



Analyzing government role in rural tourism development: An empirical investigation from China

Chunyan Liu^a, Xueting Dou^{b,*}, Jiangfeng Li^a, Liping A. Cai^b

^a School of Public Administration, China University of Geosciences (Wuhan), 388 Lumo Rd, Hongshan District, Wuhan, Hubei, 430074, China

^b School of Hospitality & Tourism Management, Purdue University, 900 W. State Street, West Lafayette, IN, 47907, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

China
Government role
Rural tourism
Rural regeneration

ABSTRACT

Rural tourism in China is flourishing, largely credited by the scholars in China to the national government's stimulating policies and emphasis on rural regeneration. Against this backdrop and given the scarce literature on the government as a critical stakeholder in rural tourism, this study examines the roles of Chinese central- and local-level governments in rural tourism development. We analyzed both secondary data sourced from government documents and primary data collected through interviews with local government employees and residents at a rural destination in China. The results indicate that the central government plays a steering role in guiding rural tourism towards desired directions, and the local government plays a serving role by directly managing tourism practices and coordinating with businesses and residents to provide services and solve problems. The synergistic interaction of the central and local governments in China stimulates the rapid development of rural tourism.

1. Introduction

For decades, rural areas around the world have endured challenges of declining economic activity, restructuring of traditional agrarian industries, aging population and out-migration of higher-educated youth, and dwindling viability of small towns and villages (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004; Lane, 1994; Sharpley, 2002). The quest for rural regeneration has led to the adoption of tourism as an alternative means for achieving economic and social revitalization. The benefits of rural tourism as an engine for economic development and a contributor to rural resident quality of life (QOL) have been highlighted in previous literature (e.g., Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Su et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the market demand for rural tourism continues to grow. An increasing number of people seek out the natural scenery and authentic folk customs in the quiet and peaceful countryside to escape from industrialization and urbanization, further promoting tourism development in rural areas (Lane, 1994; Sims, 2009).

Rural tourism in China has been moving forward rapidly in the 21st Century and is currently at the stage of flourishing development (Zhang et al., 2017). In 2018, the sector of rural tourism (including leisure agriculture) recorded 3.0 billion person-visits, generated over 800 billion RMB yuan (about \$123.1 billion) in revenue, and elevated the

income of 7 million rural households (Zhang, 2019). Scholars in China have observed, to varying degrees, that such prosperity of rural tourism is benefited from the national government's emphasis on prioritizing rural tourism development to facilitate rural revitalization (Liu et al., 2017; Su, 2011; Xue et al., 2017), especially since 2014 when rural tourism was declared a pivotal approach for rural development (Li et al., 2019). A series of policies and initiatives by the Chinese government show unprecedented support for developing rural tourism (Chen and Chen, 2007; Yang, 2013).

Although it has been recognized that the government role comprises a crucial and complex organization in the system of rural tourism and rural area development (Richter and Richter, 1985; Su et al., 2019), the need of research on government behavior is largely overlooked, even in countries like China where the government holds a critical position in the political system (Fu, 2017; Ruhanen, 2013; Su et al., 2019). The limited amount of studies discussing government roles in rural tourism mostly focus on the European context and the role of local or regional governments (e.g., Bjärstig and Sandström, 2017; Gullino et al., 2018; Iorio and Corsale, 2010; Ruhanen, 2013). To the authors' best knowledge, there has not been a study exploring the roles of both the central and local governments in China in the context of rural tourism development (Su et al., 2019; Wang and Yotsumoto, 2019).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: cyl20151008@outlook.com (C. Liu), xdou@purdue.edu (X. Dou), jfli@cug.edu.cn (J. Li), liping@purdue.edu (L.A. Cai).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.08.046>

Received 10 October 2019; Received in revised form 14 August 2020; Accepted 14 August 2020

Available online 24 August 2020

0743-0167/© 2020 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

As such, this study aims to fill the research gap by articulating the Chinese government role at both the central- and local-level in rural tourism development. Since the county government is considered the most important formal institution of local-level administrative governance (Cao, 2011), the government role at the local level is demonstrated through the analysis of the behaviors of a county government. Therefore, the following research objectives are to be achieved: (1) to identify the central government's role in rural tourism development through reviewing the pertinent government documents; (2) to specify the local government's role with a qualitative case study of a rural tourism destination in central China—Daye County; and (3) to construct a model of the Chinese government role in rural tourism development and explain its mechanism by integrating the relevant concepts in the field of public administration (i.e., New Public Service, service-oriented government).

2. Literature review

2.1. Government role in tourism development

While governments around the world hold distinct ideologies and differ in formal structures and other features, they seem to agree on the importance of tourism as a development tool and have adopted a more active role and interventionist approach in the tourism sector than in others (Hall, 2005; Ruhanen, 2013). In general, the government shapes the economic climate and provides the overall regulatory framework in which the tourism industry operates, and also assumes an influential role in planning, managing, and promoting tourism (Hall, 2005; Nunkoo and Smith, 2013). More specifically, Hall (2005) identified seven functions of government with regard to tourism development, namely “co-ordination, planning, legislation and regulation, entrepreneur, stimulation, a social tourism role, and a broader role of interest protection” (p. 236). The last function of protecting the wider public interest is a particular responsibility of the public sector's, as competing interests are likely to emerge in tourism development that call for the active involvement of governments to ensure the balance of achieving short-term benefits and long-term objectives (Hall, 2005; Jenkins and Henry, 1982; Nunkoo and Smith, 2013).

Prior research indicates that the primary reason or rationale for government intervention in tourism has transformed from mainly economic considerations to the extended concerns over environmental and social consequences of tourism development (Bramwell, 1994; Nunkoo and Smith, 2013; Wight, 2002). Especially, the widespread support for sustainable development since the 1980s has propelled the government to adopt the sustainability imperative, as an alternative to the economic development imperative, in developing and managing tourism (Sharpley, 2005; Wight, 2002). For example, Connell et al. (2009) explore the involvement of local and regional government in sustainable tourism planning under the national tourism strategy of New Zealand and reveal the dual role of the public sector as a gatekeeper of tourism development through planning control and a facilitator of economic growth powered by tourism. Similarly, Wight (2002) specifies the research, education, and policy development roles of the provincial government of Alberta, Canada in the region's ecotourism and sustainable tourism initiatives.

In the context of rural tourism, the sustainability imperative can be manifested in the incorporation of tourism as an element of the overall rural development policy, which promotes the contribution of tourism in the destination community's economic well-being, cultural integrity, and environmental stewardship (Bramwell, 1994; Sharpley, 2005). While managing rural tourism sites and businesses is likely to be devolved to the local-level administration, integrating rural tourism with broader development strategies and managing tourism development as a mechanism for rural socio-economic regeneration, as Sharpley (2005) argues, must remain the responsibility of the central government. Appropriate central government policy and guidance is an essential ingredient of effective rural tourism management; nonetheless,

except for in a few cases (e.g., Finland), establishing national rural tourism policy is far from being the rule (Sharpley, 2005).

Moreover, given the calls for smaller government and less government intervention in the Western society, the functions of tourism planning and development have been increasingly held at the regional or local level, while the national tourism agencies mostly focus on developing stronger public-private partnerships in the tourism industry and initiating promotion and marketing activities (Hall, 2005). For instance, a group of interviewed community leaders and local businesspersons in Illinois, USA stressed the perceived need for organized central agencies and councils to provide tourism information and technical assistance at the regional and state level (Wilson et al., 2001). Overall, the current body of literature lacks thorough, empirical investigations of government roles in tourism development in general, and in rural tourism in particular. This study addresses this gap by examining how the central- and local-level governments in China participate in rural tourism development to help optimize the economic and social returns from tourism.

2.2. China's rural policies and theoretical guidance from public administration

The central government of China has attached gradual yet increasing importance to rural development since the beginning of the 21st Century. In 2004, the then-President Hu stated that China entered a developmental stage where “industry nurtures agriculture, and urban areas support rural regions,” which geared China's strategic planning from a predominant focus on cities towards balanced urban-rural development (Wen, 2004). Since 2004, the central government has demonstrated its commitment to rural revitalization by declaring the annual national policy (known as the *No. 1 Central Document*) to address the “three rural issues,” namely agriculture, rural areas, and farmers (Li and Xie, 2019; Tian et al., 2016). In 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) further proposed the rural revitalization strategy, which marked the first-time inclusion of rural regeneration in national development strategies (Xinhua, 2017). Rural development has enjoyed unprecedented attention and support from the central government.

