

Tourism development and changing rural identity in China



Lan Xue*, Deborah Kerstetter, Carter Hunt

Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 March 2016

Revised 22 May 2017

Accepted 13 July 2017

Keywords:

Community development

Identity

Rural

Chongdu Valley

ABSTRACT

This study examines the patterns and driving factors of identity change amongst residents of Chongdu Valley, China, who have been experiencing tourism development since the mid-1990s. Employing semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this study uncovered four types of identity change in the community: (1) a transition from notions of rural hardship to notions of rural amenity; (2) a corresponding transition from a sense of rural shame to a sense of rural pride; (3) an overall rise in community identity; and (4) rural identity became less “rural.” Residents’ identity changes can be attributed to three factors: shifted government policies, improved living standards, and host-guest interaction. The findings suggest that material changes brought by tourism development can impact residents’ rural identity change.

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Introduction

The economic and social impacts of rural tourism development have been widely acknowledged, examined, and debated (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Daugstad, 2008; Kneafsey, 2001), yet the same cannot be said of the cultural impacts of rural tourism development (Brandth & Haugen, 2011; Rogers, 2002; Tucker, 2003). For a rural tourist destination, one potential cultural challenge facing local residents is the influence of tourism development on their identity construction and transformation (Oakes, 1993). Tourism development can lead to changes in rural residents’ livelihoods, lifestyle, social networks, and living environments, which may all have impact on their perception of being a rural resident and living a rural life (Brandth & Haugen, 2011; Cassel & Pettersson, 2015). To uncover the patterns and driving factors of rural identity change that may be associated with tourism development, we conducted a case study in Chongdu Valley, a popular and developing rural tourist destination in central China.

China provides an opportune context in which to study rural identity shift because of the vast urban-rural divide that has created long-lasting socioeconomic disparities and perpetuated unfavorable images of rural residents (Knight & Song, 1999; Whyte, 2010). Although the socio-economic gap between rural and urban populations is still huge, if not expanding (Knight & Gunatilaka, 2010), residents in some rural communities have gained economic prosperity through livelihood change and income diversification (Démurger, Fournier, & Yang, 2010; Tang, Bennett, Xu, & Li, 2013; Xu & Tan, 2002). In Chongdu Valley, for instance, tourism development has changed residents’ livelihood from agriculture to tourism-related businesses and has largely increased the local living standards, which may be dramatically affecting local residents’ identity.

Although the social, economic, and political circumstances in China differ from those in other countries, a pejorative stance towards rural areas and thus disgraced rural identities are consistent across the globe (Bezemer & Headey, 2008). Further, a decline in agricultural income and the withdrawal of traditional extractive industries has led to rural restructuring

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: lanxuefree@gmail.com (L. Xue).

in both developed and underdeveloped countries (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008), and tourism has become an effective strategy for poverty alleviation, industry revitalization, and economic diversification of rural households (Iorio & Corsale, 2010). Based in a site where dramatic social, economic and environmental changes have occurred alongside tourism development, this study focuses on the Chinese experience and in the process provides insights that may be cautiously generalized to rural tourist destinations in other countries.

Despite the prevalence of studies on the intersection of tourism and identity (Goulding & Domic, 2009; Rivera, 2008; Rogers, 2002; Stronza, 2008), extant literature focuses largely on the cultural factors leading to identity change, such as tourist representation, cultural commodification, and host-guest interaction (Mayes, 2010; Rogers, 2002; Santos & Yan, 2008; Stronza, 2008). Absent from these writings are the “developmental” factors that may give rise to identity change. The present research complements the existing literature by focusing on a setting where tourism development has brought significant social, economic, and environmental transformations to the local community. Such a context renders new insight to the mechanisms by which tourism development may alter residents' identity.

Identity and tourism

The role tourism plays in identity change at a community level has been widely examined and recognized by tourism scholars. Scholars have discovered that tourism is a double-edged sword which can help (re)build as well as corrode identity. Some authors argue that tourism helps to preserve and revise local identity that otherwise might disappear (Rogers, 2002; Stronza, 2008). Other researchers believe that tourism can lead to erosion and degradation of local identity (Medina, 2003; Nunez, 1963). In addition, scholars have also identified a variety of means through which tourism can alter identity.

For instance, tourism itself can provide a platform through which identity can be managed, represented, and rebuilt (Jeong & Santos, 2004; Rogers, 2002; Santos & Yan, 2008). In such situations tourism helps generate a sense of identity, belonging, and public memory among local residents through the production of tourist sites and goods (Waite & McGuirk, 1996). In rural France, for instance, tourism development was found to offer one forum among others for local residents to engage in expressing, elaborating upon, and debating their collective pasts, presents, and futures, and thus may “help sustain the ongoing production of local identities” (Rogers, 2002, p. 477).

However, residents are not solely in control of (re)building their new identity. Their identity also depends on how tourists and other entities perceive of them. The notion that identity change can be imposed by outside forces and occurs beyond the control of local residents was prevalent in early studies of international tourism (e.g., Lanfant, Allcock, & Bruner, 1995; Nunez, 1963; Shepherd, 2002). Drawing on the asymmetrical power between underdeveloped countries and developed countries, these scholars highlighted how tourism brought western ideology, values, and markets to the underdeveloped world, leading to commodification and/or impoverishment of local history and cultures (Medina, 2003). Others presented evidence of the dominant role outsiders played in determining touristic representations of local identities (Jeong & Santos, 2004; Rivera, 2008).

Not surprisingly, then, there are scholars who believe that identity change is a bidirectional process involving the participation of both insiders and outsiders (Guerrón-Montero, 2006). For instance, Stronza (2008) discovered that Amazonian indigenous community members are active in negotiating their own identity with tourists. They have demonstrated increased pride, enhanced indigenous culture, and heightened native identity as they were involved in the tourism industry. Mayes (2010) found that culturally empowered rural residents can decide how to represent their communities in postcard production, though they remain subject to market pressures to produce what buyers want to see.

