

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

#### 1.1 CONCLUSION

With extensive promotional efforts from the government in China at its national, provincial and local levels, the tourism industry has become increasingly prominent as a major bolster for the economy. Without this policy precondition, the tourism industry in Dali could never be promoted as well as now. The state's general policy guides the province that gives instructions to prefectures. In this sense, the state-guided policy has a strong influence on the general population. When the government claims that the tourism industry will help to further rapid development, people accept it, especially if they can see some real progress.

Yet government support is not the determining factor in creating a hotspot for tourism. These places need to have their own inherent attractiveness. With a good location, special history, pleasant weather, beautiful scenery and a unique Bai culture, Dali successfully has become one of the most famous tour destinations, and regards tourism industry as its support economy. The Bai culture is the special 'selling point' in the whole tourism industry as the unique culture including its history, customs, dress, architectural style, language, belief, knowledge, art, habit and festivities. These have made Dali a famous destination nationally and internationally, as a place one must visit in one's lifetime, and made tourism a rapidly developing industry as the support economy in the prefecture.

Due to its relatively early development in Dali, tourism has had great positive influence such as a better-known image of the Dali region and the Bai people and culture, and economic growth at the macro level. Bai cultural revival and promotion has been encouraged, the sense of ethnic minority identity has been increased, and cultural products have reached a bigger market for their products. New learning approaches have been introduced, whereby local

people receive more chances to access knowledge. Employment opportunities have increased; the infrastructure has been considerably improved and has the potential for further improvement. At the same time negative impacts, such as uneven development and the reconstruction of Bai culture partly in unauthentic ways, also appear alongside the positive. Loss of cultural authenticity, change of customs, language disuse, westernization, and the encouragement of consumption can be seen as threatening the distinct identity of the Bai people.

At the micro level, local individuals in Dali express satisfaction with the tourism development promoted by the government. None of the local people who have been interviewed in this research thinks the cultural reconstruction is bad and should be considered the fault of tourism development. They regard the 'Hanization' of Bai culture as progress and a symbol of civilization. The negative impacts on Bai culture are tiny and acceptable and can be ignored. On the contrary, some think tourism has promoted and positively revived Bai culture. Furthermore, they do not agree that social problems are directly caused by tourism development; instead some think that increased tourism employment opportunities have helped reduce the crime rate. Generally, the local people who have been interviewed in this research have a positive attitude towards tourism development in Dali especially on the cultural aspect. They accept it as the main means to rapid development. Many recognize that the tourism industry has contributed to economic growth and development. They like this strategy and agree that the government is going in a satisfying direction. Only a few interviewees and their household have not experienced obvious economic benefits.

Table 5.1. Comparison of different perceptions on the impacts of tourism

	Culture		Economy	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
<b>Perceptions in literature</b>	-Increased level of intrinsic value of the local culture	-Damaging the landscape, the way of life, the culture and sets of values -Erosion of local languages -Increased commodification -Destruction of heritage -Loss of authenticity of indigenous culture	-A major global economic force -Created more working opportunities	-Uneven development -Consumerism -Temporary and sporadic employment -Uneven gender employment
<b>Individual perceptions in Dali</b>	-Promoted Bai culture -No obvious relationship between tourism and Bai culture -Cultural authenticity sustained	-Slight impact on Bai culture, which can be ignored.	-Rapid economic growth -More working opportunities	-No economic growth in some households -Tourism employment opportunities not accessible for all
	<b>Other social aspects</b>		<b>Strategic choice for developing countries</b>	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
<b>Perceptions in literature</b>	-Maintained "good-quality" environment -good for the image of the area	-Population concentration and poor resource conservation	-A key strategy for development	-A new form of imperialism
<b>Individual perceptions in Dali</b>	-Social problems not due to tourism -Improved living environment		-A main approach for the rapid development	

## 1.2 DISCUSSION

A hypothesis was set at the beginning that the promotion of tourism development by the government that brings about modernization has both positive and negative impacts on Bai culture in Dali Old Town, but that the individual perceptions by local people are more negative. After conducting the research, it is clear that the tourism development has been promoted by the government at all levels, and brought modernization along with positive and negative impacts in the Dali Old Town, but that the local individuals are more positive, especially on the impacts on Bai culture. Therefore, in this latter respect, the findings have not totally confirmed the hypothesis.

### Reasons for the Different Perceptions

It is not difficult to notice that in the literature, most of the arguments on the tourism issue have been critically focusing on the negative impacts on development and culture especially in developing countries. Then, why does the feedback from local people in Dali turn out to be largely positive? Where is the gap and how can we interpret it?

#### 1) Historical reason and the characteristics of the Bai people

The Bai people have been open to the outside world and other ethnic minorities, for new concepts and further knowledge. They learn techniques and other elements from other cultures to improve their own social and economic growth and cultural development. This is part of the reason why Bai is one of the ethnic groups with the longest history, the strongest economy and the most advanced culture in Southwest China (Zhan and Zhang, 1990). The Bai started to integrate with the Han culture very early, and there have not been obvious boundaries between Bai and Han. Some old Bai people even think that the 'Hanization' of some aspects of Bai culture is a positive development. In addition, the central government policy on ethnic minorities has encouraged different groups of people to integrate.

## 2) Economic growth is a vital element for development

The biggest problem that most developing countries are facing is an underdeveloped economy. Countries that lack basic economic strength have to focus on their basic needs, and are unable to pursue advanced development issues. For some of these countries, cultural, environmental or other issues are only secondary concerns.

