Our economic program provides a leading role to the state. At the same time, it allows the private sector to play an important role in the economy, particularly through expanding its activities in the areas like trade and industry. (50)

Conclusion

The economic reforms and the open-door policy of 1978 have provided China with an unprecedented degree of exposure to the Western world. It has accelerated tourism development and positioned tourism as one of the important strategic industries for China's overall development. The opening of Xishuangbanna to the outside world in the 1980s was associated with a series of government incentive policies that have attracted many

entrepreneurs from outside the region to invest in local tourism businesses (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). Acknowledging the tourism potential of the natural and cultural heritage of Xishuangbanna; the state and entrepreneurs advocated for eco-tourism development as an important business sector and a tool to support ethnic livelihoods. In this regard, Xishuangbanna, a land of minorities and a cultural mosaic has been largely influenced by the rapid development of tourism and modernization. As one of the important destinations, Dai village of Xishuangbanna, with the rapid growth of tourism activities, transformed its sociocultural, economic, and environmental attributes. Both positive and negative consequences of tourism have been observed in the Dai community. Tourism has indeed increased opportunities for employment, income, and financial revenue for the local people (Yang & Wall, 2008); however, it is neither distributed equitably among the Dai people nor does it receive the proper economic return. Economic benefits are largely taken up by the non-local tourism entrepreneurs with only a tiny portion going to the grassroot level (Bhatta & Chan, 2013). In addition, local culture and heritage values have been manipulated in the interests of capital and political needs. Their authenticity has been largely influenced by the entrepreneurial interests, bureaucratic mandates, and economic necessities of the local people. More specifically, both the ethnic autonomy as well as the cultural identity of the Dai people have been challenged in the development of tourism activities (Yang & Wall, 2008).

The prevailing model of tourism generally favors the tourism entrepreneurs and the state with less attention to Dai ethnic people. It seems more like a mass tourism approach than ecotourism. Theoretically, while ecotourism is assumed to be a benign approach to promoting conservation and community development together (CeballosLascurain, 1996; Weaver, 2001); there exist several challenges to achieving this condition in the case of Dai villages. Studies reveal that

tensions between Dai people and non-local tourism entrepreneurs are often intensified in the villages (Yang & Wall, 2008). The conflict between local people and the company is particularly because of the (i) lack of proper recognition of local needs by the tourism entrepreneurs; (ii) lack of proper distribution of economic benefits to Dai people from tourism activities; (iii) unethical practices and exploitation of local culture, traditions, and values by the tourism entrepreneurs; (iv) control on the local architecture without providing proper incentives and benefits to local people; (v) lack of education and awareness about the local resources among stakeholders; (vi) entrepreneurs' desire to receive immediate benefits without giving proper attention to local culture and long-term benefits; and above all (vii) lack of inclusive participation of Dai people both in the decision-making process and sharing of benefits.

The planning emphasis should be given towards (i) inclusive participation of ethnic people not only in cultural performances but also in the decision-making and management of tourism; (ii) a collaborative approach where each actor can receive an equal opportunity to raise their genuine voices on the planning and management of eco-tourism development; (iii) promotion of education and awareness programs about the local culture, skills, and knowledge that could make local people more proud of their ethnic identity, and also get equal respect from entrepreneurs and tourists, (iv) consideration of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental concerns together to receive balanced development, and promote long term sustainability in the Dai village (Chan & Bhatta, 2013; Bhatta, 2014), and (v) construction of sustainable road connectivity using indigenous knowledge-based community participation, utilization of local resources, and improved technology. The critical discussion and findings of this paper would be helpful in the planning of ecotourism in indigenous communities both in China and other developing countries such as Nepal. As several ethnic

communities with unique cultural heritage exist in Nepal, the model of collaborative eco-tourism development involving local people, entrepreneurs (tour operators), and government could be a vehicle to promote development vis-à-vis heritage conservation.

Although, different political histories and developmental contexts exist in China and Nepal; the attempts of entrepreneurs (the company) to preserve local culture, and architectural heritage and to promote eco-tourism development in Dai villages of Xishuangbanna could be important lessons for Nepal. The agenda of sustainable ecotourism and sustainable development has already been addressed in the political manifesto of most of the political parties of Nepal specifically during the past three decades. Community participation in local development has critically been addressed in the number of publications of the late leader Madan Bhandari, which can be compared with the Chinese model as well. He has critically mentioned people's participation in nation building including community-based tourism development in his philosophical and vision-based publications. The Chinese sustainable eco-tourism model and its implementation strategy will be important lessons for Nepalese tour operators and entrepreneurs, who usually neglect the significance of local values, cultural heritage, and vernacular architecture in the promotion of tourism products. The philosophy of people's active participation in nation building as in PMPD envisaged by People's Leader Madan Bhandari will be a strong basis for promoting sustainable ecotourism and sustainable development in the ethnic settlements of Nepal.

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