Rural tourism has been identified as an effective way to promote rural regeneration in China. The *Guidance on Promoting Rural Tourism Development* issued by the National Tourism Administration (NTA) spells the role of rural tourism in building a “new socialist countryside” (People's Daily, 2006). In 2009, the *Suggestions on Accelerating Tourism Development* by the State Council of China confirmed the role of rural tourism as the nation's strategic new pillar industry (The State Council, 2009).

The ultimate goal of rural revitalization, including rural tourism development, is to elevate resident QOL (Iorio and Corsale, 2010; Su et al., 2019), which is reflected in China's rural policies. The emphasis on the fundamental interests of rural residents conforms with the citizen-centered value in public administration (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). Placing citizens, citizenship, and the public interest at the forefront, the paradigm of New Public Service (NPS) presents a set of ideals and related practices that emphasize the role of the public sector in facilitating citizenship and promoting democratic governance (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000, 2015). Especially, NPS argues that the primary role of government is to *serve*—to help citizens articulate needs and meet their shared interests, rather than to *steer*—to attempt to control the society or merely establish rules and incentives through which people will be guided towards certain directions (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000). The government should increasingly play a facilitating, a conciliating, or a mediating role while holding public interest as the aim and encouraging citizen engagement (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000, 2015).

Scholars in China have acknowledged the theoretical significance of NPS to the ongoing reform of Chinese public management towards establishing a service-oriented government (Zhao and Leng, 2011). At

the core of the service-oriented government is the idea of “serving the people” and involving citizens’ views during the decision making process (Chen et al., 2010; Zhao and Leng, 2011). Li and Chen (2018) integrate the principles of NPS and service-oriented government in analyzing the local government behavior in the national initiatives of constructing a Beautiful Countryside, and reveal the existing issues attributed to the local government’s inadequacy in serving rural residents and communities. As such, NPS and the concept of service-oriented government provide valuable theoretical guidance in the investigation of government role in China.

Policy-wise, the central government’s emphasis on rural tourism along with the overall rural development is unambiguous. However, it is not evident if and how these policies have been implemented at the regional and local levels. As significant stakeholders of rural tourism, governments at various levels and their roles in developing rural tourism through policy-making and implementation warrant more investigation. Taken into consideration the relevant concepts in the field of public administration (i.e., New Public Service, service-oriented government), the present study aims to shed light on this topic in the context of rural tourism in China.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection and analysis

Both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. For the primary data collection, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted through two rounds of fieldwork by the first and third authors in Daye County, China (August 2–8, 2018 and February 18–28, 2019). Purposive sampling was adopted to identify and select information-rich subjects related to the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). The authors first sought information from Daye County government employees regarding the departments or agencies critical to rural tourism development and were provided a list of 7 local government departments (with three more added after the first round of interviews). The potential sample was thus confirmed to include employees of these departments. As the Daye County Tourism Administration was considered the most relevant department where employees were deeply involved in local tourism practices, the authors first approached and invited potential subjects there to talk about their perspectives and experiences regarding Daye County rural tourism development. Four Tourism Administration employees were interviewed. Upon the completion of each interview, the interviewee was asked to recommend and help contact other potential interviewees from the departments on the list. In this manner of snowball sampling, a total of 27 Daye County government employees from 10 departments related to rural tourism development were selected and interviewed.

In addition, the researchers randomly selected a total of 26 residents living in or near the five relatively established rural tourism destinations in Daye County to solicit their first-hand experiences of local tourism development through interviews. Table 1 shows the interviewee profile.

Open-ended questions were asked to both government employees and rural residents. Key interview questions for the employees included: “What do you think the role of the Daye County government is in developing rural tourism?” and “What initiatives have your department taken for rural tourism development?” The residents were asked such questions as “Have you noticed any impact of rural tourism on your quality of life?” and “What roles do you think the local government has played in developing rural tourism and changing your quality of life?” To fully capture and probe the issues brought forward by the interviewees, follow-up questions were asked based on the subjects’ responses to the key questions. The interviews lasted from 25 to 45 min.

The secondary data were sourced from Chinese government documents retrieved from the official government websites and other media outlets such as online newspapers. Specifically, the government documents include the annual *No. 1 Central Document* from 2000 to 2017,

Table 1
Profile of interviewees from Daye County.

| Government Employees | | Rural Residents | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|
| Daye County Government Departments | Count | Rural Tourism Destinations | Count |
| General Office of Government | 6 | Zhaoshan Village | 6 |
| Tourism Administration | 4 | Shangfeng Village | 5 |
| Development and Reform Committee | 3 | Ewangcheng Estate | 6 |
| Bureau of Agriculture | 2 | Longfeng Estate | 5 |
| Bureau of Environmental Protection | 2 | Chutianxianggu Estate | 4 |
| Finance Administration | 2 | All Interviewees | |
| Bureau of Natural Resources | 2 | Female | 22 |
| Bureau of Planning | 2 | Male | 31 |
| Administration for Market Regulation | 2 | Age 20-29 | 3 |
| Transport Administration | 2 | Age 30-44 | 26 |
| | | Age 45-59 | 19 |
| | | Age ≥60 | 5 |

reports at the annual National People’s Congress from 2010 to 2017, as well as other conference reports and speech notes from government officials. These documents were released by the State Council, NTA, the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), and other central government branches in China managing rural tourism and rural development issues. The Appendix lists 20 pieces of representative government documents along with their brief content.

We analyzed the qualitative data from both the primary and secondary sources with the method of content analysis. Specifically, the first and third authors read and coded the interview transcripts and government documents independently in an attempt to identify emerging themes and sub-themes. Then, all the authors (including the first and third authors) reviewed and discussed the two sets of resulting themes, especially ensuring the subjects’ views were accurately reflected in the emerging themes through constant comparison with the original interview transcripts. Based on the connections and conceptual similarities among the themes and the research purpose of this study, the authors finally agreed on three themes and eight sub-themes, as shown in Table 2.

3.2. Case study site

Daye County is located in the southeast of Hubei Province, China, covering a landmass of approximately 1566.3 km² and a rural population of 447,000 people (as shown in Fig. 1). Daye County was chosen as

Table 2
Themes and sub-themes from content analysis of qualitative data.

| Themes | Sub-Themes |
|--|--|
| 1 Roles of the central government in rural tourism development | Important developmental strategies to promote rural tourism and rural regeneration Guidance/directives on investment Promotions and recommendations |
| 2 Roles of Daye County government in rural tourism development—perspectives of Daye government employees | Supervising and managing the procedures of rural tourism development Providing services for rural tourism development |
| 3 Roles of Daye County government in rural tourism development—perspectives of Daye rural residents | Supervising and managing the procedures of rural tourism development Providing services for rural tourism development Impact of rural tourism development on quality of life |

the case study site for three reasons. First, the county historically depended on heavy industry and mining as key parts of its economy, both of which were declining due to the depletion of natural resources (Zhao et al., 2015). The residents of Daye County suffered from the economic stagnation of the area as well as the deterioration of the natural environment (Tang, 2013). The overall situation propelled the adoption of alternative economic activities, such as rural tourism, to reverse the vicious cycle and achieve sustainable development in the long term.

Second, rural tourism in Daye County has been developing rapidly and effectively since its official initiation in 2012. As shown in Fig. 2, since 2014, the tourist arrivals and tourism revenue have been increasing at a fast pace. In 2017, Daye County was selected as one of the national models for leisure agriculture and rural tourism by the MOA, indicating its remarkable performance in rural tourism development. Third, the first and the third authors have years of experience (from 2013 to 2016) in tourism planning and government strategic analysis in Daye County. Their acquaintance with this region provides a basic understanding of the government role in the context of rural tourism and facilitates the progress of the primary data collection through on-site interviews.

4. Findings

Based on the synthesis and analysis of the government documents and interview data, we summarized the results into a model of the Chinese government role in rural tourism development, as shown in Fig. 3. At first sight of the government documents, the marching orders from the central government highlighting rural tourism and rural area revitalization may appear redundant between the two. However, when digging deeper into the language of each policy and subsequent directives from various government branches, we found that the policies of rural development and rural tourism are complementary to each other, so are their strategic principles, which can be described as synergistic. Under these principles, rural tourism development is facilitated

by both the central and local governments. The central government guides with macro-level policies and provides policy-related stimulation to lower-level governments. The local government—in this case, the Daye County government—actively responds to the national policies, supervising and directly involved in the process of rural tourism development. Holding the improvement of rural resident QOL as the ultimate goal, the central and local governments interact in a synergistic way to facilitate rural tourism development.

