



Functions of social conflict in tourism: tourism's impacts on the Kanas Tuva and Kazakh Settlements, Xinjiang, China

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The study has five main goals. The first goal is to examine the extent to which Coser's (1956) 16 suppositions can apply to tourism impact studies in China, using evidence from the Kanas Scenic Area, where the two research contexts differ significantly, as seen in Table 1.

Lewis A. Coser's (1956) *The Functions of Social Conflict* was one sociological work that critiqued the dominant sociological paradigm — structural functionalism, and has contributed to its diminishing influence in the discipline. Coser has re-formulated and analysed sixteen of Simmel's propositions regarding conflict. These hypotheses apply to a wide range of conflicts from racial tensions to religious differences. They have valuable explanatory power for analysts of

contemporary social relations, and many of these assertions still sound reasonable today.

The second goal is to discuss tourism impacts on the Kanas Tuva and Kazakh community in relation to the concepts of tension and cooperation, which involves a series of objectives:

- ✓ To examine the nature and functions of tensions in social relationships between the stakeholders.
- ✓ To explore the extents, means, and results of tourism impacts on different populations of the community.
- ✓ To demonstrate the impact of intra-group conflict upon the structure of the ethnic community.
- ✓ To analyse the impact of inter-group conflict upon the structure of the ethnic community.

Table 1. Comparisons of the contexts of Coser's (1956) study and this study

Coser's (1956) study	This study
Western settings	China (a government-directed society)
Sociology	Anthropology (ethnic community)
Theory	Reality (the Kanas Scenic Area/tourism)
Past	Today (21 century/globalisation)

✓ To discuss the unification and alliance between groups/individuals.

The third goal is to establish a conflict-directed tourism development system of ethnic communities. The objectives include:

- ✓ To identify and examine the main stakeholders in tourism development in ethnic communities and their relationships.
- ✓ To demonstrate the mechanisms of tourism impacts from community and inter-personal perspectives.

The fourth goal is to explore the development of a 'few-population ethnic group'. The objectives include:

- ✓ To address the paradoxes and adaption of the cross-boundary *few-population minority* Tuva people in multi-minority areas in relation to tourism development.
- ✓ To explore how the Tuva people in the community maintain boundaries with other groups against the background of modernisation.

The fifth goal is to address the differences between China and Western countries. The objectives are:

- ✓ To address the differences between China and Western societies in terms of political systems, economic development, social structures, and culture.
- ✓ To present the gaps between China's eastern developed regions and the western developing and even under-developed minority areas.
- ✓ To suggest that some theories and research methods might need modification for the Chinese context.
- ✓ To recommend that researchers and

scholars researching China should have a detailed understanding about China and appropriately apply Western theories and research methodology within China's context.

Methodology

The uniqueness of the indigenous Tuva and Kazakh people in Kanas requires the researcher to become immersed in their patterns of lives. The author employed an ethnographic approach whereby she lived in Kanas, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China, for a whole year from summer 2009 to autumn 2010. This involved learning Tuva and Kazakh languages, living together with the locals, learning to ride a horse like a native, drink like a native and survive harsh winters.

A combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials and perspectives in a single study is regarded as an appropriate strategy to answer any inquiry (Flick, 1998). Data and methodological triangulation were adopted. Regarding data triangulation, different data sources, including both primary and secondary sources of information, were used. Primary sources included participative and non-participation observation in village life and tourism operation, oral accounts, interviews, and the use of a questionnaire. They were complemented by a variety of secondary data, including academic literature, artifacts, newspapers, online information, official documents and statistics. With respect to methodological triangulation, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed. Quantitative data were coded and analysed by using statistical software SPSS. Qualitative data were coded by classifying and categorising individual pieces of data.

Two levels of emic and etic paradigms are involved in this research. The first is from the perspective of the researched indigenous community: based on the author's 'insider' fieldwork in the community. The author tried to reflect the values and perspectives of the locals and provide a 'true' picture of the area; on the other hand, she provides explanation and thinking from theories as an 'outsider' researcher. The second level is regarding her identity of Chinese (insider) and the understandings of Western readers (outsider). Chinese specific values and perspectives are different from those of western world. The author has been trying to show the difference, to think from both perspectives and to enable readers, especially westerners, to better understand China, especially the research area.

