

Tourism and sustainability in the Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP, China

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INTRODUCTION

The Yunnan Great Rivers Integrated Conservation Development Project (ICDP) joins the wide range of recent projects which attempt to link the conservation of biodiversity in protected areas with local social and economic development (Wells and Brandon, 1993). This received official ratification by the provincial governor in February, 1998. The title of the project is no misnomer. The project area, in the northwest corner of the southwestern-most province of China (Figure 1), lends itself to the application of superlatives. In areal extent it equates approximately to four times the size of Yellowstone National Park. The three great rivers in question, the Salween, the Mekong and the Yangtze flow north to south on almost parallel courses through the study area, barely eighty kilometres apart, before diverging to become three of the world's great river systems, in Myanmar, southeast Asia and China respectively (The Nature Conservancy [TNC], 1997). The project embraces four mountain ranges containing 30 major peaks, at least five of which exceed six thousand metres. As well as these scenic attractions there is exceptional biodiversity and outstanding cultural variety. Yunnan province as a whole contains the richest variety of both animal and plant life in China. A third of its population of 38 million consists of 24 ethnic minorities. As The Nature Conservancy points out, however, the extraordinary natural and cultural assets of the region are under threat from a variety of unsustainable practices including logging, agriculture and grazing, the hunting of rare and endangered species of animals for furs and medicinal purposes, and the indiscriminate gathering of medicinal herbs (TNC, 1997). Moreover, the unprecedented growth of tourism, both domestic and international, has resulted in largely unplanned and uncoordinated infrastructural development. This is discordant with vernacular architecture and little or no regard has been given to environmental or cultural impact, or consideration of how tourism might enhance rural livelihoods.

In an attempt to avert environmental and cultural catastrophe, the Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP is currently implementing a three-year programme to identify the sustainable options that could be offered by the development of ecotourism, organic farming and sustainable forestry. The conceptual plan defines four types of zone in the project area (Table 1) incorporating the basic tenets behind the ICDP approach which recognises the need to ensure biological diversity by reconciling the management of protected areas with the social and economic needs of local people (Wells and Brandon, 1992).