4.1. The central government: guiding and promoting

The central government of China represents the highest level of authority nationwide, steering the country towards effective development, including in the process of developing rural tourism. Although market economy has been practiced since 1978, the central government still controls the power to govern regional/local officials through appointment, supervision, and provision of rewards and punishment (Cao, 2011), thus still playing a crucial role in the development of economic activities and enterprises. The importance attached by the central government to a particular policy directly impacts on the effectiveness and efficiency of lower-level governments' implementation. The emphasis, guidance, and stimulation from the central government are the source of power for rural tourism development. The role of the central government in rural tourism can be specified in three dimensions (as indicated in Fig. 3 and Appendix) and explained in detail as follows.

4.1.1. Creative campaigns

To enact various policies on rural tourism and rural development, the State Council and its agencies at the national level have staged goal-driven campaigns. These campaigns are creatively branded to mobilize resources and motivate actions. The most notable ones are constructing the New Socialist Countryside and Beautiful Countryside, and promoting Smart Tourism and Holistic Tourism. The New Socialist Countryside refers to revitalized rural areas described as “advanced production, improved livelihood, civilized social atmosphere, clean and

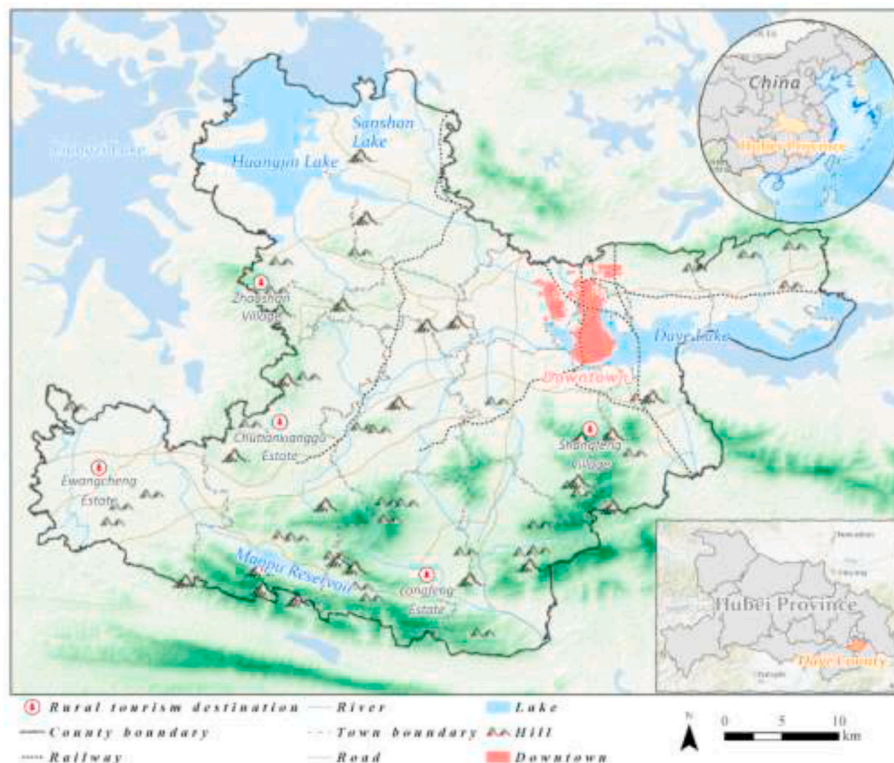


Fig. 1. The geographic location of and rural tourism destinations in Daye County, China.

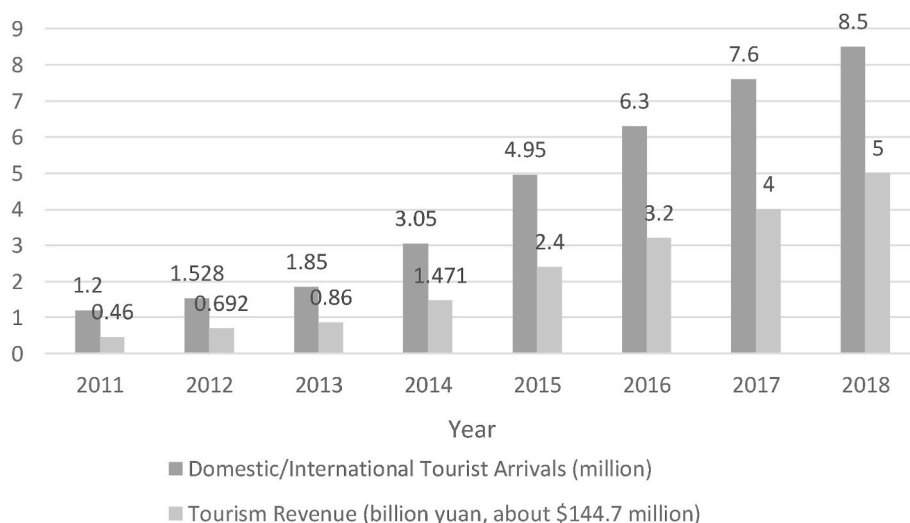


Fig. 2. Daye County domestic/international tourist arrivals and tourism revenue by year (data from *Daye Yearbook, 2012–2016*, and *Daye County Government Reports, 2017–2019*).

tidy villages, and democratic administration” (The State Council, 2005). The Beautiful Countryside highlights the environmental aspects of rural development, emphasizing the prerequisites for promoting rural tourism (Ministry of Agriculture, 2013). Smart Tourism, on the other hand, encourages the advancement of rural tourism driven by information technology, particularly in building the national network and platform for tourism-related public services (Xue, 2015). Holistic Tourism focuses on the integrated use of and shared access to expertise and resources. This campaign aims to present a particular area as an all-inclusive rural tourism destination for the benefit of both the tourists and the focal communities and residents (Li, 2016).

4.1.2. Resource-related stimulation

The central government employs resource-related stimulation in terms of beneficial policies on capital, lands, information technology, personnel, and other infrastructural facilities and services to create conducive circumstances for the thriving of rural tourism (People’s Daily, 2012). The funds available come from the budgetary allocation of the central government as well as national grants targeting specific forms of rural tourism (The State Council, 2016a). Innovative financing schemes are established to assign scattered funds into rural areas, often through such public-private partnerships as “government + farmers,” “farmers + rural community,” and “corporation + community + farmers” (The State Council, 2015a, The State Council, 2016a).

Lands are fundamental to the development of rural tourism. The central government has loosened the policy restrictions regarding the use of rural lands for tourism (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2015; Xinhua, 2017). Along with the revised policies, the government sets up a marketplace where farmers can subcontract, lease, exchange, or transfer the use of their lands for the benefit of rural tourism (Xinhua, 2008). Rural cooperatives are incentivized to convert unused lands into hotels, restaurants, parking lots, and other tourism facilities and operations. Businesses and individuals from outside of the rural areas are also allowed to engage in tourism-related operations and activities through various forms of contract arrangement with farmers or cooperatives (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2015).

The central government’s promotion for the urban-rural balance in terms of infrastructure, public services, and social welfare has enabled the rural area to catch up with the cities in various aspects (Xinhua, 2010, 2012, 2017). In the process, rural tourism has benefited from the government directives which prioritize the development of rural destinations and the improvement of tourism-related facilities (The State Council, 2015b). Furthermore, initiatives including the Clean Village

Project and Quality Country-Road Project have offered solutions to the baseline issues of sanitation, transportation, and environmental protection facing the rural area. The accomplishment of these projects provides critical prerequisites for the progress of rural tourism (Ministry of Transport, 2018; The State Council, 2006).

4.1.3. Best practice promotion

Promoting best practices and establishing national models provide valuable references to the regional and local rural tourism management, reducing their trial and error costs. The central government has embraced an approach of rewarding and promoting the best practices in rural tourism. The purpose is to encourage local governments and rural destinations to learn from others’ experiences and to reflect on their own practices. Initiatives in this respect include the Most Beautiful Villages in China (China Central Television, 2013), National Leisure Agriculture and Rural Tourism Demonstration Counties and Demonstration Sites (Ministry of Agriculture, 2012), and National Models of Holistic Tourism (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2019). The central government employs a three-step procedure: the top-down communication of evaluation principles, the bottom-up system of review and selection, and the top-down promotion of the selected models. Consequently, counties, villages, and other rural tourism sites strive to present outstanding performance to become national models, boosting the prosperous development of rural tourism nationwide.