Host-guest interaction is another factor that threatens the sustainability of local cultures and identities (Smith, 1989; van den Berghe, 1994). Acculturation often occurs via the demonstration effects of tourists (McLaren, 1997). With the intrusion of tourists into host communities, local residents may adopt the lifestyle of tourists and gradually lose their own identity amongst a homogenized identity of the modern world (Stronza, 2001). In a study of ethnic minorities in southern China, Yang (2011) found that hosts-guest encounters made the locals eager to change their identity and adapt to the mainstream life of Han Chinese.

A common thread among this large body of research is the focus on cultural factors that drive identity change. New identity formation is typically grounded in the representations of local cultures, traditions, and heritages that have little to do with the socioeconomic conditions of tourist destinations. This perspective is short sighted as the impacts of tourism development are multifaceted, and material changes have had a huge influence on residents' sense of identity. Indeed, identity lives on in the “everyday practices of the contemporary world” (Cloke, 2006, p. 18). In rural areas, for instance, the increasing use of rural spaces for leisure, recreation, and tourism activities has challenged the conventional views of the rural, and thus, rural identities (Fløysand & Jakobsen, 2007; Panelli, 2006). Rural gentrification due to tourism development has blurred the distinction between rural and urban landscapes (Hines, 2010). Second home owners in some rural communities have driven local people out of the property market and reconfigured rural populations (Müller, Hall, & Keen, 2004; Panelli, 2006). And, adoption of tourism as a livelihood strategy has affected rural people's day-to-day practices, social networks, and mindsets, and thus their perception of living a rural life (Brandth & Haugen, 2011).

These examples suggested that the formation and recreation of rural identity is an ongoing process that is shaped by the social structure, landscape, livelihoods, and living standards in rural areas. While tourism scholars have invested much effort in understanding the mechanisms by which tourism alters identity, less attention has been directed to the societal, environ-

mental, and economic factors that have led to identity reconstruction and transformation. Given that these factors are inevitably brought about by tourism development, how and what kind of impacts they exerted on identity change deserve scholarly attention. The present study aims to provide answers to these questions by taking Chongdu Valley, China as a case study site. The significant developmental changes resulting from tourism development in Chongdu Valley rendered it an ideal scenario for examining whether and how such changes altered locals' sense of being a rural resident and living a rural life.

The cultural politics of the rural-urban divide in China

Unlike many other countries in the world where a rural-urban divide is usually characterized in terms of function, land use, population size/density, and socio-cultural disparity (Halfacree, 1995), the rural-urban divide in contemporary China is by and large a consequence of state control and institutional arrangements. Notably, the *hukou* system, or the household registration system invented through a series of policies put into effect in the 1950s, has built an “invisible great wall which divides rural and urban people and generates a substantial difference in their levels of economic welfare” (Knight & Song, 1999, p. 13).

Prior to 1978 when China was still operating a socialist economy, the *hukou* system carried out two functions: one was to prevent free mobility of Chinese people between urban and rural areas, and the other was to determine people's accessibility to state-provided benefits and opportunities (Chan & Buckingham, 2008). During that time, the government provided welfare in the form of employment, housing, food grain, medical care, education, a pension, and other essentials to people who held urban *hukou* (Cheng & Selden, 1994). People that lived in rural areas and held rural *hukou* had no access to state-sponsored welfare and were expected to provide support to urban residents (Chan & Zhang, 1999).

With the adoption of a market-oriented economy in 1978, a more flexible *hukou* policy was implemented that permitted temporary mobility between urban and rural areas (Chan & Zhang, 1999). However, the amended policy was mainly intended to facilitate the modernization of urban China through the employ of cheap rural labor (Ngai, 2005). Rural people began to migrate to urban areas in a large scale in search of jobs and increased income (Fan, 2008; Zhang, 2014), but they instead encountered rampant inequality in the form of unstable job opportunities, lower salaries, a lack of fringe benefits, and absence of formal education for their children (Fan, 2008), primarily because of the persistence of the *hukou* system.

The *hukou* system has thus resulted in huge economic disparity between rural and urban China (Whyte, 2010). According to China Statistical Yearbook (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014), the urban/rural income ratio has been fluctuating since 1978, reaching the lowest point in 1985 but going up afterwards (see Fig. 1). The income ratio has been above three since 2002, leading to the continuous and increased amount of migration from rural to urban areas as well as unprecedented problems and challenges facing rural China: children and older adults being left behind, poor infrastructure and facilities, abandoned farmland, environmental degradation, loss of rural traditions and kinship ties, and more (Biao, 2007; Chen, Ye, Cai, Xing, & Chen, 2014; Long, Li, Liu, Woods, & Zou, 2012; Skinner, Joseph, & Kuhn, 2003).

The persistent inequality has resulted in a long-lasting unfavorable perception of rural residents. For instance, in China the word “peasant” carries a negative connotation and has been widely used to describe all rural residents regardless of their occupations. Rural “peasants” are considered a lower social class and inferior to urban “workers”:

Speaking of workers and peasants, the workers have relatively more culture. . . we can't say the peasants have no culture – intensive farming, the singing of folksongs, and dancing are also culture. But the majority of them are illiterate and have no modern culture or technical skills. They can wield hoes and plows but can't use tractors. In terms of modern culture and technology, the bourgeoisie is ahead of the other classes. (Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China, cited in Lei, 2003, p. 613).