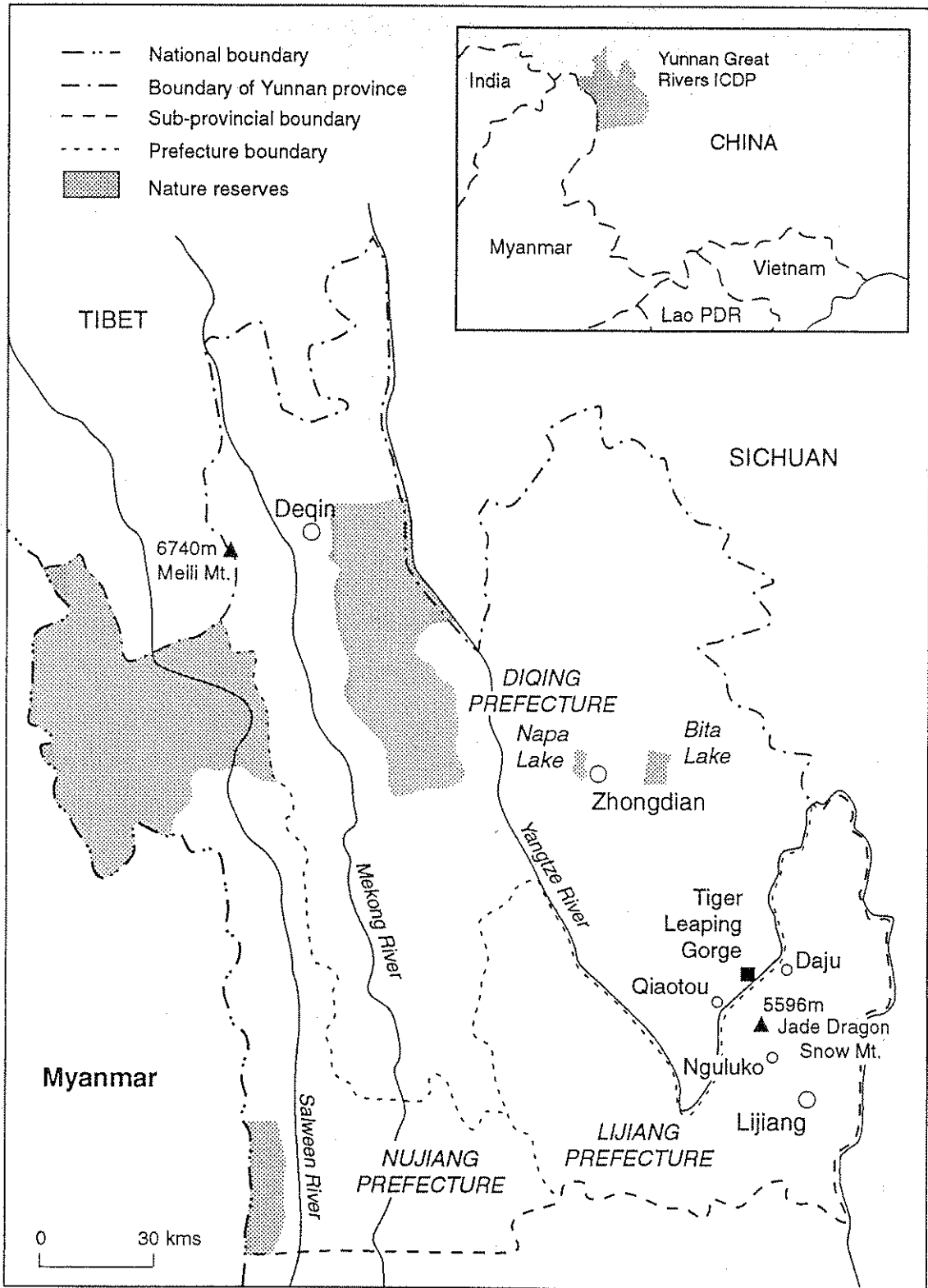


Figure 1 Yunnan Great Rivers Integrated Conservation Development Project

Table 1 The Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP zoning scheme

Designation	Characteristics	Examples
Preservation Zones	High biological diversity, encompassing unique vegetation and important wildlife habitats	Napa and Bita Lakes
Economic Zones	Locations for sustainable development activities and continuation of some traditional community-based economic activities	Provincial Development Zone of Diqing Autonomous Prefecture
Scenic / recreation Zones	Natural scenic resources which will accommodate either restricted recreation activities or permit active recreational pursuits	Jade Dragon Snow Mountain
Cultural Zones	Include existing population settlement, traditional use and cultural sites which would incorporate historical plant collection sites and ancestral medicinal plant gathering areas	Dayan (old Lijiang)

Source: TNC (1997)

Inevitably, with a project of this size and scope, there are bound to be conflicts as well as the complementarities envisaged in this strategy. A major area of concern is that of the tourism problematic: given the rapid rate of growth of tourist visitation what are the problems of, and prospects for, its more sustainable development and how might it contribute to sustainable development within the area in general? Many of the over-optimistic claims for the role of tourism in development and conservation arise from a failure to recognise the economic and societal contexts at all spatial levels, from the global to the local, in which it is cast as a process. As Milne (1998) suggests, 'we need to look carefully at the global-local processes that influence tourism, and to create a clearer conception of how different scales of analysis and various stakeholders articulate with each other'. This is, of course, easier said than done. The basic question that needs answering in relation to the Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP concerns how ecotourism can contribute towards sustainable development in the project area. The basic scale of analysis is therefore the sub-provincial level, and it is necessary to identify the major opportunities and constraints, arising from different interests and at different levels, that will condition the viability of this contribution. A preliminary analysis here makes use of SWOT analysis in order to highlight some of the major areas of concern.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

SWOT analysis is a business management technique which attempts to identify strategic issues for a company or organisation. The myriad of factors affecting business objectives fall into two categories. Firstly there are those which may be considered *internal* to the operation in terms of the attributes of either superiority (i.e. 'Strengths'), or inferiority (i.e. 'Weaknesses') which, in theory, are capable of manipulation from within. Secondly, there are those factors which are largely *external*, those of the outside environment in which the company or business must operate, which constitute the 'Opportunities', which can be capitalised upon, or the 'Threats', which constrain successful operations. Whilst, in theory, the operation has little or no control over these external factors, adjustment of the balance of its strengths and weaknesses will alter the relative position of the operation *vis a vis* this external context; thus, none of these categories should be considered as mutually exclusive, but rather as interdependent elements within a specific context.

Conventionally, SWOT analysis as applied in tourism has been used systematically to appraise the competitive position of a company and to identify problems prior to the launch of

a new product or the preparation of a new marketing plan (Holloway and Plant,1992). It is recognised that the analysis might not be entirely suitable for this preliminary appraisal of the Yunnan Great Rivers project, and that this exercise may be extending it beyond its limits as an analytical tool. Cooper et al (1993), for example suggest that SWOT analysis needs to be complemented by a PEST investigation of the Political, Economic, Sociological and Technological changes which affect a company, but in this liberal application of SWOT analysis, to a more general scenario, these largely exogenous factors are incorporated in the categories of Opportunities and Threats.

It will become obvious, as the analysis proceeds, that certain criteria cannot unequivocally be considered as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats but indeed are a mixture of all four. The rapid rate of growth of tourism to the province and project area is a case in point. This exercise, however, views SWOT analysis as a useful framework within which to summarise systematically the various issues and interests which will condition the prospects for the increased sustainability of tourism and the contribution that it can make towards more sustainable development in the project area.

STRENGTHS

The conservation and development link

A major strength of the conceptual plan is reflected in its very designation as an Integrated Conservation and Development Project. As Wells and Brandon (1992) suggest, the common objective of ICDPs is to link the conservation of biological diversity in protected areas with local social and economic development. It is now widely recognised that conservation requires a perspective that extends beyond the designation of protected areas (there are seven designated protected areas within the proposed ICDP, two at the National and five at the Provincial level), to incorporate development issues. If the latter are ignored, sustainability will be compromised.

As discussed below, under weaknesses, in the scramble to secure tourism revenue by the individuals, firms, organisations and even prefectures within the area, sustainability could well be threatened in the absence of a coordinated approach. An overarching umbrella organisation, such as the ICDP, is essential in order to reconcile conflicting interests.