## 3) Being in a primary/transitional stage

In her book about the global evolution of views on tourism and its impacts, Scheyven (2002) has pointed out the trajectory of changes in the arguments over the last 50 years. As the phenomenon of tourism emerged, arguments were largely positive; in a later stage of tourism development, more critical views were expressed which also resulted in some changes; and in the current stage the positive and negative aspects of various types of tourism are argued. The same pattern can be applied when we look at people's interpretations on tourism development in Dali. As it is still in its 'infant' or 'teenage' period, more positive views prevail, especially on its encouraging impact on economic growth. But we have also witnessed the emergence of critical views. We can expect the change of individuals' perceptions may also follow a more critical trend in the coming few years, along with emerging concomitant social and cultural problems resulting from tourism development.

## 4) Gaps between "we" and "them"

When looking at ordinary people's lives and perceptions, academics tend to interpret from their own viewpoints why 'ordinary' people behave in certain ways. Academics and grass roots have different positions from where to see and understand a phenomenon. The old Chinese saying "sitting talk is more relaxing than standing talk" can reflect that difference. Academics are well-educated people with better economic circumstances, especially the western ones, whose needs are totally different from the grass roots populations of less-developed places. As cited by Scheyvens (2002: 1), Robert Chambers has noted:

“academics get more points for writing about failure than about success (1983).” People at the grassroots level however are worried about their next meal, their own and their children’s jobs, how much they can earn from the next harvest and what the weather will be like the next day. Those different attributions form a ‘gap’ between academics and the farmers, students, waitresses and workers, who might think in a very simple but inarguably very realistic way. Therefore, it is understandable that arguments from academic writers are different from those of local individuals.

### **Beyond the Local Perceptions**

When discussing tourism development, debates are normally focused on the economic and the cultural impacts. It is necessary to analyze the two aspects in this case.

#### **1). Indifference on cultural impact**

The most prominent finding from the interviews has been the local people’s indifference on the impact that tourism might have on Bai culture, notably on the Bai language. As the key medium, language connects people and the society, and it is the tool people through which communicate with each other and deliver information. A language declines when the number of people who speak it declines and it dies when nobody speaks it any more (Crystal, 2000). The language decline and death of a language is a key question of maintaining cultural identity, since languages are regarded as a main symbol of the ethnic identity.

Although none of the interviewees think the Bai language will vanish, it is still clear that people are encouraged to speak the local Han dialect outside of the household and village communities. In other words, there are situations where they have to use the local Han dialect or Mandarin rather than the Bai language. For example, to get employment in the tourism market, the predominant requirement for a Bai person is the ability to speak the local Han dialect. So, as a communication tool, the function and use of the Bai language is decreasing, even though it is not government policy to discourage its use. We can apply Steven Lukes’

view on power to explain such a situation: the ability to shape what people need, and what their priorities are, is the peak of the exercise of power. Believing that the local Han dialect and Mandarin are more useful and functional in their daily and economic life, contributes to the disuse of the Bai language. One day, tourism development could expand to reach all parts of these communities, and the Bai language will lose its last resort. During this research, children have even expressed their dislike of Bai as it is considered “unfashionable”. This is a loud warning, which requires adequate attention.

There are also other impacts on local culture from tourism development that local individuals have not yet become aware of. Some may have noticed them but regarded them as so insignificant that they can be neglected. However, the present reconstruction and remaking of Bai culture could possibly lead to the loss of the Bai identity.

The indifference expressed by local people, especially Bai people, can be largely attributed to their change in perception of what are positive and negative, good and bad.

## 2) Reasons for the indifference are largely economic

The desire for economic growth is the most important reason identified in the research, which makes local people indifferent to tourism’s negative impacts on Bai culture.

Since the government is putting every effort to promote tourism development, the primary objective is to attract more tourists from outside. Communication with them is vital to achieve this. While in the past speaking Bai was crucial for living and communicating in the local community, now a language skill for income generation seems more important. Already, schools seldom provided bilingual circumstances, neither does the growing tourism market. People choose to speak the local Han dialect and Mandarin, or other languages to communicate with outsiders, otherwise they will be excluded from this market. Those who only speak the Bai language have few chances to participate in tourism development, let alone sharing its benefits.

### 1.3 SUGGESTIONS

In this conclusion, I may have raised more questions than answers. There is a gap between the needs, views and priorities of the ‘outsiders’ who travel and analyze tourism and the ‘insiders’ who live within it. We also need to address the dilemma between local people’s needs, notably their economic needs, and the best way to protect local culture and heritage.

There is no universal model for development as each context is different. Cases can be studied as examples, but no model can be applied everywhere. Therefore, it is necessary to look for suitable measures for development according to local conditions.

There are different perceptions on tourism development: those who support tourism emphasize the positive impacts, while the critics stress the negative impacts. There are views from outside, or those from inside, from those living in wealthier societies, or from a similar situation to the insiders, or from those in less developed societies. It is essential to listen to different perceptions, but it is vital to take decisions according to the reality of each situation.

The foremost point is that development must be people-oriented and balanced, regardless of locality, ethnicity or culture. Imbalanced development always benefits rich people more than those at the grass roots, and will not be sustainable. In order to improve this, wider and equal popular involvement must be encouraged by policy makers and all others working in tourism.

To conclude, it is everyone’s concern to seek a balance between negative and positive, poor and rich, local and global, indigenous and mainstream, economy and culture, so that to use a Chinese expression, a “virtuous circle” can be formed and sustained.