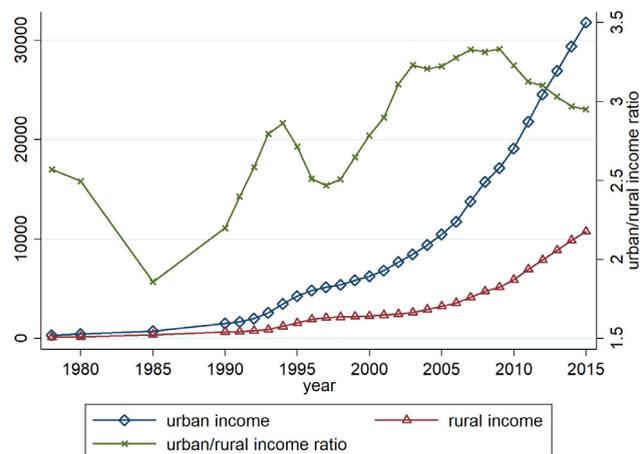


Fig. 1. Incomes and income ratio of urban and rural residents in China since 1978.

China's popular discourse also reinforces a negative image of rural residents. Urban areas are often referred to as civilized centers with striking skylines and grandiose highrise buildings. Rural areas are often described as backward, dirty, and unorganized (Lei, 2003). Urban people are alluded to as "high quality," polite, educated, and vocal, whereas rural residents are depicted as "low quality," under-educated, provincial, and as second-class citizens (Anagnost, 2004). This "population quality" discourse denotes rural residents as impediments to modernization, and suggests that they need to regulate their conduct and raise their "quality" to meet the standards of modern citizens (Murphy, 2004).

Another prejudicial discourse is that "peasants" have poor taste and wear outdated clothes, the opposite of urbanities (Zheng, 2003). Rural migrant workers, particularly those who are new to urban areas, are directly compared with urban residents. They tend to be distinctively visible in terms of their skin color, language, and dress (Herrmann-Pillath, 2005; Herrmann-Pillath, 2011). To combat the negative discourse and resultant discrimination, many female workers intentionally make changes to their appearance. In Zheng's (2003) study of bar hostesses in urban China, hostesses from rural areas consumed luxury goods, the latest models of mobile phones, and even resorted to plastic surgery to "erase their rural origins and lay claim to a new urban identity" (p. 150).

In sum, the *hukou* system and its associated economic consequences left a legacy of negative identity amongst rural residents' in contemporary China. More recent development efforts, including tourism, have allowed for new livelihoods in rural areas and have thus begun to close the economic gap between rural and urban areas (Su, 2011; Ying & Zhou, 2007; Zeng & Ryan, 2012). The extent to which the identity gap has closed correspondingly remains to be empirically demonstrated. Given that rural identity was historically associated with the lower economic status of rural residents, it is reasonable to hypothesize that rural identity may have changed through the recent tourism development that has brought new economic activity to rural areas.

Methods

Case study setting: Chongdu Valley, China

Chongdu Valley, located in southern Luoyang, is a popular rural tourism destination in Central China. It is under the jurisdiction of, from lowest to highest level, Tantou town, Luanchuan county, and Luoyang municipality (Fig. 2). Chongdu Valley Village is the only village located in the Valley and is home to approximately 367 households (1,440 residents). Prior to tourism development, local residents maintained their traditional lifestyle through farming, timber harvesting, and making bamboo crafts. This traditional lifestyle led to persistent poverty, as did the Village's isolated geographical location. It was not until 1995 that the first paved road connecting Chongdu Valley to the outside world was built. This change in transportation, along with Chongdu Valley's rich natural scenery (i.e., bamboo forest, waterfalls, and mountain springs) made it a great travel destination for urban dwellers.

In response to the mounting arrival of urban tourists, the local government and the Village co-established the Chongdu Valley Scenic Zone in 1999. At the very beginning, few local residents worked in the tourism industry and there were just six rural guesthouses capable of receiving tourists. By 2012 the number of rural guesthouses had increased to 328, with a total accommodation capacity of 12,000 visitors per night. More than 95% of the local population now worked in the tourism industry, and 90% households reported owning and operating rural guesthouses (Chongdu Valley Scenic Zone., 2013). Tourism has become the primary livelihood and income source for local residents.

Chongdu Valley is an appropriate study setting for two reasons. First, Chongdu Valley has been selected as one of the national models of rural tourism by the central government, so it represents a typical rural tourist destination in China. Indeed, government officers from different rural areas have visited Chongdu Valley and learned from its developmental experiences. Second, Chongdu Valley has a relatively long tourism development history that has induced various societal, economic, and environmental changes. It thus provides an ideal scenario for examining whether and how such changes altered locals' sense of being a rural resident and living a rural life.

Data collection and analysis

From June to August 2014, the first author conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation in Chongdu Valley. First, fifty local residents were purposively sampled to participate in a semi-structured interview. These interviews gathered information about 1) families and their trajectories during the time period in which tourism development occurred in the Village, 2) their perceptions of the difference between rural and urban areas before and after tourism development, and 3) any ways in which their perceptions of being a rural resident and living a rural life has changed in the years since tourism came to Chongdu Valley. The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

The first author also conducted 10 key informant interviews with non-local residents who work in Chongdu Valley as souvenir shop owners, corporate staff/managers, and tour guides. The purpose of the key informant interviews was to get an outsiders' perspective on tourism development and identity change. Key informants' were asked about their experience working in Chongdu Valley as well as their perceptions of tourism development and changes in the community.