Ecotourism potential

The attraction of the area to ecotourists in terms of its outstanding natural and cultural landscape combined with almost unparalleled biological and cultural diversity is indisputable. The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, describes northwest Yunnan as one of the most important sites on Earth in terms of biodiversity. Ten thousand species of plants, including 60% of the plants used in traditional Chinese medicine, are estimated to occur in the project area (TNC, 1997). Yunnan shelters the largest range of wild animals in China, accounting for 50 per cent of China's vertebrate species (Yunnan Provincial Travel and Tourism Administration, 1991). It is the habitat of many rare animals, at least 30 of which are on the IUCN red list (TNC, 1997).

The study region embraces a considerable share of the cultural diversity of the province as a whole. The Naxi, who number approximately a quarter of a million of the project area's total population of 1.5 million, are the predominant ethnic minority. They have what is believed to be the only well preserved pictograph language in the world. There are also over 100,000 Tibetans, as well as a significant number of Tibeto-Burman groups (Pumi, Nu, Dulong, Yi, Lisu and Jingpo) together with the Bai (Sino-Tibetan) and Dai (Tai-Kedai) peoples. There is considerable pride in this rich and diverse cultural heritage; many of the minorities still wear traditional dress on a daily basis. The Dongba Cultural Research Institute in Lijiang, a tourist attraction in itself, is actively engaged in research into the ancient Naxi culture. There has been a resurgence in traditional Naxi music; at least four full orchestras of elderly men have formed in and around Lijiang (Booz, 1997), the most renowned of which, led by the Naxi scholar Xuan Ke, gives nightly performances in the heart of the old city. The six-hundred year old city of Dayan (old Lijiang), in the south-east of the project area, was designated a World Heritage site in 1997. Ninglang autonomous county, in Lijiang province, has the area's first bilingual school, seen as a means of retaining the Yi identity (Goodman, 1998). The Tibetan culture of Diqing prefecture is evocative of the highland culture associated with central Tibet, with barley cultivation on the high windswept plateau, herds of yaks, whitewashed houses with thick walls of rammed earth, chortens and several active monasteries (Goodman, 1998). The most significant of these monasteries, Songzhanling, on the outskirts of Zhongdian, which suffered from the extensive destruction that swept south east Tibet in the late 1950s and 1960s, has undergone steady reconstruction, and once again houses over 700 monks in a remarkable hillside complex. It has been suggested that, because of its great distance from Lhasa and its special ties to Yunnan, Zhongdian has never witnessed ethnic

tension. The Tibetan community is vibrant and in full control of economic and political developments (Goodman 1998).

Healy (1997) examines the concept of food and drink as tourist merchandise. Such commodities are of considerable importance in enhancing local multiplier effects whilst simultaneously reducing import leakages. Yunnan province is self sufficient in high quality, year round vegetable crops, and rice is abundant. Tropical fruits such as pineapples and bananas are transported by road from the southernmost prefecture of Xishuangbanna. Whilst beer is imported from other parts of China, the local Lijiang beer, as well as that from Dali (around 200 km south of the project area) feature extensively on restaurant menus. The brewery at Dali is to undergo joint venture expansion (foreign investment will constitute 25-49 per cent of the total shareholding) to increase its production from 40,000 to 100,000 tons a year (Tenway, 1998).

In terms of infrastructure, there is ample water and electricity supply. Indeed Yunnan province is one of the ten largest hydropower bases in China (Yunnan Provincial Travel and Tourism Administration, 1991). Whilst the quality of the roads is poor throughout much of the project area, upgrading is occurring, such as the 50km stretch of road from Jade Dragon Snow Mountain to Daju.

There is valuable precedent in the project area in terms of an existing ecotourism project at Wenhai. The Ford Foundation originally sponsored a research project there in 1993, as Wenhai, with a population of 115, was one of the poorest villages in the region, with no electricity supply (this was laid on, however, in 1997). Wenhai's scenic location, at an altitude of 2700 metres on the flanks of the beautiful Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, with a nearby lake and as a neighbouring village to Nguloko (the home of the famous Austro-American botanist and explorer, Joseph Rock, from the 1920s to 1950s), suggested its candidacy as an ecotourism location. Farmers from the village, three hours walk from the nearest road, acquired a local house and turned it into a lodge for trekkers and birdwatchers (Mu, 1998). Funding from the Ford Foundation ceased in 1995 (Harkness, 1997), but the project is now run by a village co-operative whose shareholders bought into the scheme at 100 yuan (\$US12.50) a share. In theory, profits are shared amongst these shareholders, but in practice the scheme is not yet profitable. Wenhai offers valuable experience which should be more systematically researched, in particular it is vital to understand the impact of ecotourism on rural livelihoods and its potential for poverty alleviation in the project area.

WEAKNESSES

Uncontrolled growth and development

Unplanned development threatens to destroy the environmental, cultural and scenic qualities of the area (TNC, 1997). The current scenario reflects an uncoordinated approach to the largely uncontrolled growth of tourist visitation. This is exemplified by the proliferation of new, monolithic, hotel buildings in Lijiang (such as the large, recently opened, Guanfung Hotel), and the increase in new hotels in the past two years in Zhongdian, such as the Bitu Hotel, opened in December 1997 (Zhongdian has only been open to foreign tourists since 1992. It received 540,00 tourists in 1997, of whom 30,000 were foreigners). Guangrui (1995) describes how China's experience in general illustrates how the large scale construction of tourist attractions and accommodations, before the necessary infrastructure (for example transportation and education/training), has resulted not only in unsound tourism development, but also in a waste of resources and damage of the destination's image.