4.2. The local government: managing and serving

Local governments are responsible for the down-to-earth implementation of the central government’s policies and provision of a multitude of services and solutions to possible issues in rural tourism development. The prosperity of rural tourism relies on the practices of the local governments—in this case, the Daye County government along with its subordinate departments. Based on the interviews with the government employees and local residents, we revealed three distinct dimensions of the local government role in rural tourism development: planning and managing, supervising and regulating, and investing and coordinating. These three dimensions do not work in isolation; rather, they take effect as an integrated role for the ultimate purpose of developing sustainable rural tourism and improving resident QOL. Specifically, the government serves as a manager to administer rural tourism through planning and managing as well as supervising and regulating. At the same time, the government, as a facilitator, coordinates with businesses and residents, provides necessary services,

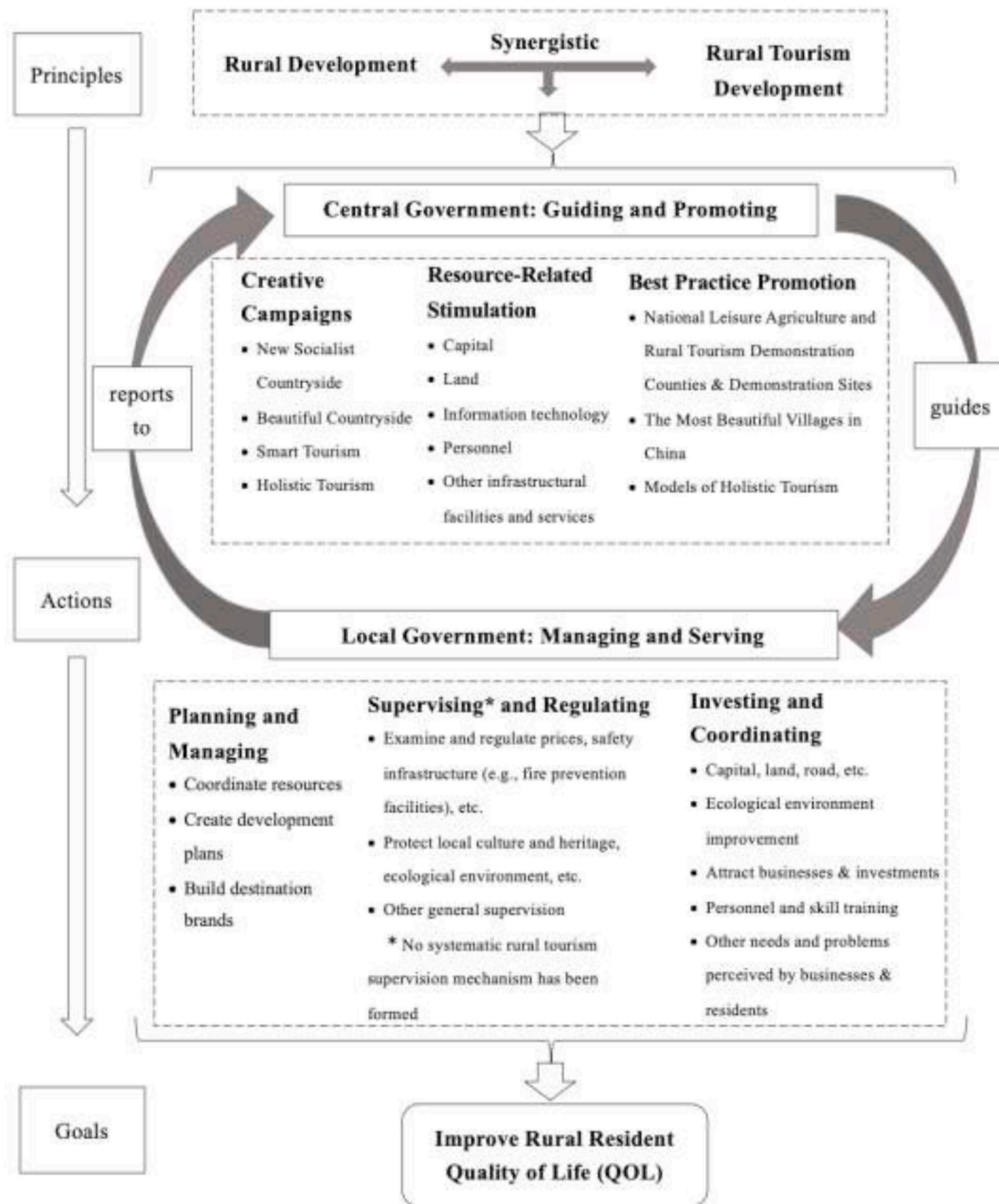


Fig. 3. The model of the Chinese government role in rural tourism development.

and solves practical problems.

4.2.1. Planning and managing

The Daye County government directly manages and engages in the process of local tourism development. The emphasis attached by the county government determines, to some extent, the speed and quality of tourism development in Daye County. As one interviewee (G6) mentioned, “It was the Daye County government who chose rural tourism as a viable approach for the county’s economic transformation. The county government hit the switch that turned on the fast-paced development of rural tourism.” The local government plays an irreplaceable role in coordinating resources, creating development plans,

and building destination brands.

Rural tourism is not just an enterprise of one village or one destination; it requires the coordination of multi-dimensional resources including lands, funding, transportation, and marketing, which is beyond the capability of rural residents or small businesses. Several government employees highlighted the role of Daye County government in planning and managing rural tourism. For example, one employee (P1) denoted:

The county government collaborated with professional planning agencies to achieve the orderly development of rural tourism, avoid the conflict and repetition between destinations, and maximize the benefit of tourism. They compiled several plans for Daye County,

including the overall plan for tourism development, the plan of leisure agriculture and rural tourism, the plan of holistic tourism, and so on.

Tourism branding, especially the formation of joint brands, can strengthen the market appeal of tourism destinations (Cai, 2002). The county government has organized the China Rural Horticultural Exhibition in six consecutive years, with different themes as hosted by different towns/villages in the county. The exhibition helps Daye County build a unique rural tourism brand, which enhances its image as a rural destination and differentiates it from competitors. Meanwhile, the county government actively seeks collaboration with media platforms, including newspaper, television networks, and social media, to advertise the tourism products of Daye County and expand the market. Several government employees acknowledged the role of the county government in building a consistent destination brand, as one employee (T2) explained:

The county government has hosted the China Rural Horticultural Exhibition for several years. Since 2014, the government has devoted a considerable amount of funds, goods, and labor to a series of rural tourism festivals and events. Although each event has a different theme, such as roses, fruits & vegetables, and health & wellness, they are all crowned the China Rural Horticultural Exhibition. It forms a significant brand effect for Daye County.

4.2.2. Supervising and regulating

The supervision and regulation by the local government ensure the efficient utilization of tourism-specific funds, the quality of constructions, and the benefits gained by rural residents. Adequate supervision is needed for regulating the tourism market behavior, protecting the destination brand image, and promoting the sustainable prosperity of rural tourism. The Daye County government employees pointed out that, government departments such as the Bureau of Environmental Protection, Tourism Administration, Administration of Cultural Heritage, and Administration for Market Regulation are all responsible for preserving the ecological environment and cultural heritage as well as ensuring the legitimacy of the tourism operations. For instance, one employee (E1) said:

Multiple Daye government departments are supervising and regulating the operations of tourism-related companies, farm-to-table restaurants, and homestay businesses. The Bureau of Quality and Technology Supervision, Food and Drug Administration, Bureau of Culture and Market Supervision, and the fire department jointly organize an annual inspection of the public areas of rural communities, rural tourism sites, restaurants, and accommodations. The inspection aims to ensure the sanitation, food safety, and the well-functioning of the infrastructure, fire-prevention facilities, and entertainment facilities.