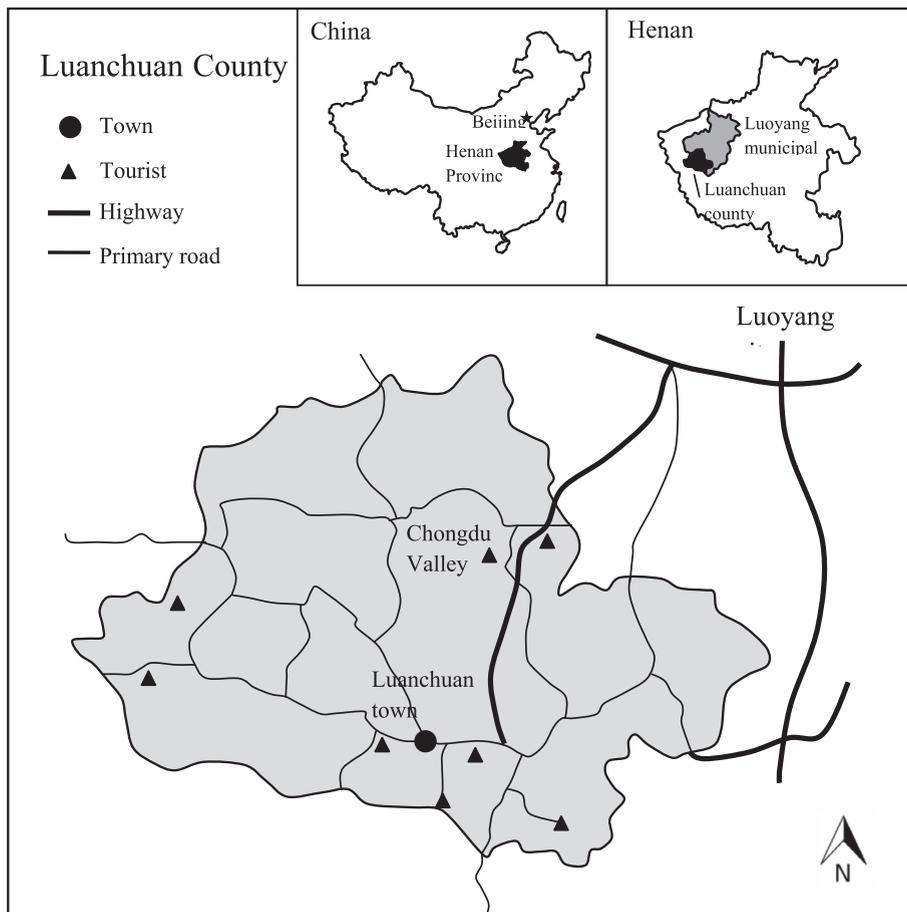


Fig. 2. The locations of Chongdu Valley, Luanchuan County, Luoyang municipal area, and Henan Province in China.

Table 1
The socio-demographic characteristics of the local resident sample.

Socio-demographics		Frequency	Socio-demographics		Frequency
Age	20–29	10	Gender	Male	28
	30–44	13		Female	22
	45–59	19	Household size	2–4	17
	≥60	8		5–6	26
Household income	0–49,999	8	Education	≥7	5
	50,000–99,999	15		Primary school and below	11
	100,000–199,000	16		Middle school	19
	≥200,000	1		High school	12

*Note: some interviewees did not provide information about their education and household size.

Finally, the first author gathered participant observation data on the daily routines and practices of local residents. She primarily focused on the family members of five guesthouses where she stayed during her visit. The interactions between the family members and their guests (i.e., tourists) were observed to better understand the potential factors underlying rural identity change. Detailed accounts of all the observations, as well as the first author's personal reflections, were kept in field notes.

The field notes and the transcripts from the formal interviews were compiled for data analysis. A grounded theory approach was adopted to capture themes emerging from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). Open coding and axial coding helped the authors to discover a range of categories and subcategories reflective of the themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding was then used to specify themes representing patterns of rural identity change as perceived by local residents, as well as the factors that have contributed to these changes.

Rural identity changes in Chongdu Valley

Four primary themes representing patterns of rural identity change were identified. These themes are addressed individually in the following sections.

A transition from notions of rural hardship to notions of rural amenity

The data revealed that older residents frequently speak of the poverty and hardship they endured prior to tourism development. For example, due to limited arable land within the Valley, local residents expanded their farmland on to the surrounding mountains for subsistence agriculture. During the farming season they averaged two hours travelling back and forth to their farmland. Crop yields were often constrained by a shortage of stable water sources for irrigation in the mountain area, leaving harvests dependent on the weather. Thus, yields fluctuated from year to year, and typically the best residents could hope for was to make ends meet, save a little for their children's education and, in lucky years, create a small economic buffer for family emergencies. Meanwhile, the intensity of this agricultural labor caused many farmers to suffer a variety of chronic diseases and on-going body pain.

The situation has changed with the development of tourism. Since 1999 most of the local residents have started guest-house businesses, which involves receiving tourists in their homes. This change from farm work to hospitality has gradually led to a *change in residents' perception of living a rural life*. Compared to farm work, providing food and room service is far less intensive and laborious. Working in the tourism industry has enabled local residents to make a much better living but in a less physically demanding manner. As one villager explained, "Now our living standard is almost the same as those in the cities. We don't work on farmland anymore, we buy the food we eat, we work as businessmen, not peasants anymore." However, adopting the new livelihood also engenders a feeling of pressure that they have never experienced as peasants:

Now our living standard is increased, but we feel less happy than before. When we farm, we only need to know the four seasons and the twenty-four solar terms; we had a quiet mood as peasants. Sometimes when I am alone, I thought of the debts I owed for rural house construction, I was worried a lot.

The freedom from hardship has allowed residents to finally cherish the environmental amenities in Chongdu Valley that they and their ancestors have been blessed with for hundreds of years. They have begun to acknowledge and enjoy the natural beauty surrounding them: the scenery of the mountains, rivers, and waterfalls; the rural environment absent of crowds, noise and chaos; the unpolluted air; and easy access to clean, organic food. All these amenities serve as a sharp contrast to the severe food contamination crisis and air pollution in urban China. As an owner of a rural house said:

If you are rich, for health, and for amenity, you'd better live in rural areas. Of course it is convenient to buy food and clothes in cities, but that is just a small part of your life. If you could own a house in rural areas where air is clean, environment is superb, and pollution is minimal, you will find it is the best life you can get.