Lack of coordination

At present, there appears to be little coordination either vertically, from the local through the regional to the national levels, or horizontally, between the various sectors or administrative units, whose aims and objectives may well conflict with those of sustainable tourism. Both will be examined under threats, as they largely constitute the external context within which the ICDP is cast. However, the latter is also a feature within the project area which consists of three sub-provincial administrative units: Diqing Autonomous Prefecture which is comprised of three counties; Lijiang Prefecture, which has four counties, two of which are autonomous; and Nujiang Autonomous Prefecture which has five counties, one of which is autonomous. It is clear that there will be a diversity of views and interests, often competing, which need to be taken into account. Indeed the situation is illustrated by the fact that the individual prefectures within the project area appear to be jockeying with each other to secure a larger share of the tourists visiting the area. This territorial competition is a common phenomenon in China, as localities scramble for a share of the commercial benefits that remain once the agents and entrepreneurs in urban areas have retained the major portion. This is described in Guizhou province by Oakes (1995). A similar scenario is presented by one of the most popular attractions in the project area, that of Tiger Leaping Gorge. The road through to Daju, at the northern end of the gorge, on the Lijiang prefecture side is at present undergoing significant reconstruction to improve tourist access, whilst the road from Quitou,

in the adjacent prefecture of Diqing, to the Tiger Leaping Stone itself has been completed, and the remaining section north (on the opposite bank of the Yangtse to Daju) is currently being completed. Cooperation over these two schemes is not only essential but could also be mutually beneficial in terms of an integrated circuit, especially if a linking bridge is built in the future.

Marketing

The marketing of the area and its attractions needs careful thought. It has clear appeal to several different market segments, but there is a definite danger that the requirements of one will prejudice the needs of another. Nowhere is this more evident than with the conflict between ecotourism and resort-based tourism, such as that being developed at Snow Flower Resort in the Yulong area at the foot of the Jade Dragon Mountain range, with its planned golf courses and skiing facilities. Tourism development is proceeding apace; the Yulong Snow Mountain Development Company is based in Lijiang.

It is essential to appreciate the implications of the ecotourism and conventional tourism divide within the project area because it is largely delineated according to the origin and ethnicity of visiting tourists. Domestic tourism visitation is experiencing a phenomenal growth rate in China, the total number of domestic tourists is expected to reach 700 million by the year 2000 (Zhang, 1995). Only 4.8% of the 1.7 million tourists that visited the project area in 1997 were international (Niu, 1998). As nationals outnumber foreigners by a ratio of around 20 to one (at times of peak demand, in particular the Spring Festival following Chinese New Year it will be in excess of this), it is obvious which is the most significant force. As Lindberg *et al.* (1997) suggest, in destinations where cross-cultural differences are great, which is often the case for developed country ecotourists visiting developing country locations, such as this area, there is a considerable dilemma of catering for visitors with different motivations and desires. Less accessible sites such as the ecotourism project already described at Wenhai village, will appeal only to ecotourists more towards the 'hard' end of the spectrum (Lindberg, 1991) but it is those sites that appeal to a wider cross section of tourists, such as Dragon Spruce Meadow and Tiger Leaping Gorge, that will need to resolve, or at least reconcile, conflicting demands. The promotion of Diqing prefecture as the probable location of Shangri La (the ancient Tibetan name for Zhongdian was Shanbala) in James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* is not just an inevitable eventuality, but already an actuality. The name now figures extensively throughout the area, for example as the designation of one of the most successful tour operators in Zhongdian, based at the Bitu hotel. The Hong Kong

based international Shangri-La hotel chain, not surprisingly, is looking for a potential site to locate in Diqing prefecture (Niu, 1998). There is considerable concern, however, that injudicious commercialisation may destroy the image of harmony with nature that is conveyed by this 'place of the dream' (Higgins, 1997).

It is not only how these attractions are promoted, but also how the independent tourists purchase their experience within the area itself that is also of interest. At present they are faced with a bewildering number of small operators from whom to buy their tour, usually from one to three days duration. This is a particularly difficult exercise for the foreign tourist, who will consequently, by default and because of language constraints, opt for the services of China International Travel Service (CITS), China's largest comprehensive tourist enterprise catering to foreign tourists. Most of them are unaware that each of the small operators may be equally reputable as they are usually linked to official departments, such as forestry. These links should be made explicit, and indeed cultivated, building upon the strengths of these individual departments. For example, the department of agriculture would be best placed to coordinate farm home-stays; forestry might be most suited to coordinate ecotourism. The project at Wenhai uses the agency run by forestry in Lijiang to market itself. At present CITS in Lijiang seem to have little knowledge of ecotourism opportunities in the area. Greater cooperation and coordination is clearly called for.