Results

In undertaking this study, Coser's (1956) 16 propositions are examined and extended by making comparisons between Western and Chinese societies, by applying those concepts to an ethnic community, and by looking at the administrative realities of the Kanas Scenic Area. Based on the differences in culture between Western societies and China, it is suggested that some theories and research methods might need modification in the Chinese context.

Theoretical conclusions

This study adopts Coser's (1956) conflict theory for a discussion of tourism impacts. Therefore, the contribution of this study is assessed from two perspectives: social conflict theory and tourism studies.

Perspectives of social conflict theory

There has been a lack of empirical testing of Coser's (1956) social conflict theory within tourism. This study supports the arguments by the researcher's observations derived from one year's fieldwork, which is convincing. Furthermore, instead of merely examining a theory or a framework of other disciplines in tourism, this study broadens and deepens the original theory within the changed background against that of Coser's (1956) discussion,

especially in terms of the following four perspectives:

a) Western vs. Eastern (a government-directed society)

Simmel's (1955) and Coser's (1956)'s arguments are derived from western capitalist society. This study is conducted in a government-directed society, and argues that some arguments in Coser's (1956) study require adjustment and extension within a different context. Examples are those arguments in Coser's (1956) three propositions: Proposition 13 - Conflict binds antagonists, Proposition 8 - Conflict as an index of stability of relationships, and Proposition 4 - Conflict and hostile impulses.

b) Sociology vs. Anthropology (ethnic community)

In contrast with Coser's (1956) study which is derived from a social systems analysis, this study takes account of the characteristics of an ethnic community. Factors such as indigenous culture, belief, and the unequal positions of different stakeholders in ethnic societies are considered in this study. In the discussion of Coser's (1956) Proposition 10 - Conflict with another group defines group structure and consequent reaction to internal conflict - three factors are suggested as additional variables to Coser's (1956) concepts about conflict, group structure and consequent reaction to internal conflict. They are (1) ethnic people's marginalised position in society, (2) the membership criteria (ascribed or achieved), and (3) the relative strength of the groups involved in conflict (highly unequal or varied). It is argued that these factors must be taken into account when discussing the conflict regarding ethnic groups.

c) Theory vs. Reality (the Kanas Scenic Area/tourism)

In applying Coser's (1956) theories to the situation in Kanas, his modes of social analysis are useful in that changes to traditional life styles are occurring with

subsequent social disharmonies arising into which his theoretical concepts provide an insight; however those insights arguably remain incomplete as they do not analyse the reasons *per se* for the disequilibrium. Furthermore, the stakeholders in tourism are highly correlated, which limits the frequency of conflict.

d) Past vs. present (21 century /globalisation)

Coser's (1956) discussions about the functions of social conflict relate to the period of the early part of the 20th century and even earlier. This study is conducted in the 21st century against the background of globalisation. Modern Western culture is spreading to each corner of the world, with the ethnic communities no exception, and thereby the tension between western modern and indigenous cultures arises. On the other hand, due to a close connection between groups and individuals in the globalisation context, conflict and tensions exist in new forms, in contrast to the counterparts of the cold war era.

Tourism Perspectives

Coser's particular construct of conflict has not been applied to tourism impacts on an ethnic minority and this thesis thus breaks new ground in that context. Coser's (1956) 16 propositions are fully borrowed for the discussion of tourism impacts on different segments of the community. There is a general lack of empirical evidence in the tourism literature as to the functions of social conflict and the relationship between tourism impacts and conflict. When such concern does exist, it is directed primarily toward the reduction of conflict. However conflict is a necessary and positive part of all social relationships, and a necessity for social change. In this study, both the positive and negative functions of social conflict in tourism are discussed.

(1) A tension-directed tourism development system is established. This system involves both macro and micro perspectives of tourism impacts. It embodies the evolutionary mechanism of tourism destinations, an

emphasis on the four stakeholders, and the changes of inner-personal relationships during tourism development.