Notions of rural amenity were also attributed to changed attitudes towards leisure¹ and the community's close proximity to recreational activities. Prior to tourism development, when life involved a considerable amount of manual labor, leisure was considered an unproductive use of time. Today, the slow pace of rural life has come to be seen as integral to enjoying life. In one of the rural houses where the first author was hosted during data collection, the sons in the family participated in recreational fishing almost every evening. The privileged proximity to nature provides a huge benefit and source of enjoyment for rural people. As one young boy raised in post-agricultural Chongdu Valley explained, living in a city would be boring because "there is nowhere to play in the city. You cannot jump into a river and swim."

Despite the improved quality of life in Chongdu Valley, some local residents still consider cities better places to live. Along with an increasing number of urban people renting rural houses in Chongdu Valley, there is a growing trend of rural and urban people admiring each other and, to some extent, wanting to experience each other's life style. A local resident denoted:

The differences are... urban people go to rural areas, and rural people go to urban areas, and that is the difference. In the countryside, we have good air quality, we have mountains and rivers around, urban people like to come. In the cities, there are high-rise buildings and large mansions, we think it is better. Wherever you live, you will always think other places are better. You are going to feel bored if you live in a place for a long time.

Meanwhile, the trend implied that urban residents also started to adopt a new perception of rural life and sought to enjoy the natural environment and rustic lifestyle that are absent from their daily routines.

A transition from a sense of rural shame to a sense of rural pride

Tourism is also responsible for a shifting characterization of rural as being a source of shame to being a source of pride in Chongdu Valley. Because of the long-lasting negative images of rural environment and rural residents in China, Chongdu Val-

¹ For Chinese people, leisure (Xiuxian in Chinese) can mean "'free time' or 'idleness,' or it can suggest a comfortable social status, a spiritual or aesthetic condition, or even a state of being" (Liu, Liu, Chen, & Long, 2010). In the context of Chongdu Valley, leisure is understood as "free time" or "idleness."

ley residents initially rejected the idea of tourism. They had little confidence in urban residents having interest in their culture, let alone coming to live in their rustic homes and eat their simple food. Tourism development was considered unrealistic. As one villager recalled:

Tourism development was proposed by a deputy town chief. Back then, needless to say the local residents, the village leaders doubted his proposal and said: 'How could it be possible? Who will come to Chongdu Valley? There is just a stream of water. No one will want to see it.' The deputy chief finally managed to persuade local villagers to build a few basic tourist facilities. Urban people then started to come to Chongdu Valley. They drove cars, good cars that the elder people in the village had never seen before.

The arrival of tourists who were interested in rural culture and lifestyle has changed residents' view of the local culture. Nowadays, many forms of local culture, both tangible and intangible, are packaged and presented to tourists. Local residents have learned to showcase the various aspects of their rural life to urban tourists. For example, farming tools and food processing equipment are preserved and presented in clay rural houses to provide urban tourists with a portrait of rural livelihoods. The art of making wine is showcased and tourists are allowed to purchase freshly made wine after each scheduled wine making demonstration. Bamboo-based arts and crafts, such as chairs and baskets, are handmade by local elders and sold to tourists at a good price. In addition, residents have designed and decorated their houses with traditional elements that highlight the slate roofs, wooden windows, and red lanterns. Residents have also learned to cook a wide range of authentic rural cuisine that stresses local, simple, and organic.

Tourism development has also changed local residents' understanding of urban residents. Through daily interaction with urban tourists, local residents have developed a more nuanced understanding of urban people. They still consider urban people to be polite, educated, and eloquent, yet also cold, self-protective, and shrewd. This may be partly due to differences in the living environments of urban and rural people; "in cities, life is fast paced and competitive, pushing urban residents to be cautious and discreet." In comparison, they think themselves to be warmhearted, easygoing and honest, as one villager said: "I think rural people are easygoing, whereas urban people are relatively, not easy to get close to."

However, locals still think that urban residents are more civilized than themselves. One villager said, "Urban people are more informative. Rural people are not as good as urban people in terms of speaking and knowledge." Some residents expressed their admiration of urban residents' clothes, behaviors, and manner of speaking, and felt embarrassed in comparison: "You don't need to go to the cities to be defeated; they come here to defeat you." Some expressed that they can still feel the discrimination from some urban tourists: "Some of them are very polite and clean, they talk to you, sit and chat with you. Some of them are vitriolic and fussy; they don't understand you. You treat them with [a] warm heart, but they don't appreciate it."

An overall rise in community identity

Another change in Chongdu Valley is the increasing distinction in identity between Valley residents and residents of other rural communities. Historically, identity among those from different rural villages was by and large the same: poor, frugal, and under-educated peasants that earn their income from agriculture (Lei, 2003). Now, in the wake of tourism, "Chongdu Valley resident" has become a unique identity that not only distinguishes the locals from others, but also results in locals' enjoyment of a variety of special treatment, benefits, and privileges.

For instance, residents of Chongdu Valley now have a deeply engrained reputation as "wealthy" within Luanchuan County. When Chongdu Valley residents shop in the town center, they are looked upon as affluent people who only buy expensive products. Several interviewees mentioned that when salespersons know that they are from Chongdu Valley, they always recommend the highest priced products.

Along with tourism development, Chongdu residents started to enjoy the convenience of running family businesses at home, whereas residents from other nearby villages have had to continue to rely on less profitable forms of agriculture or to look for jobs in the cities. As a result, Chongdu Valley residents do not have to bear the poor working and living conditions migrant workers often suffer in the cities. Some Chongdu Valley residents who had worked in the cities indicated that it is much better to run a business at home than to work in the cities.

Compared to outsiders who worked in Chongdu Valley, being a "Chongdu Valley resident" affords many privileges. For example, outsiders in Chongdu Valley have tended to open souvenir shops, restaurants, or work for the Scenic Zone. Few of them have been able to run a rural guesthouse, the most profitable business in Chongdu Valley, and those that do operate guest houses pay hefty rents to local residents. The same applies in other profitable businesses in Chongdu, e.g., local transportation, rafting, and expeditions exclusively operated by local residents. Valley residents are also given priority for full-time jobs in the Scenic Zone.