Carrying capacities

The tourist numbers arriving mean that, particularly for certain sites and for times of peak demand the essential problem is one of excessive pressures. The carrying capacity, whether *social*, in terms of impact on local communities, *psychological*, in terms of tourist satisfaction, *physical* in terms of site characteristics, or *ecological* in terms of environmental impacts (Cooper *et al.* 1993) is being exceeded in several locations within the project area. For example at Tiger Leaping Gorge social impacts are evident at the gateway of Quitou, where ethnic minorities coming in to market are juxtaposed with mini-bus loads of tourists on day trips from Lijiang. Overcrowding is a common phenomenon on the newly completed 500 concrete steps that give access to the bottom of the gorge and at the natural rock platform adjacent to the Tiger Leaping Stone. New parking facilities are being constructed at the top of the steps; and the physical scar of the newly constructed road visually intrudes on the dramatic gorge landscape. At Dragon Spruce Meadow the psychological carrying capacity is severely compromised, particularly at times of peak visitation as tourists queue at the chairlift that lends access to the mountain-encircled meadow in Yulong National Park. During the 1998

Spring Festival, the bottleneck was so severe that traffic jams on the access road extended to two hours, and waiting time at the chairlift to three, a total waiting time of five hours. It is also paradoxical that a 2 yuan (US25c) ecological protection charge is levied from each tourist at the meadow entrance in addition to the chairlift fare plus entrance fee paid at the top of the lift, yet simultaneously unsustainable practices are evidenced by the sale of animal furs, rare herbs and fungi by Yi stallholders positioned at the side of the wooden walkway approaching the meadow. On the meadow itself, the sight of jeans-clad tourists being attired in traditional Naxi and Yi costumes and participating in an abbreviated dance for 5 yuan may be seen as cultural assimilation by some, or a brazen form of staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) by others. Swain (1995) describes the selling of the material culture of Yunnan's indigenous peoples, along with the mass marketing of pseudo artefacts to tourists as a 'commodification of ethnicity', and highlights how ethnic tourism in Yunnan is built on an us/them dynamic: in this case the contrast between the majority Han Chinese society with the 'exotic' minorities.

However, added to the frequently voiced criticisms of carrying capacity as a concept (Wight, 1998) is the question of ethnocentricity. Lindberg *et al.* (1997), for example, document how levels of crowding are more tolerable to Chinese visitors than to western visitors. This fact is substantiated by Gormsen (1995), who describes how as many as 10000 Chinese visitors on peak days gather on the spatially limited plateau of Huang Shuan (Anhui Province). The Chinese also have a much higher tolerance level of littering in natural areas and, additionally, it must be recognised that Eastern cultures tend to favour human manipulation of nature in order to enhance its appeal compared to its preservation in a pristine state (Lindberg *et al.*, 1997).

Is it possible to reconcile the differing demands of domestic tourism, which takes on the characteristics of mass tourism, with that of small-scale, specialist visitation? This is not a question unique to the project area. Guangri *et al.* (1995) document how the dominant emphasis on mass tourism, pervading most of the development in China, is an anathema to the interests of ecotourists. The conflict is particularly evident at Tiger Leaping Gorge where the previous attraction of the site to trekkers has been severely compromised by the carving of the new road along the side of the gorge north of Quitou. The steps down to the Tiger Leaping Stone at the bottom of the gorge now facilitate visitation by large numbers of domestic tourists, for whom the experience takes on the guise of a virtual pilgrimage.

Petersen (1995) documents how the Chinese domestic visitor's motivation is a voluntary cultural decision, akin to a pilgrimage to historical, cultural and political centres.

It is also true that whilst carrying capacity may well be exceeded at certain locations at certain points in time, the problem may well be one of excess capacity at others. The industry has had to be prepared for considerable peaks in demand for accommodation at certain times of the year, notably the Chinese Spring Festival when most Chinese travel. At other times, hotels may operate considerably below capacity, for example on a weekend in mid February, 1998, the 52 room, two years old, Gyaltheng Dzong hotel in Zhongdian had only two occupants. Certainly carrying capacity is an issue that needs to be carefully examined, with tourist characteristics carefully matched to those of the locality. Already the wisdom of constructing a ski-lift in the project area, to one of the most southernmost glaciers in south-east Asia has been questioned. The chairlift at Snow Flower resort was inaugurated on the second anniversary of the Lijiang earthquake, in early February 1998. The most recent tour operator to open in Lijiang, Yulong Travel Service, has a large advertising display above its expansive shop-window style premises featuring skiing, as well as golf, as activities. Apart from the disastrous environmental consequences of skiing on the glacier snowfield, it has been suggested that the high altitude (around 4000m), steep slopes and wet condition of the snow render such activity unviable (TIM, 1997). In the face of recent assurance from the provincial governor that all improper development would be halted at the site, the development of an interpretive Glacier Park is a mooted alternative. The chairman of the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology recently identified four different types of glacier along with interesting geological features. As the 2700m chairlift is already operational, this alternative outcome would need to be carefully planned and monitored.

Lack of interpretive facilities and guidelines

Interpretive facilities and aids are, at present, notably lacking in most of the project area. Museums such as the Dongba Cultural Centre in Lijiang or the new museum at Zhongdian provide a fascinating insight into the natural and cultural environment of the surroundings, but there is a clear need to provide more interpretation at the actual individual attractions, and also to issue the tourists with guidelines. Much of the environmental and cultural damage caused by tourism can be attributed to a lack of information and understanding on the part of the tourists themselves. Tourist guidelines are a relatively inexpensive, basic communications tool for reducing visitor impacts and preventing irreversible damage. They should include economic guidelines, to keep revenue in the destination and provide maximum benefit to

local communities, by incorporating suggestions on the selection of local products and services available for purchase by the tourists (Blangy and Wood, 1993). The messages in the guidelines need to be positively reinforced; tourists need to be informed about how to get the most out of their visit without incurring damage. They need to know why appropriate behaviour is not only desirable but essential for tourism sustainability.