An employee from the Bureau of Environmental Protection (E2) indicated that, “Our department monitors the protection of the ecological environment and cultural heritage. If any illegal or damaging activity is detected, the tourism operation will be requested to close and correct the violation on top of a monetary penalty and other potential penalties.” In addition, an employee from the Bureau of Natural Resources (L1) denoted: “Our department supervises land use and transfer. We evaluate whether the essential farming lands are effectively protected, and whether the construction lands are legitimately utilized.”

Nevertheless, the local government only carries out general, industry-wide supervision and regulation. No systematic and targeted mechanism has yet been formed for regulating rural tourism in Daye County. One of the interviewed local residents (R15) perceived the inadequacy of the local government in regulating tourism businesses: “Some tourist company is doing an unauthorized road construction on the farm land that I leased out. The villagers’ committee won’t do

anything about it, and I don’t know which upper-level government department could help me resolve this problem.”

4.2.3. Investing and coordinating

In addition to managing the directions of rural tourism development in Daye County, the county government also provides various services needed for tourism development and the improvement of local residents’ life. Before undertaking rural tourism, the villages in Daye County were inadequate in terms of infrastructure and public services. Most of them failed to meet the requirements of facilities and the overall environmental condition for developing tourism. The Daye County government has been committing substantial capital and labor to improving infrastructure and facilities since the initiation of rural tourism. In addition, the county government and villagers’ committees also cope with issues among rural residents and incoming investors regarding land rental and other conflicts.

Sufficient funding is the basis for any municipal construction and development. The most explicit contribution from the county government to rural tourism has been the distribution of funds, which was demonstrated in the interviews with the employees from multiple government departments. Besides the local fiscal revenue, the county government has been actively applying for rural development- and tourism-related grants from the provincial and the central government. Daye County initiated the strategy of developing tourism and building an ecologically healthy county in 2013. Since then, the county government has devoted a large amount of money annually to rural tourism and rural revitalization. One interviewee (F2) said:

In 2012, the county government invested 10 million yuan (\$1.45 million) in rural tourism development. There has been a 20% increase annually since then, and the amount has reached 30 million yuan (\$4.35 million) per year since 2018. These funds are mostly used for rewarding the development of high-quality tourism operations. In 2018, 265 farmers’ cooperatives and 53 family-owned farms were rewarded or compensated by the county government.

Businesses comprise a major part of the tourism industry. Rural tourism in Daye County cannot enjoy rapid and sustainable development without the injection of businesses. Employees from the Daye Tourism Administration and the Development and Reform Committee mentioned that, as villagers on their own can hardly get in touch with competent entrepreneurs for potential investment in local tourism, the government agencies help the villages attract high-quality businesses as well as individuals with abundant capital for tourism development in the area. For example, D2 said:

The government has limited capacities, and rural residents lack funds and relevant skills, so the development of rural tourism requires a push from businesses and individuals with means. Our department is responsible for attracting businesses and investments to the county. We need to actively accomplish the task to obtain sufficient resources to develop rural tourism.

When external businesses come to the county and during their operations afterwards, the government assists them in dealing with various issues based on the businesses’ needs and residents’ requests. As another employee (P1) noted:

Rural tourism generally needs a longer time to develop in order to show the return-on-investment. Besides, rural residents often hold a hostile attitude towards the outside companies. Therefore, companies need the local government to assist them in developing tourism operations. The government departments mainly help with the land transfer, road construction, supply of electricity and tap water, and expedited review and grant of operational licenses.

A local resident’s remarks also reflect the government role in this aspect: “We villagers usually do not communicate directly with the

business owners. When disagreements emerge between residents and businesses in tourism development, we go to the villagers' committee or the county government, and they will coordinate with the businesses" (R7).

The essential factors impacting on the development of rural tourism and rural resident QOL include the convenience of transportation, the safety of drinking water, access to electricity, availability of public restrooms, and the overall ecological environment of the village. The interviews with government employees from the Daye County Transport Administration, Tourism Administration, and Finance Administration reveal that the county government has been making efforts to construct and renovate village roads and public restrooms and improve the ecological environment. In addition, the government has provided land-use permits for tourism-related constructions and appropriate skill training for rural residents. The directing committee of the China Rural Horticultural Exhibition has offered specific guidance on rural tourism operations in the county. One interviewee (R2) specified:

In recent years, country roads have been built and renovated around the tourism destinations, including Shangfeng Village, Ruisheng Fragrance Industrial Park, and Longfeng Estate. By the end of 2018, 164 km of country roads have been built, stimulating the tourism development along the route and elevating rural resident QOL as well.

Another interviewee (G4) also noted:

In 2018, the county government invested 48 million yuan (\$7 million) in total in rewarding and compensating the 1216 rural revitalization projects in 213 villages. The projects include building and renovating roads, village landscaping, roadway lighting, constructing cultural squares, providing safe drinking water in villages, and other major improvements of infrastructure and the environment.

The local residents' comments seem consistent with the government employees' remarks. For example, one resident (R4) said: "The road to the village and those inside the village, as well as the street lamps and ponds, are all built and renovated by the local government. If not for the development of tourism, our village would have remained in poor condition as before."

5. Discussion and conclusion

As a country that exercises a governance system dominated by one political party and yet has experimented a series of economic reforms with elements from other governance systems, China offers a new fertile ground to examine phenomena and explore ideas unseen and unknown elsewhere. Given the increasing presence of China in regional development and resident QOL improvement, understanding the Chinese government role in one of the fastest growing sectors in rural areas—rural tourism—is valuable to both the academic community and the practices of rural revitalization.

The current Chinese political system is characterized by the separation of the power to govern officials from the power to govern people, forming the "vertically decentralized authoritarianism" (Cao, 2011). In this system, the local government takes the responsibility of governing people and managing specific affairs under its jurisdiction, as long as the local officials abide by the principles of the central government (Cao, 2011). The results of this study accord with this system-wise characteristic and indicate that the central and local governments coordinate with each other, holding the overarching improvement of resident QOL as an objective and promoting rural tourism synergistically with rural area development. On the surface, certain strategies and initiatives of the local and central government appear indistinguishable, while a deeper look into the decisions and actions reveals different roles played by the government at different levels in rural tourism development.

The central government mainly plays a steering role, providing favorable policies and creating a conducive macro-environment to guide and enable lower-level governments to efficiently develop rural tourism. Through launching creative campaigns, providing resource-related stimulation, and promoting best practices and successful experience nationwide, the central government sends a signal to local government saying that, effective rural tourism development is the desired direction and supporting policies and resources are accessible. Meanwhile, the local (i.e., Daye County) government, which has attained increased degree of autonomy in China's administrative reform and devolution in recent years, directly participates in rural tourism development and plays the role of a manager and a service provider. In addition to the engagement in tourism planning and management as well as investment in land, capital, and infrastructure construction, the local government actively interacts with subordinate institutions, tourism businesses, and rural residents to help them articulate their needs and perceived issues in tourism development and seek solutions to the problems.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Tourism research largely focuses on the perceptions and behaviors of tourism enterprises, tourists, and local communities in the process of tourism development (Amerta, 2017; Byrd, 2007; Mottiar et al., 2018). The examination of the government as an important stakeholder has been an area of relative neglect in the extant tourism literature (Jenkins and Henry, 1982; Ruhanen, 2013). The current study enriches the research on tourism stakeholders by comprehensively discussing the government role in developing rural tourism in China.

Scholars have acknowledged the China central government's emphasis on rural tourism as an essential driving force for its rapid development nationwide, while no in-depth analysis was conducted to investigate how exactly the central- and local-level governments are involved in rural tourism. Integrating the key idea in the paradigm of New Public Service (NPS) and the concept of service-oriented government, we specify different roles of the governments at different levels and extend the application of the public administration concepts to the tourism domain. Specifically, our findings indicate that, in rural tourism development, the central government of China plays a steering role, while the local government—although also "steers" in the key decision-making processes regarding local tourism development—mainly plays a serving role by directly managing tourism practices and coordinating with businesses and residents to provide services and solve problems. It is evident that China has not yet fully established a service-oriented government, but is still undergoing a transformation.

Although the public sector is encouraged to step away from the steering role and focus on serving, the current study suggests that these two roles are not necessarily contradicting, especially in the context of rural tourism. As previous researchers point out, utilizing tourism development as a mechanism for rural regeneration remains the responsibility of the central government and needs to be incorporated into national rural policies (Bramwell, 1994; Sharpley, 2005). The central government role revealed in this study is consistent with these points of view. Moreover, the findings of this study contribute to the research on Chinese government roles by presenting alternative insights to the conventional perceptions that governments within a centralized political system can only practice the role of steering. The separate examination of the government role at central and local levels proves to be necessary in a given context.