The privileges enjoyed by Chongdu Valley residents have lured outsiders and previous residents to move (or move back) to the Village. Distant relatives who have not communicated for decades now come to visit. A man commented: "When we were poor, we did not hear from distant relatives. But now they all come to find us." In addition, growing income and assets have made it easier for local men to find a wife. Old bachelors who were unable to get married prior to tourism development have all been able to do so. As a resident from another village who is very familiar with Chongdu Valley noted:

From the year of 2008, Chongdu Valley has sped up its changing pace. The local residents here do not need to do any marketing to draw tourists; they can make money at home. Now girls from all over the Luanchuan County think Chongdu

Valley is the best place to marry to. Because being married to someone from here almost means to become a wife of a wealthy family. The only thing she needs to do is to look after the house, no need to do any heavy work.

Overall, tourism has distinguished Chongdu Valley residents from other rural residents in terms of livelihoods, living standards, job opportunities, etc. While it helps generate a sense of pride and community identity in Chongdu Valley, it leaves rural residents in nearby communities behind in development and even being discriminated against when they seek jobs in Chongdu Valley. While the rural identity associated with Chongdu Valley residents is no longer disgraceful, the rural identity linked to residents in other poor communities may continue to be negative.

Rural identity became less “rural”

Despite the positive changes associated with rural identity in Chongdu Valley, the rapid and momentous transformations within and around the community have introduced a number of challenges that threaten the sustainability of residents’ “rural” identity. Local traditions, indigenous knowledge, social norms, and even built landscapes are all being tested.

The foremost challenge is the loss of traditional farming knowledge and skills. Prior to tourism development, local residents developed sophisticated knowledge about and skills for cultivating crops in mountainous areas. Now these skills and knowledge are facing extinction. Farmland on the mountains has been acquired by the government and converted to bamboo forests, leaving only a small portion of arable land for agriculture. Older residents who still farm only plant vegetables in their spare time. Most individuals under 20 years of age consider farming laborious and boring and, as a result, have no experience with it.

Along with the loss of agricultural knowledge and skills, the sharing system has also been tested. Prior to tourism development, due to limited labor and financial resources, local residents had developed labor- and resource-sharing rules to plant, grow, and harvest crops. These rules were extended to other areas such as building a house, traveling outside the Valley, and family emergencies. Now, with mounting income, a growing number of resources, and the influence of a modern business culture, the sharing system is disappearing as people tend to rely on themselves.

In terms of traditional culture, the local operas that used to be the most popular form of entertainment do not appeal to the younger generation of Chongdu Valley residents and are on the edge of extinction. Recalling the past, an older man who was a script writer for the local operas said,

Chongdu Valley had quite a prosperous culture. In the old days, the eight production teams had six self-organized performing troupes. They wrote operas themselves and performed for fun. . . . Chongdu Valley had advanced culture. The performing troupes were dissolved in recent years. We used to organize competitions for “Yangko” (a rural folk dance) and “Gaoqiao” (walking on stilts), drawing performing troupes from surrounding villages to compete.

Tourism development has also resulted in urbanization of the rural landscape. In recent years, Chongdu Valley has gradually transformed from a land of production to a land of consumption (Shepherd, 2002). Some residents complained that Chongdu Valley has become too urbanized to be considered a rural community. It now has a karaoke store, a movie theater, fast food restaurants, and a performance plaza. During peak season thousands of tourists infiltrate the community on weekends, turning the rural community into a mini-city. Indeed, gentrification has become a challenge for preserving an authentic rural environment and landscape.

The level of urbanization in Chongdu Valley does not appear to meet the needs of local young people; most of them indicated that they have purchased or plan to purchase second homes in the cities. Their ideal life is to live in Chongdu Valley from late spring to early fall when they can enjoy its rural amenities and run their tourism-related business. During the remainder of the year they plan to move in to the city to enjoy urban amenities such as indoor heating, high-quality medical services, and convenient travel. In addition, owning an urban property benefits the family in terms of medical services, the children’s education, and a means of security for the children if they choose to live in the city when they grow up. Despite the interest among youth, older people in Chongdu Valley indicated that they feel comfortable living in a rural area and have no intention of moving to a city; they prefer to live in the village for the rest of their life.

Factors influencing identity change in Chongdu Valley

Results revealed that the rural identity of Chongdu Valley residents has evolved alongside tourism development. The data gathered here suggests that three factors have influenced this change: 1) shifted government policies, 2) improved living standards, and 3) guest-host interactions.

Shifted government policies

When asked what has helped change rural life, many Chongdu Valley residents credited the Chinese national government despite the fact that it was responsible for the vast rural-urban divide in China’s recent history. A villager mentioned: “Now our life is much better than before. The government has made many good policies, putting rural people first place. Now, being a rural resident has more privileges than being an urban resident.” Starting in 2004 the national government recognized the severe economic and social disparity between rural and urban populations and established and implemented a

Table 2

A list of the key national policies and regulations on rural issues since 2004.