Unsustainable tourism practices

Whatever the type of tourism, unsustainable practices need to be clearly identified. The proposed golf courses at Snow Flower Resort give obvious grounds for concern. What might not be so obvious are the complex ramifications of a proposal in Diqing province to introduce mushroom forays for Japanese tourists. The much sought after matsetaki mushroom commands a high price for the local collectors of 500 yuan a kilo, or as high as 1000 yuan for the first crop (Charlin, 1998). At present, entrepreneurs from Japan, Singapore and Korea come to Zhongdian from the end of July to the beginning of September to buy the crop harvested by local Tibetan collectors, but the proposal to attract specialist tour groups may well cut this lucrative source of revenue for many local families.

Other unsustainable practices are, ironically, stimulated by the tourism industry itself. The sale of animal furs at Dragon Spruce Mountain has already been mentioned, but a range of skins, including those of endangered species such as the leopard, are also on open sale in a shop in the main street of Zhongdian. Furs of the lesser red panda are hawked from the back of a bicycle at the entrance to old Lijiang. Tourism, in so many ways, is responsible for destroying the very resources upon which more sustainable operations should be based. These practices are amongst the most obvious, and it is quite feasible that action to curtail them should be taken in the short term. Ultimately it is not only desirable, but also essential, to ensure enhanced sustainable outcomes via the implementation of techniques such as environmental and social impact analyses prior to development taking place, and environmental auditing to monitor how the products and processes of tourism interact with the environment (Goodall, 1992).

Human resource bottlenecks

There is a shortage of trained, local, tourism staff, particularly good English speaking guides, supervisors and managers. It is also a feature that many of the entrepreneurs come from outside the project area, either from elsewhere in the province, notably Kunming, or from elsewhere in China. In the old city of Lijiang, for example, many of the souvenir shop owners are neither Naxi nor Yunnanese. There is a tourism course at the Lijiang College of

Education, but clearly the provision of local training opportunities must be a high priority to ensure that the local community benefits in terms of employment.

The question of scale

Wells and Brandon (1992) highlight the need to consider the scale of an ICDP. The Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP is, undeniably, an ambitious project in terms of its scale. In this context, given the size, the diversity of activities, and size of settlements included in the area, it is vital that it should not, in its entirety, be labelled a National Park, which is perhaps one of the major reasons for some adverse reaction to the project's inception (TIM, 1997; 1998c). Of the case study ICDPs examined by Wells and Brandon, only that of Air-Tenere in Niger (also a multiple-use area including protected zones) is larger; most nowhere approach the size of the Yunnan ICDP. It is inevitable that this areal extent will embrace a wide diversity of activities and interests, not all of which will be conducive to sustainable tourism.

Participating organisations

Wells and Brandon (1992) also highlight the need to consider carefully the participating organisations. In the case of the Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP, the three initiating bodies are The Nature Conservancy (TNC); the Institute of Human Ecology, Beijing; and a business consortium consisting of the Japanese Itochu Corporation and the Thai developer, Bang Pakong. It is essential that there is a balance of the interests of all stakeholders affected by the project, that commercial interests should not prevail, that local involvement is incorporated as an essential feature (there are, as referred to above, important lessons to be learned from the Wenhai project), and that local knowledge and expertise be harnessed (for example via co-operation with the Dongba Cultural Institute).

The role of local government must also be appreciated. Lindberg *et al.* (1997) document how local government, and thus ultimately the Communist Party, as well as performing an industry function, has a larger role in protected area management in China than elsewhere.

Though this role facilitates tourism development, it may compromise conservation objectives.

Contribution to local livelihoods

With an average annual per capita income of only US\$70 (TNC, 1997), a significant proportion of the population of the project area is living at or below the official Chinese poverty level. A more equitable distribution of the benefits from tourism to the area needs to be a high priority. At present those who did make an income from the smaller scale of tourism in the past are frequently being marginalised, such as the pony operators at Dragon

Spruce Meadow who have been superseded by the chairlift and now, apparently, earn insufficient to feed the horses (TIM, 1998).

Unfortunately, the existing ecotourism project in the area, at Wenhai, discussed above, does not yet point the way as the project still has to make a profit. The reasons for this need to be fully explored but include problems with marketing the site (one of the only avenues at present is via a Canadian co-operative organisation based in Lijiang); low overheads charged on food purchases such as potatoes (only 10%); no sale of crafts or other tourist merchandise (these can provide an important means of local capture of tourist revenue, as discussed by Healy, 1994); and under-pricing of the facility (Mu, 1997). At present visitors are charged 20-30 yuan (US\$2.50-3.75) for accommodation excluding food, but, as willingness to pay surveys conducted in protected areas around the globe have suggested (Dixon and Sherman, 1990), foreign tourists are willing to pay on average \$10 for site visitation alone. Fortunately there do not yet appear to be any adverse impacts from visitation to the village, but the main beneficiaries appear to be the ecotourists, largely foreign, who express satisfaction with their visits (Mu, 1998), and gain from the consumer surplus generated by the present low prices. The potential of tourism to enhance rural livelihoods and as a means of poverty alleviation needs to be explored. It is vital that the ICDP turns to experience elsewhere and examines best existing practice, particularly with regard to community involvement. Expertise is considerably building on this front within the Asia/Pacific region, for example the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC) based in Bangkok held an International seminar on Ecotourism for Forest Conservation and Community development in Chiang Mai in 1997 (Bornemeier, Victor and Durst, 1997). RECOFTC are actively involved with linking community forestry with tourism in several projects in the region.