5.2. Managerial implications

The synergistic interaction of the central and local governments stimulates the rapid development of rural tourism in China. As a country with centralized administrative system, the Chinese central government exerts a stronger guiding force on the lower-level governments and institutions. Thus, the state-promoted rural tourism strategies tend to be

implemented promptly and effectively through the regional and local governments. The signal from central government also drives the inflow of external capital, which further encourages the nationwide development of rural tourism. The local government—in this case, Daye County government—fosters the prosperity of local tourism by providing supervision and necessary services and actively communicating with the subordinate institutions (e.g., township government, villagers’ committee), tourism businesses, and rural residents, resolving problems such as difficulty to attract investment, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient branding and marketing efforts.

Meanwhile, significant issues emerge as rural tourism is promoted throughout the country. The central government’s steering is likely to lead to an infeasible “one-size-fits-all” strategy, resulting in homogeneous tourism products. Regional and local governments often hastily carry out rural tourism initiatives for better performance evaluation and compete for resources provided by the central government, leading to various problems such as dissipation of resources and destruction of indigenous culture. Moreover, Daye County government is excessively involved in the specific tasks of rural tourism development. The provision of all-inclusive and “micromanager-style” services to the tourism sector will not only exhaust the local government, but also induce the following issues. First, businesses and rural residents become over-reliant on the local government and less motivated to increase the competitive advantages of their tourism products/services, leading to an unsustainable rural tourism industry in the area. Second, the local government stresses too much on the role of serving while neglecting its responsibility of regulating. The public interest may be compromised when the local government favors the tourism businesses for the benefit of tourism development in dealing with a conflict of interest between businesses and residents. Third, Daye County government targets the townships and villages with rich tourism resources and supplies them with advantageous conditions for development, causing an inequality of public services among tourism destinations and non-tourism destinations.

With the progress of globalization as well as a blur of the barriers between socialism and capitalism, effective pro-development approaches put forward by any country or region are worth learning by other places in the world. The “Chinese-style” rural tourism development and the corresponding government roles provide valuable implications for other countries and regions. Based on the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the model presented in this study, the following managerial implications are provided.

First, the higher-level government should leverage its broad range of impacts to promote tourism development and create a conducive environment through policy-making. The local government should help local destinations select the most appropriate route for developing tourism and designing competitive products. In addition to providing management and services, the local government should make efforts to cultivate the competence of local businesses and residents in developing and maintaining tourism operations. External capital should be

attracted to invest in local tourism facilities, thus to avoid the excessive government investment in tourism destinations and the consequent inequality of public services between destinations and non-destinations in the region. Meanwhile, the local government role of supervising and regulating needs to be strengthened to rectify and prevent illegitimate behaviors. When conflicts emerge between the interest of local residents/communities and that of tourism development, the local government should hold the citizen-centered principle and the goal of improving resident QOL, prioritizing the protection of public interest over the pursuit of short-term profits in tourism development.

5.3. Limitations and future research

The current study has some limitations that warrant attention. First, as it is difficult to get in touch with officials from the central government for data collection, we utilized relevant government documents as the secondary data to analyze the central government role in rural tourism. While the government documents can largely reflect the directives of the central government, it is optimal to collect primary data through interviews or panel discussions, which we will make efforts to do in the future. Moreover, because of the relatively powerful position of the central government in China’s political system, the developmental approaches of rural tourism in China may represent a unique path involving a greater degree of government intervention and effective implementation of state-level policies. Future research may continue with this line of inquiry in the context of countries with different political systems and/or in various developmental stages.

In addition, this study lacks quantitative evidence to corroborate the effectiveness of the steering and serving roles played, respectively, by the central- and local-level governments in rural tourism development. Nevertheless, this study provides an important first step by articulating government behaviors in rural tourism, laying the foundation for quantifying the impact of the government actions. Future research could extend the current study by investigating the influence of the government policies and initiatives on particular aspects of tourism development or other stakeholders of the tourism sector (e.g., businesses, local residents) with in-depth, quantitative analyses.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Chunyan Liu: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing - original draft. **Xueting Dou:** Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization. **Jiangfeng Li:** Investigation, Data curation, Project administration. **Liping A. Cai:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Appendix. Selected Chinese government documents of rural tourism policies

| Category | Title of document | Main content |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Creative Campaigns | New Socialist Countryside Report from the 5th Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China— <i>Several suggestions on promoting the construction of the New Socialist Countryside</i> (The State Council, 2005) | The requirements of constructing a New Socialist Countryside include advanced production, improved livelihood, civilized social atmosphere, clean and tidy villages, and democratic administration. To build a new socialist countryside is to increase farmers’ income by promoting agrarian production, to drive democratic progression by reinforcing rural resident education, to enrich rural residents’ cultural life by strengthening rural community cultural development, to promote primary and occupational education in the |

(continued on next page)

(continued)

| Category | Title of document | Main content | |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Resource-Related Stimulation | Beautiful Countryside | <i>Perspectives on the launch of developing a Beautiful Countryside</i> (Ministry of Agriculture, 2013) | countryside, to enhance rural medical and healthcare system, and to build and improve rural social security system. It is proposed to build a Beautiful Countryside by reinforcing ecological development and environmental protection and regulation in the rural area. Ten models were presented, including industrial development, ecological protection, suburban intensification, integrated social management, cultural heritage, fishery exploitation, prairie and pasture, environmental renovation, leisure travel, and high-efficiency agriculture. |
| | Smart Tourism | The National Tourism Administration— <i>Guidance on promoting the development of Smart Tourism</i> (Xue, 2015) | Facilitate the application of information technology in tourism experience, management, and industrial development. By 2020, distinctly increase the smart tourism service capability; consistently reinforce smart management; progress in big data mining and smart marketing capabilities; widely apply mobile e-commerce, systematic analysis of tourism big data, and artificial intelligence in tourism; nurture more enterprises with smart tourism as core businesses, and form a systematic network of smart tourism value chain. |
| | Holistic Tourism | Report on the 2016 National Tourism Work Conference— <i>From single-destination tourism to Holistic Tourism: Create the new situation of tourism development in China</i> (Li, 2016) | To facilitate the transformation from single-destination tourism to holistic tourism. It is designed to achieve the conformable improvement of economic and social resources within the area, promote the integrated development of the primary, secondary and tertiary industries, and enable the shared access to tourism development process and achievement by all industries, departments, and community members. |
| | Capital | <i>Guidance on initiating pilot project of mortgage loan for management right of contracted lands and property right of housing in rural areas</i> (The State Council, 2015a) | Initiate the pilot project of mortgage loan for management right of contracted lands (cultivated lands) and property right of housing in rural areas, increasing the capital input for medium-to-long term agricultural production and scale operation. |
| | | <i>Guidance on the mechanism of innovative rural infrastructure investment and financing</i> (The State Council, 2017.) | Increase fiscal expenditure on agriculture and rural areas, provide more central infrastructure investment to agriculture and rural areas, maintain the consistency and stability of agricultural subsidy and gradually broaden the scope. |
| | | <i>Several suggestions on applying new ideas to accelerate agricultural modernization and achieve goals for a moderately prosperous society</i> (also known as <i>The 2016 No. 1 Central Document</i> ; The State Council, 2016a) | Encourage the PPP (Public-Private-Partnership) model—the cooperation of government and social capital, guide and support for the development of leisure tourism products with high rural community participation and wide range of beneficiaries. |
| | Land | <i>Decisions from the Central Committee of the CPC regarding several important issues on promoting rural reform and development</i> (Xinhua, 2008) | Based on the rules of being legal, voluntary, and with compensation, farmers are allowed to subcontract, lease, exchange, transfer, or start a joint stock partnership, etc. to circulate the management right for contracted land, developing moderate-scale operation in various forms. |
| | | <i>Suggestions on the policies supporting land-use for tourism development</i> (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2015) | In accordance with law, collective economic organizations in rural areas can use construction land to self-operate or co-operate tourism/hospitality businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and parking lots with other organizations or individuals by pooling of land as shares, joint operation, etc. |
| | | President Report on the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Xinhua, 2017) | Organizations and individuals other than rural collective economic organizations can use collectively owned cultivated land and unused land to engage in tourism-related activities such as crop farming, forestry, stock farming and fishery, through contract management turnover in accordance with law. |
| | Information Technology | President Report on the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Xinhua, 2012) | The time frame for using contracted lands in rural areas is extended for another 30 years, which ensures the sustainability of land-using for rural tourism development. |
| | <i>The 13th five-year guidelines on nationwide information development of agriculture and rural areas</i> (Ministry of Agriculture, 2016b.) | It is proposed to facilitate the synchronized development of industrialization, informationization, urbanization, and agricultural modernization. Informationization has been elevated to a national development strategy, which brings about a significant opportunity for the informationized development of agriculture and rural areas. By 2020, achieve outstanding results of the “Internet plus” modern agriculture development; significantly improve the level of informatization in agriculture and | |