Policy	Focus	Release date
Opinions on deepening the pilot reform of rural taxes and fees	To increase the intensity of the deduction and exemption of rural taxes and fees and expand the reform to large areas	July 11, 2005
Establishing a rural minimum wage living security system	To establish a nationwide rural minimum wage living security system to secure long-term and effective measures for the subsistence of the rural poor	July 11, 2007
Opinions on the current finance market for promoting economic development	To increase financing in rural areas and encourage more loan making in the countryside	December 15, 2008
The key implementation plan of medical and health system reform	To expand the new rural cooperative medical system to more than 90% of the rural population in China	March 18, 2009
Decision on several major issues of comprehensive and deep reform	To establish a mutual and beneficial rural and urban relationship in an effort to let both the urban and rural populations equally participate in the modernization process and share the benefits	November 18, 2013
Opinions on improving the rural living environment	To carry out and implement scientific village-level planning to help improve the rural living environment	May 16, 2014
Opinions on further promoting a reform of the household registration system	To remove limits on the <i>hukou</i> registration in townships and small cities, relax restrictions in medium-sized cities, and establish qualifications for household registration in big cities	July 24, 2014

Source: The Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China, 2015.

series of policies and regulations aimed at releasing the burdens associated with being a rural resident. As shown in Table 2, policies associated with the rural social security system, the medical insurance system, and rural taxes and fees have largely alleviated the economic burdens on Chongdu Valley residents.

Policies at the national and regional levels should also be credited for rural economic development and, in this case, the rapid growth of the tourism economy in Chongdu Valley. For example, the policy on rural finance market provided strong financial support for rural residents to obtain seed funding to start new businesses (Table 2). In addition, Chongdu Valley residents benefited from a tax policy for small businesses at the provincial level, which allows businesses reporting earned revenue of less than 20,000 Yuan per month to be exempt from taxation.

Changing national policies towards rural population have also shifted the status of rural versus urban *hukou*. Today, being a rural resident and holding a rural *hukou* has a few advantages over being an urban resident. For example, farmland and land for house construction are allocated to each household in rural communities, and the only legal way for outsiders to obtain land is to lease pieces of land at a high price. In Chongdu Valley land value is increasing rapidly due to growing demand for land. Chongdu Valley residents that were in hope of becoming urban residents prior to tourism development now consider it silly:

There is no sense to transfer to urban *hukou*. Even if I was given tens of thousands Yuan, I won't transfer. Now, a rural house site is much valuable, plus I can earn much more in the rural than in the urban.

This opinion is not specific to Chongdu Valley, but is popular in many other rural regions in China (Hao & Tang, 2015).

Improved living standards

Another factor that influenced identity change was the huge increase in Chongdu Valley residents' living standards. Tourism development has brought substantial changes to local residents' annual income and overall assets. The income per capita grew more than 60 times from about 400 Yuan before tourism development in 1999 to about 27,500 Yuan in 2014, which largely exceeded the income per capita of other rural communities in the County, and even surpassed that of Luoyang (Bureau of Statistics of Luoyang, 2015). In terms of residents' overall assets, the most significant was the family's house, which changed from a one floor traditional clay house (Fig. 3 upper left) to a two to four floor modern rural house (Fig. 3 upper right) valued from 300,000 Yuan to 2 million Yuan. In addition, a growing number of local residents have purchased apartments in the town center, Tantou, or in the nearest city, Luoyang.

Changes in education and transportation have also occurred as a result of improved living standards. For example, residents' children are being sent to boarding schools in the town center for better quality education and care. In terms of transportation, most households own at least one motorcycle, the price of which ranges from 30,000 Yuan to 300,000 Yuan. Also, the popularity of private cars has increased residents' interest in driving relatively long distances to shop, relax, and have fun. Tourism has actually become an important component of local residents' leisure pursuits. Every year the village organizes visits to popular tourist destinations (e.g., Beijing, Hong Kong, Hainan) in China.



Fig. 3. Photos of Chongdu Valley before and after tourism development. Note: A typical rural house before tourism development (upper left, Courtesy of Lingge Ma), a traditional style rural house after tourism development (upper right), a village road before tourism development (lower left, Courtesy of Lingge Ma), a village road after tourism development (lower right).

Upgrades have been made to community facilities and services to improve the living environment. Smelly mounds of household garbage have been replaced by a modern garbage disposal system. Dirty restrooms have evolved into modern restrooms with better facilities. A variety of recreational facilities such as performance plaza and a movie theater have been built to provide entertainment opportunities for both tourists and local residents. New bamboo elements such as bamboo forests and bamboo-themed rural houses have been built in the community. And, a large manmade lake, water ponds, pavilions, bridges and roads (Fig. 3 bottom) have been built to further ameliorate the landscape and environment.

Overall, an increase in household income has bridged the economic gap between rural and urban residents while simultaneously enlarging the gap between residents from Chongdu Valley and from other rural communities, stimulating the transformation of residents' identity from rural shame to rural pride and led to a rise in community identity. However, increased income has caused them to consume more expensive products and purchase second homes in the cities, making them easily adopt an urban lifestyle. Upgrades in community environment have provided an amiable living environment for local residents, giving rise to their increased sense of pride, confidence, and community identification, whereas rural gentrification and urbanization have eliminated the differences between rural and urban spaces as well as landscape.

Guest-host interactions

Under the new political and economic conditions, interactions between local residents and urban tourists constitute another force that has altered rural identity. As previously mentioned, Chongdu Valley residents realized the importance of rural culture and tradition through the interests showed by urban tourists. They also gained a better understanding of urban residents and themselves through daily interaction with tourists. The results showed that the locals have begun to develop a holistic view of the qualities of urban and rural people and have changed their old self-deprecation and lack of confidence while interacting with urban residents.

Meanwhile, their new rural identity began to be challenged by the influx of urban cultures. For instance, as previously mentioned, the younger generation has lost interest in the local opera. Their day-to-day interactions with urban tourists and exposure to the Internet have introduced them to a broader range of cultures and types of entertainment, such as pop music, movie, video games, etc. Also, modern consumer culture has penetrated rural society and changed local residents' consumer behavior. Buying products such as private cars has become a new way of demonstrating one's economic status. Many residents choose to buy cars beyond their budget as a way to showcase their family's wealth. Increasing interaction with outsiders has also influenced their consumption of high-quality products. As a guest house owner said:

Now most of my clothes are of famous brand. Pants, shirts, and shoes. A pair of shoes usually costs me five to six hundred Yuan. Since I like to go to the cities to meet with my friends, sometimes it is just about 'face.' My friends are all wearing good clothes, and I have the ability as well, why shouldn't I?"