OPPORTUNITIES

Hotel licensing

In China there is a licensing system of hotels wishing to accommodate foreign tourists; this requires a financial bond as a guarantee of meeting certain regulations. Whilst this may be viewed as a constraint, and thus a weakness, in terms of high capital costs of entry for local entrepreneurs (indeed Taylor et al., 1996, describe how it took a couple of years for the Old Inn in Dali to negotiate all the red tape necessary), it is conceivable that environmental regulations could be built into the licensing requirements.

A new destination

The fact that this is potentially a world class destination has not escaped the attention of international tourism operators, ever eager to capitalise on the increasing demand for new and exciting destinations. As the managing director of Diethelm Travel, Yunnan, Solange Herze, recently declared 'all agents in Europe are trying to find new destinations and Yunnan is a new destination' (TravelAsia, 1998a). Diethelm is positioning Yunnan province as part of its Mekong sell, and the province already features in Kuoni UK and TUI programmes (TravelAsia, 1998a). The provincial governor recently announced that it was Yunnan's aim to target tourist sources in Europe, North America and Japan in order to increase the total number of foreign tourists visiting the province by 60 per cent, from 800,000 in 1997 to 1.3 million in 2002 (Xinhua, 1998). A significant growth is to be expected via the development of tourist circuits in this region of southeast Asia, notably from Northern Thailand via Vientiane and Luang Prabang in Laos to Yunnan (the Mekong circuit) and Kunming, Yunnan to Mandalay, Myanmar (the Burma Road).

Leading sector

Yunnan is the only province in China to make tourism the leading sector. Thus it is likely that the project will be guaranteed the continued support from provincial level government; indeed it received the endorsement of the provincial governor and planning committee in February, 1998. The participation of the Institute of Human Ecology in Beijing as one of the three initiating bodies of the ICDP is indicative of support at the national level.

THREATS

Conflicting interests

The area is threatened by unsustainable logging practices as loggers exploit the northwest of the province. Yunnan province is the fourth largest timber producer in China (Yunnan Provincial Travel and Tourism Administration, 1991). There are many logging sites, and evidence of deforestation and soil erosion on the road from Lijiang to Zhongdian.

It is likely that one of the most intractable problems facing sustainable tourism in the project region will be that of inter-sectoral conflicts. 'Yunnan's traditional image as the Kingdom of minerals; Kingdom of plants and Kingdom of animals is giving way to a modern, bustling techno-industrial economy' (Hayes *et al.*, 1994). The provincial economy has grown at a rate above the country's average, stabilising at 7 to 8 per cent after three years of restructuring

(ChinaWorks, 1998a). Yunnan has opened up to foreign investment; in 1993 foreign investment in the province totalled US\$150 million and cooperation projects extend to tertiary industry, basic raw material industry and hi-tech industries (ChinaWorks, 1998b). There are opportunities for joint venture investment in everything from glass bottles to bio-engineering (ChinaWindow, 1998). The ICDP will attempt to reconcile the conflicts of a rapidly modernising provincial economy with that of conservation through its proposed zoning scheme. At present, eleven economic zones have been designated, but it is an unfortunate fact of life that, where these are located alongside tourist routes, they will detract somewhat from the overall tourist experience, as indeed do the Pulp and Paper factory and the sizeable HEP installations on the route from Lijiang to Zhongdian. Potentially compatible are the bio-resources development projects under the Green Yunnan umbrella (GreenYunnan, 1998).

Infrastructural improvements may also be a double-edged sword. The construction of the Nanning-Kunming railway; four radial highways from Kunming: to Sichuan, Myanmar, Xishuangbanna and Guangxi (ChinaWorks, 1998a); the completion of the airport at Lijiang three years ago, and the construction of the airport at Zhongdian in 1999, all play an undoubted role in modernisation and provincial development. The relative ease of movement (the journey time between Kunming and Lijiang has been reduced from 12-15 hours by road to 45 minutes by air, for example) will, however, mean that pressures of tourism visitation will increase. Flights from Kunming to Lijiang during the 1998 Spring Festival were increased to 11 a day.

It is not only inter-sectoral conflicts that may prejudice sustainable outcomes, but also that development aims and objectives vary within the administrative hierarchy. Thus, whilst the Lijiang county government opposed the proposed golf courses at Snow Flower Resort, the provincial tourism officials tend to equate size with success (TIM, 1997).

Rapid rate of growth

Such is the complexity of tourism, that what might be perceived as an opportunity for one interest in one place at one point in time is likely to prove a threat to another (Cater, 1994). Thus the growth rates envisaged in tourist arrivals to the province have mixed implications. Yunnan province as a whole received 20 million tourists in 1997, of whom around 4 per cent (approximately 800,000) were foreign. The projected target for the year 2002 is a total of 36 million, with 1.3 million (3.6 per cent) from overseas (Xinhua, 1998). This represents an average annual increase of 17.5 per cent in domestic visitation and of 12.5

per cent in foreign tourists. Both figures are well in excess of the average global figure of an anticipated annual growth rate of 4.4 per cent in tourism during the last decade of the millenium (WTO, 1994). Such rapid rates of growth are likely to prejudice sustainable outcome; change is inevitable (Butler, 1991).