(continued on next page)

(continued)

| Category | Title of document | Main content |
|---|---|--|
| | <i>The nationwide planning for modernized agriculture, 2016–2020</i> (The State Council, 2016b.) | rural areas; integrate information technology and agricultural production, operation, management, and services; and use informatization as a leading force for driving the development of agricultural modernization. Promote the technological development in rural areas with research, development, and promotion of agricultural technology; incentives for technological innovation; construction of agricultural technology park; and skill-training for agriculture practitioners. |
| Personnel | <i>Several suggestions on further facilitating tourism investment and consumption</i> (The State Council, 2015b) | Guide and support millions of returned migrant workers, college graduates, and professional technicians to initiate entrepreneurship through rural tourism operations. |
| | <i>Opinions on supporting people who return or go to the countryside for entrepreneurship and innovation to promote the integrated development of primary, secondary and tertiary industries</i> (The State Council, 2016c.) | Provide policy support for those who return or go to the countryside to initiate entrepreneurship and/or innovation, including rural migrant workers, high school/college graduates, veterans, and scientific and technical personnel. |
| Other Infrastructural Facilities and Services | <i>Several suggestions from the State Council of China on strengthening the coordinated urban-rural development and further laying foundations for rural and agricultural development</i> (also known as <i>The 2010 No. 1 Central Document</i> ; Xinhua, 2010) | Rural infrastructure construction has the priority to use funds from fiscal budget, fixed asset investment, and land-selling profit, facilitating the collective development of and benefit from urban-rural infrastructure. Increase the quality of rural public service, emphasize on villages and cities/towns with more migrating rural residents in terms of social undertakings, and promote the expansion of urban public service to rural areas. Promote urban-rural public service equality and the joint and united development of education, health and medical services, culture, and social security systems by advancing the development of rural infrastructure and public service. |
| | President Report on the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Xinhua, 2012) | |
| | President Report on the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Xinhua, 2017) | |
| Best Practice Promotion | <i>Notice about the continuing development of the National Leisure Agriculture and Rural Tourism Demonstration Counties and Demonstration Sites</i> (Ministry of Agriculture, 2012) | To explore development models, identify best practices, and reflect on and advocate experiences, the Ministry of Agriculture and National Tourism Administration launched the annual initiative since 2010. Eligibility to become demonstration counties/sites and application procedures have been provided. |
| | <i>The Most Beautiful Villages in China</i> | Since 2013, the Ministry of Agriculture, National Tourism Administration, State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of China, and the China Central Television collaborated to select the ten Most Beautiful Villages in China based on criteria including prosperous industries, suitable living environment, civilized rural atmosphere, effective management, and well-off livelihood, and promoted these best practices nationwide. |
| | <i>Guidance on developing Models of Holistic Tourism</i> (National Tourism Administration, 2017) | The National Tourism Administration released several official documents regarding holistic tourism, including the <i>Identification Criteria for National Models of Holistic Tourism and Evaluation Criteria for National Models of Holistic Tourism</i> . The first batch of national models were identified in September 2019, providing best practices for the development of holistic tourism. |

References

- Amerta, I.M.S., 2017. The role of tourism stakeholders at Jasri tourism village development, Karangasem regency. *Int. J. Soc. Sci. Humanit.* 1 (2), 20–28.
- Anderock, K.L., Nyaupane, G.P., 2011. Exploring the nature of tourism and quality of life perceptions among residents. *J. Trav. Res.* 50 (3), 248–260.
- Björstig, T., Sandström, C., 2017. Public-private partnerships in a Swedish rural context—a policy tool for the authorities to achieve sustainable rural development? *J. Rural Stud.* 49, 58–68.
- Bramwell, B., 1994. Rural tourism and sustainable rural tourism. *J. Sustain. Tourism* 2 (1–2), 1–6.
- Briedenhann, J., Wickens, E., 2004. Tourism routes as a tool for the economic development of rural areas—vibrant hope or impossible dream? *Tourism Manag.* 25 (1), 71–79.
- Byrd, E.T., 2007. Stakeholders in sustainable tourism development and their roles: applying stakeholder theory to sustainable tourism development. *Tour. Rev.* 62 (2), 6–13.
- Cai, L.A., 2002. Cooperative branding for rural destinations. *Ann. Tourism Res.* 29 (3), 720–742.
- Cao, Z., 2011. The vertically decentralized authoritarianism and the mechanisms of political stability in China. *Sociol. Stud.* 1, 1–40.
- Chen, Z., Chen, X., 2007. Actively develop rural tourism, promote the development of new socialist countryside. *J. Hunan Administration Inst.* 2007 (1), 48–49.
- Chen, L., Wang, X., Zhao, J., 2010. The approach from developmental government to service-oriented government—based on case studies of returnee’s entrepreneurship policy in Shanghai, Suzhou and Wuxi. *Gongong Guanli Xuebao [J. Publ. Manag.]* 7 (3), 47–51.
- China Central Television, 2013. The Official Kick-Off of the 2013 Find the Most Beautiful Villages in China. Retrieved from. accessed. http://cctv.cntv.cn/lm/meilizhongguoxi_anguoxing/xzzmxc/index.shtml. (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Connell, J., Page, S.J., Bentley, T., 2009. Towards sustainable tourism planning in New Zealand: monitoring local government planning under the Resource Management Act. *Tourism Manag.* 30 (6), 867–877.
- Denhardt, R.B., Denhardt, J.V., 2000. The new public service: serving rather than steering. *Publ. Adm. Rev.* 60 (6), 549–559.
- Denhardt, J.V., Denhardt, R.B., 2015. The new public service revisited. *Publ. Adm. Rev.* 75 (5), 664–672.
- Fu, S., 2017. Analysis of the Government Behavior in Rural Tourism Development in Wulong District, Chongqing [Master’s Thesis]. Retrieved from. accessed. <http://cdmd.cnki.com.cn/Article/CDMD-10635-1017846167.htm>. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Gullino, P., Devecchi, M., Larcher, F., 2018. How can different stakeholders contribute to rural landscape planning policy? The case study of Pralormo municipality (Italy). *J. Rural Stud.* 57, 99–109.