Running a tourism business requires social networking with urban tourists. These business-related interactions have also influenced residents' mindset and made them think and behave more like a businessperson. For example, many local residents have established long-term relationships with urban visitors, not merely for friendship, but also to attract more clients. For some residents, this active building of external social capital has helped them to expand their businesses. Their interactions with urban residents have begun to exceed their interactions with local people.

Discussion and conclusions

Through examining the patterns and driving factors of rural identity change in Chongdu Valley, China, we aim to understand the cultural impacts of rural tourism development as well as fill a gap in the tourism and identity literature, which tends to largely focus on the cultural factors behind identity change. We found that tourism development had enabled local residents to change their perceptions of themselves and the place in which they live. Notably, local residents have started to appreciate the positive aspects of living a rural life. They have begun to feel proud of being a rural resident, to embrace rural cultures and amenity, and to enjoy the privilege of being a rural resident, particularly a Chongdu Valley resident. These changes amongst rural residents are dramatic given the long history of discrimination and stereotypes against rural populations in China.

However, seemingly contradictory is that rural residents are also planning to purchase second homes in the cities, with the intent of living in the cities and rural areas at different times of the year. While they are embracing their new rural identity, they were also expressing admiration of urban lifestyle and were eager to learn and adopt urban cultures. This finding presents a paradox which may not be unique for transitional contexts (Tucker, 2010). Indeed, Chongdu Valley residents may have adopted a new form of hybrid identity that broke down traditional binary oppositions between the urban and the rural (Bhabha, 1994). As long as rural residents choose to live as half rural dwellers and half urban dwellers, the construction of their identity will be an ongoing process that is likely to continuously evolve and change.

The formation of a hybrid identity further indicates the emergence of a new kind of rural-urban relationship in China. In the past, rural-urban relations were characterized by the significant divide between rural and urban areas (Knight & Song, 1999). Today, tourism development has blurred this boundary. On the one hand, the disgraced rural identity has been minimized within China's new political environment and Chongdu Valley's new economic circumstances. On the other, urban culture has penetrated into Chongdu Valley, gentrifying the rural landscape, altering local residents' mindset and behavior, and threatening the sustainability of rural traditions. The future challenge facing Chongdu Valley residents is how to negotiate their rural identities and their increasing integration into urban cultures.

While examining the patterns of rural identity change, we also explored the factors that drove these changes. We found that government policy shifts play a critical role (Lepp & Harris, 2008; Rivera, 2008). In Chongdu Valley, tourism development took place concurrently with the implementation of a series of national policies aimed at releasing the economic burdens faced by rural populations and facilitating rural economic development. These policies have not only contributed to the smooth and successful development of tourism in Chongdu Valley, but also created a new nationwide discourse on rural people that has contributed to rural identity change. These results resonate with mainstream identity scholars who believe that collective identity is situated within larger social, economic, and political contexts and is subject to continuous changes arising from history, culture, and power (Hall, 1990).

More importantly, our study showcased that "developmental" changes have huge and mixed impacts on identity change. This finding adds to existing knowledge on the mechanism by which tourism alters identity, which has largely ignored the role of material changes on identity transformation. In China, rural identity has historically been primarily a result of the huge economic disparity between rural and urban areas. Improved income and living environment in Chongdu Valley, however, have helped to diminish the disparity. The Village now is by no means backward, dirty, and unorganized (Lei, 2003), and the local residents are on no account poor or provincial (Zheng, 2003). Instead, they are enjoying a living standard that is comparable to urban residents in the nearest city. The economic conditions that used to create the second-class status of rural residents have now become a source of pride for them to be distinguished from outsiders.

The rising economic and political statuses of rural residents also influences the way that local residents interacted with tourists, and in the process, further altered their rural identity. Previous studies have shown that rural residents often became less confident and more ashamed of their rural identity after interacting with urban residents (Zheng, 2003). Today in Chongdu Valley, while local residents are enjoying a similar level of living standards with urban residents, interaction between the two groups are based on their equal social statuses and turned to be pure clashes of distinctive traditions, human personalities, and mindsets through which elements of both cultures are reinforced.

Despite the important contributions we have made to the tourism development literature, particularly with respect to identity formation, this study does have two principal limitations. First, the study only focused on one rural community in China. Whether other tourism-dependent rural communities in China and elsewhere in the world have experienced similar rural identity change we are unable to determine. It is estimated that the developmental stage of the tourism industry and to what extent it contributes to residents' living standards will influence whether and how rural identity changes. Second, this study mainly treats Chongdu Valley residents as a single entity. In so doing, it fails to examine the experience and perspectives of different subpopulations (e.g., based on differences on gender, age, or economic status) that may present different perspectives on identity change and its influencing factors.

In conclusion, the results of this study extended the scope of existing research on tourism and identity by illuminating the impact of the developmental factors. However, much remains to be explored on the topic. Fruitful paths forward should include longitudinal studies on the impacts of developmental changes on identity; identity formation for different subpopulations; and other factors that may influence identity change, such as livelihood change, migration, and displacement. Adopting different methodological approaches and accounting for other potentially significant factors will contribute to a more holistic understanding of the intersection of tourism and identity.

Acknowledgement

The research is part of a dissertation study that was funded by the Interinstitutional Consortium for Indigenous Knowledge at the Pennsylvania State University – United States.

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Lan Xue earned her PHD in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management at Pennsylvania State University. Her research interests lie in community development, rural tourism, sustainable tourism, and tourism planning.

Deborah Kerstetter is a professor in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management at Pennsylvania State University. Her research interest lies in decision making behavior and impacts of tourism.

Carter Hunt is an assistant professor in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management at Pennsylvania State University. His research interests lie at the intersection of environmental anthropology and the anthropology of tourism.