(2) This study provides a holistic view and systematic approach to the research of tourism impacts. It demonstrates the nature, forms, and means of conflict between the groups and subgroups, contributing to researching the extents, approaches and reasons relating to tourism impacts. Not only tourists, but also governments, tourism entrepreneurs, local community and tourism development of the destinations, are taken into account in the discussion of tourism impacts. Not only are the consequences of tourism on the locals assessed, but also the determinants and the mechanism of tourism impacts are involved.

(3) It provides a useful tool to compare and contrast tourism impacts and their determinants in tourism destinations. Many tourism impact studies are empirical studies which emphasises the specific characteristics of the case areas, and lack a comparison with other case areas and related studies. The framework of analysis and the tension-directed tourism development system provide a tool for comparing and contrasting tourism impacts on different areas. It permits a discussion of the determinants of different tourism impacts on different destinations. It therefore permits cross case study analysis from which generalisation becomes possible.

(4) Tourism's impacts on multi-minority communities are discussed. Studies of tourism's impacts on indigenous people commonly concentrate on areas inhabited by one indigenous group; however, globally, tourism destinations that are inhabited by more than one minority are not unknown. Consequently interactions among multiple minority groups in tourist destinations require attention from researchers if a better understanding of the social and cultural impacts of tourism is to be developed. This study makes some contribution to this domain.

(5) There is a lack of research on domestic

tourists who are the main component of the ethnic tourism destinations in many developing countries. This study provides a systematic research and survey on studying domestic tourists.

(6) There is a lack of systematic research on tourism impacts on ethnic communities in northwest China in literature in English, and this study fills such a gap.

Practical application of the dissertation

In line with the theoretical conclusions of the study, a number of practical implications require addressing, including (1) an objective attitudes towards the social conflict inherent in tourism development; (2) a balance of stakeholders' interest; (3) an attention to sub-groups' interests; (4) ethnic people's psychological problems during social change; (5) antecedent conditions for tension, such as social positions, cultural norms, demographics, and social structure when dealing with conflict; (6) the relationship between conflict and cooperation/unity/alliance, and so on. Importantly, it is suggested that the functions of conflict in contributing to the social development should be considered and emphasised.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one: Introduction

Chapter one presents an outline of the research and its significance, goals and objectives.

Abstract of chapter two: Literature review

Chapter two critically reviews the tourism impact literature relevant to this research to establish the theoretical context. In line with the research objectives, a conceptual framework for studying tourism impact is proposed and is tested empirically in the context of the Kanas Tuva and Kazakh settlements in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China.

Abstract of chapter three: Research sites

Chapter three describes the study area and the specific study sites. China, especially its ethnic minorities, is also introduced to provide

English-speaking readers with a broader background to this research.

Abstract of chapter four: Research methods

Chapter four covers the research methods that were employed in the field research and data analysis. The research challenges and limitations are also discussed.

Abstract of chapter five: Conflict and group boundaries

Chapter five describes the stakeholders involved in the study, namely, governments, tourism entrepreneurs, tourists and local ethnic people by providing a description of these groups. The description serves a function by indicating the potential sources of tension that can arise, and how these tensions, following the theoretical work of Coser (1956), help reinforce sense of identity.

Abstract of chapter six: Hostility and tensions in conflict relationships

Chapter six discusses the nature and functions of opposition and tensions in social relationships between stakeholders in tourism development, and Coser's (1956) four propositions regarding these issues are examined.

Abstract of chapter seven: In-group conflict and group structure

In Chapter seven, the extents, approaches, and results of tourism impacts on the different populations of one community – the Kanas Scenic Area are discussed, and Coser's (1956) three related propositions are discussed.

Abstract of chapter eight: Inter-group conflict and group structure

Chapter eight discusses the impact of conflict with another group upon the structure of the indigenous community, in line with Coser's (1956) further four propositions.

Abstract of chapter nine: Conflict- the unifier

In Chapter nine, the role of conflict as a means of unifying antagonists is discussed, and Coser's (1956) final four propositions regarding this issue are developed within the context of China.

Abstract of chapter ten: Conclusions

The thesis terminates with a summary and conclusions in Chapter ten. Based on the discussions in this study, a tension-directed tourism development system is established. Its theoretical and practical implications are discussed. Specific implications for China, considering China's specific issues, are provided. Some recommendations relevant to the research objectives are identified. Contributions and limitations of the research are discussed as well. Finally, directions for future research are suggested.

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