- Hall, C.M., 2005. The role of government in the management of tourism: the public sector and tourism policies. In: Pender, L., Sharpley, R. (Eds.), *The Management of Tourism*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Iorio, M., Corsale, A., 2010. Rural tourism and livelihood strategies in Romania. *J. Rural Stud.* 26, 152–162.
- Jenkins, C.L., Henry, B.M., 1982. Government involvement in tourism in developing countries. *Ann. Tourism Res.* 9 (4), 499–521.
- Lane, B., 1994. What is rural tourism? *J. Sustain. Tourism* 2 (1–2), 7–21.
- Li, J., 2016. From Single-Destination Tourism to Holistic Tourism: Create the New Situation of Tourism Development in China. Retrieved from. accessed. <http://www.dlxzf.gov.cn/dlgovmeta/bmxzgz/gzbm/lyj/zfbgkml/tygkxx/201610/t201610231674868.html>. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Li, L., Chen, Q., 2018. Initiatives of building a beautiful countryside through the theoretical lens of new public service—a case study of County E in Guangxi. *Mod. Bus. Trade Ind.* 23, 29–31.
- Li, J., Xie, Y., 2019. The No. 1 Document by the Central Government Continuously Focuses on the Three Rural Issues for 16 Years, Sending Out These Packages Beneficial to Farmers. Retrieved from. accessed. <http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-02/20/c1124137146.htm>. (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Li, J., Huang, T., Qu, X., 2019. The development and prediction of rural tourism policy in China in recent 30 years. Retrieved from Resour. Dev. Market 7. accessed. <https://mall.cnki.net/magazine/Article/ZTKB201907013.htm>. (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Liu, J., Nijkamp, P., Lin, D., 2017. Urban-rural imbalance and tourism-led growth in China. *Ann. Tourism Res.* 64, 24–36.
- Ministry of Agriculture, 2012. The Notice from the General Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Office of National Tourism Administration about the Continuing Development of the National Leisure Agriculture and Rural Tourism Demonstration Counties and Demonstration Sites. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/zwgg/2012-03/08/content_2086872.htm. (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Ministry of Agriculture, 2013. Perspectives from the General Office of the Ministry of Agriculture on the Launch of Developing a Beautiful Countryside. Retrieved from. accessed. http://jiuban.moa.gov.cn/zwlwm/tzgg/tz/201302/t20130222_3223999.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2019. The First Batch of National Models of Holistic Tourism Has Been Announced. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/fuwu/2019-09/06/content_5427750.htm. (Accessed 10 September 2019).
- Ministry of Natural Resources, 2015. Interpreting the Suggestions on the Policies Supporting Land-Use for Tourism Development. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.mnr.gov.cn/gk/zqjd/201512/t20151214_2364876.html. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Ministry of Agriculture, 2016. The notice from the Ministry of Agriculture about the distribution of the 13th Five-Year Guidelines on Nationwide Information Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas. , 2016–. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Ministry of Transport, 2018. The Notice from the Ministry of Transport about Releasing the Regulations of Rural Roads Construction and Quality Management. Retrieved from. accessed. http://xxgk.mot.gov.cn/jigou/aqyzjlgjlj/201811/t20181122_3131434.html. (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Mottiar, Z., Boluk, K., Kline, C., 2018. The roles of social entrepreneurs in rural destination development. *Ann. Tourism Res.* 68, 77–88.
- National Tourism Administration, 2017. The notice from the National Tourism Administration regarding the distribution of the Guidance on Developing Models of Holistic Tourism. , 2017–. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Nunkoo, R., Smith, S.L., 2013. Political economy of tourism: trust in government actors, political support, and their determinants. *Tourism Manag.* 36, 120–132.
- Palinkas, L.A., Horwitz, S.M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N., Hoagwood, K., 2015. Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Adm. Pol. Ment. Health* 42 (5), 533–544.
- People's Daily, 2006. The Director of the National Tourism Administration Talks about the Effect of Rural Tourism Development in Constructing a New Countryside. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/zwhd/2006-04/28/content_268294.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- People's Daily, 2012. The Report by Hu Jintao at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Retrieved from. accessed. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2012/1118/c64094-19612151-3.html>. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Richter, L.K., Richter, W.L., 1985. Policy choices in South Asian tourism development. *Ann. Tourism Res.* 12 (2), 201–217.
- Ruhanen, L., 2013. Local government: facilitator or inhibitor of sustainable tourism development? *J. Sustain. Tourism* 21 (1), 80–98.
- Sharpley, R., 2002. Rural tourism and the challenge of tourism diversification: the case of Cyprus. *Tourism Manag.* 23 (3), 233–244.
- Sharpley, R., 2005. Managing the countryside for tourism: a governance perspective. In: Pender, L., Sharpley, R. (Eds.), *The Management of Tourism*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Sharpley, R., Vass, A., 2006. Tourism, farming and diversification: an attitudinal study. *Tourism Manag.* 27 (5), 1040–1052.
- Sims, R., 2009. Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *J. Sustain. Tourism* 17 (3), 321–336.
- Su, B., 2011. Rural tourism in China. *Tourism Manag.* 32 (6), 1438–1441.
- Su, L., Huang, S., Huang, J., 2018. Effects of destination social responsibility and tourism impacts on residents' support for tourism and perceived quality of life. *J. Hospit. Tourism Res.* 42 (7), 1039–1057.
- Su, M.M., Wall, G., Wang, Y., Jin, M., 2019. Livelihood sustainability in a rural tourism destination-Hetu Town, Anhui Province, China. *Tourism Manag.* 71, 272–281.
- Tang, J., 2013. The economic transformation of resource-depleted cities: a case study of Daye County. *Contemp. Econ.* 21, 82–83.
- The State Council, 2005. Several Suggestions on Promoting the Construction of the New Socialist Countryside by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2006/content_254151.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- The State Council, 2006. Actively Develop the Pilot Sites of the Clean Village Project. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/node_11140/2006-04/22/content_260913.htm. (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- The State Council, 2009. The Perspectives of the State Council of PRC on Expediting the Development of the Tourism Industry. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2009-12/03/content_3983.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- The State Council, 2015a. The Guiding Perspectives by the State Council on Initiating Pilot Projects of Mortgage Loan for Management Right of Contracted Lands and Property Right of Housing in Rural Areas. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/24/content_10121.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- The State Council, 2015b. Several Suggestions by the General Office of the State Council on Further Facilitating Tourism Investment and Consumption. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/11/content_10075.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Several suggestions on applying new ideas to accelerate agricultural modernization and achieve goals for a moderately prosperous society. , 2016–. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- The State Council, 2016b. Notice from the State Council regarding the distribution of the Nationwide Planning for Modernized Agriculture, 2016–2020. , 2016–. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Opinions on supporting people who return or go to the countryside for entrepreneurship and innovation to promote the integrated development of primary, secondary and tertiary industries. , 2016–. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- The State Council, 2017. Guidance from the State Council of China on the mechanism of innovative rural infrastructure investment and financing. , 2017–. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Tian, Q., Guo, L., Zheng, L., 2016. Urbanization and rural livelihoods: a case study from Jiangxi Province, China. *J. Rural Stud.* 47, 577–587.
- Wang, L., Yotsumoto, Y., 2019. Conflict in tourism development in rural China. *Tourism Manag.* 70, 188–200.
- Wen, Y., 2004. Guangming Daily: Industry Nurtures Agriculture, and Urban Areas Support Rural Regions. Retrieved from. accessed. <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/40551/3081895.html>. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Wight, P.A., 2002. Supporting the principles of sustainable development in tourism and ecotourism: government's potential role. *Curr. Issues Tourism* 5 (3–4), 222–244.
- Wilson, S., Fesenmaier, D.R., Fesenmaier, J., Van Es, J.C., 2001. Factors for success in rural tourism development. *J. Trav. Res.* 40 (2), 132–138.
- Xinhua, 2008. Decisions from the Central Committee of the CPC Regarding Several Important Issues on Promoting Rural Reform and Development. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/test/2008-10/31/content_1136796.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Xinhua, 2010. Several Suggestions from the State Council of China on Strengthening the Coordinated Urban-Rural Development and Further Laying Foundations for Rural and Agricultural Development. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-01/31/content_1524372.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Xinhua, 2012. Hu Jintao: March Steadily along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Endeavor Vigorously to Build a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects—The Report at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2012-11/17/content_2268826.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Xinhua, 2017. Xi Jinping: Build a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects, and Acquire the Grand Victory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era—The Report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Xue, X., 2015. The National Tourism Administration Releases the Guiding Perspectives on Promoting the Development of Smart Tourism. Retrieved from. accessed. http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/12/content_2803297.htm. (Accessed 5 February 2018).
- Xue, L., Kerstetter, D., Hunt, C., 2017. Tourism development and changing rural identity in China. *Ann. Tourism Res.* 66, 170–182.
- Yang, H., 2013. Rural tourism and the sustainable development of rural economy. *China Econ.* 2013 (12), 212–214.
- Zhang, M., 2019. Operational Income from Leisure Agriculture and Rural Tourism in 2018 Nationwide Exceeds 800 Billion Yuan. Retrieved from. accessed. <http://country.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0214/c419842-30674249.html>. (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Zhang, H., Fang, J., Yang, L., 2017. The current situation and trend of leisure agriculture and rural tourism in China. *Chin. J. Agric. Resour. Reg. Plann.* 38 (9), 205–208.
- Zhao, Y., Leng, X., 2011. The theoretical foundation of service-oriented government—perspectives from dispute. *Social. Stud.* 2, 62–65.
- Zhao, M., Tang, J., Wang, Y., 2015. Tourism transformation and regional development research of Daye: based on the coupling between mineral resources sustainable power and tourism resources potential development power. *China Min. Mag.* 25 (4), 55–60.