The guise of ecotourism

Furthermore, even seemingly benign forms of tourism such as ecotourism may well prove a cover for unsustainable activities. There is considerable concern that, if ecotourism is used as a marketing ploy, treated solely as a product or market segment without embodying the essential principles of environmental integrity, social and cultural responsibility, and economic viability, sustainability will be compromised (Cater, 1997). One area of concern, which has recently been highlighted, is that of 'biopiracy' of valuable genetic materials and indigenous knowledge under the guise of ecotourism. This practice, involving the illegal acquisition of plant and animal genetic materials by multinational corporations, has already been observed in northern Thailand (TIM, 1998a). As Yunnan is renowned for its rich biodiversity, and has a long history of traditional medicinal practices, it is clearly a possible threat in the province. Not only would this potentially threaten biodiversity, by causing a rapid decline in valuable flora and fauna, but might also jeopardise the continuation of traditional livelihoods as it would deplete the resources upon which local communities depend for healing and food sources. The practice would simultaneously exploit traditional knowledge, with little or no commensurate return.

Joint venture

Until recently, the organisation of inbound tourism was restricted to Chinese travel agencies. Foreign agencies were limited to having representative offices in China and could not deal in cash transactions. However, in June 1998, the government announced the opening of joint venture travel agencies by Thomas Cook Travel Services (HK) in tandem with China Merchants in Beijing, Jebsen Travel in Shanghai and Lantian Worldexpress in Beijing (TravelAsia, 1998b). Thailand based Diethelm Travel was recently granted the permit to open a joint venture office in Kunming and the provincial governor of Yunnan, Li Jiating, recently stated that joint venture partnerships with foreign investors are being actively sought for tourism in Yunnan. Tourist agencies from Europe, North America, Japan and Thailand will be encouraged to establish joint ventures in the province and international hotel groups will be approached to join with local hotels (Xinhua, 1998).

It must be appreciated that the leakages resulting from repatriation of profits, managerial salaries etc. will considerably reduce the amount of tourist revenue that stays within the province through this form of involvement. This, together with many other possible negative aspects, must be set against the advantages gained from outside financial backing, marketing channels, product identity etc. It is also likely that the main beneficiary of any planned integrated tourism circuit will not be Yunnan: Thailand is likely to be the gateway to the Mekong sub-region, the Tourism Authority of Thailand is actively seeking to promote overland routes from Thailand (Yeoh, 1998).

Regional downturns

In recent years, Yunnan received one third of its overseas tourists from southeast Asian countries. Visitors from Thailand comprised the largest share of foreign hotel arrivals in Kunming (Gormsen, 1995b) and Thai business interests have been significant in the project area. The three star Grand hotel in Lijiang, for example, was built by Thai developers (TIM, 1997). The impact of the 1998-9 financial crisis in southeast Asia is therefore likely to be significant.

However, the shortfall in southeast Asian tourists may be partially compensated for by the fact that the entire region is viewed at the moment as being a cheaper destination for tourists from Europe and North America. Also, paradoxically, it has been predicted that China's dominant aviation role throughout the region will be accelerated as a result of the downturn in Asian economies because of its domestic market strength and cautious bilateral strategy (TravelAsia, 1997)

CONCLUSIONS

Shaw and Williams (1998) suggest that prospects for tourism sustainability are mediated by contingencies of place. However, it must be recognised that these contingencies in themselves are shaped by economic, socio-cultural, political, ecological, institutional and technical forces which are both endogenous and exogenous. It is also imperative that the role of tourism in sustainable development is set in an overall context, intrinsically and extrinsically; within and between levels, sectors and interests. This analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to the prospect of sustainable tourism and its potential for contributing towards sustainable development in the Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP is valuable. This is because it sets the myriad of forces into a framework which not only enables a systematic

examination of the place-specific attributes of this particular case study but also sets tourism into the general development context.

It is also vital to remember that the situation is not static: that the various strengths and weaknesses will be manipulated both from within and from outside. The external opportunities and threats within which a project is cast are continually changing. Thus, for example, the inextricability of the global and the local is evident as a number of projects under the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Programme, including priority land transportation and tourism projects, have been postponed by the Asian Development Bank because of the Asian financial crisis (TIM, 1998b).

SWOT analysis therefore offers the opportunity for an holistic appraisal which facilitates a realistic assessment of the potential for sustainable tourism and its contribution to sustainable development in the Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP. Milne (1998) highlights how 'in attempting to achieve more appropriate forms of tourism, it is also essential that we steer away from creating a dichotomy between "alternative" and "mass" forms of tourism. Such a division serves little real purpose and diverts our attention away from the interlinked nature of all types of tourism development'. The foregoing analysis has served as a reminder that the prospects for sustainable ecotourism need to be viewed in the context of tourism visitation as a whole to this area of southwest China, and, in turn, that tourism development in general needs to be set in a much wider context.

What, therefore, are the prospects for the Yunnan Great Rivers ICDP? In particular what are the problems and prospects for sustainable local livelihoods in the project area and for poverty alleviation? The task of reconciling conservation and development is enormous, but the project should, at least, offer the prospect of a better informed overview by exploring the socio-cultural, ecological, technical and institutional issues which surround such an attempt to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with the social and economic needs of local people. Hopefully, such a co-ordinated overview will ultimately be effectual along the lines suggested by Wells and Brandon (1992), resulting in effective enforcement, mitigation of the adverse impacts of tourism, specific agreements for local development, and direct linkage of conservation goals to development benefits.

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