

**Preliminary Field Study on Xishuangbanna Dai Prefecture
for Admission to the United Nations World Tourism
Organization Programme on Sustainable Tourism
Observatories**

Report by the MCSTO (Monitoring Centre for UNWTO Sustainable
Tourism Observatories in China) rapporteur

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report was to review a series of tourism attractions existing within Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan, China, with a view to assess whether advantages can be gained from enlisting the support of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Monitoring Centre for Sustainable Tourism located at Sun Yat Sen University.

For that purpose a visit was made to various sites during the period of April 8th to 14th, 2014 as described in the main body of the report.

It is evident from that visit that:

- a) Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture possesses outstanding natural environments of tropical rain forest and social communities based on the culture of its differing ethnic groups;
- b) That tourism is generating economic benefit for the differing communities;
- c) That continued growth of tourist numbers would, all other things remaining the same, create problems, particularly with reference to the social fabric of the communities, while evidence already exists of environmental issues arising from current agricultural practices;
- d) Problems can be averted, mitigated or overcome through informed decision taking;

Given this, it is recommended that the Yunnan Provincial Government through its pertinent subsidiaries and the local administrations of Xixhuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in association with the Yunnan Tourism Investment Company and its affiliates, seek an agreement with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Monitoring Centre for Sustainable Tourism located at Sun Yat Sen University to permit a process of destination monitoring.

The purpose of such monitoring would be to aid the Government to develop a vision of tourism that complies with the tenets of sustainable patterns of tourism and in accordance

with the principles being established by the People's Congress with respect to natural environments and the role of intangible assets such as those of cultural minority groups.

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However, the content of the report is entirely the responsibility of the author. If there are any errors, all consequences shall be borne by the author.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report was commissioned under the auspices of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to assess tourism developments on behalf of the Monitoring Centre for UNWTO Sustainable Tourism Observatories (MCSTO). MCSTO is located within Sun Yat Sen University as the operational centre for China.
- 1.2 Consequently it reports on the visit undertaken from April 8th to 14th 2014. The purpose of the visit was to assess whether the sites visited are appropriate for systematic monitoring – such monitoring being conducted to achieve long term sustainability of tourism product within a context of environmental, cultural, social and community sensitivities. The purpose of such monitoring is to aid all stakeholders to achieve the goals of the pertinent Chinese legislative and regulatory frameworks, and codes of conduct as enacted by the UNWTO and the national legislature. The pertinent policies of China and the Yunnan Provincial government are described below in paragraphs 2.10 and on.
- 1.3 The assessment in April 2014 included visits to Xishuangbanna Tropical Rainforest National Park, Mengyang Natural Reserve and the Wild Elephant Sanctuary, Mengjinglai, botanical gardens in Jinghong, the Tea-Horse Trail and villages of Dai and Jinoe ethnic groups.
- 1.4 All of these sites are to be found in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

2.0 Features of Xishuangbanna

- 2.1 The total population of the Prefecture is approximately a million people divided across three administrative units. These are the county-level city of Jinghong City (population in 2010 being 519,935) and two counties – Menghai County (331,850 residents) and Mengla County (281,730 residents). In the local Dai language

Jinghong means City of Dawn, and as such is a centre of accommodation while including many notable temples and other buildings.

- 2.2 The Prefecture is primarily agricultural in nature, and the region is covered with banana, rubber and tea plantations. Much of these have been established on land cleared from tropical rain forest, often in the past by burning. While there are protected areas of tropical rain forest one concern is that inherently the soils of tropical rain forest are not naturally rich, primarily deriving their nutrients from rotting vegetation. Consequently the plantations require considerable use of fertilizers, and thus there are issues of run-off into water drainage systems that threaten the quality of lakes and rivers in the longer term (Li, Ma, Liu and Liu, 2012). For example Zhang, Schaefer, Chan and Zou (2013) note an impoverishment of soils derived from growing numbers and areas devoted to rubber plantations.
- 2.3 The Tropical Rain Forest is also exceptionally rich in species biodiversity and many studies have reported this for significant periods of time (e.g. Zhu, 1992, Zhang and Cao, 1995). Cao, Zou, Warren and Zhu (2006) note that Xishuangbanna ‘... contains over 5000 species of vascular plants, comprising 16 percent of China’s total plant diversity (Li *et al.* 1996, Cao & Zhang 1997, Myers *et al.* 2000). The fauna of Xishuangbanna are no less diverse, as 36.2, 21.7, and 14.6 percent of China’s birds, mammals, and reptiles, and amphibians occur in the region, respectively (Kou & Zhang 1987, Wang & Jin 1987, Yang *et al.* 1987).’
- 2.4 However, while rain forest covered more than 50% of the Prefecture in the 1950s by the 1970s this had been reduced to 34% of the land area (Zhu, 1992). Today it is less. Mo et al (2011) demonstrate that the forests can recover with various forestry management techniques, but also comment that rubber plantations inhibit the effectiveness of traditional forest techniques.

- 2.5 Consequently there is a significant need to both protect and conserve existing Rain Forest, and in addition to establish transition zones between plantations and the forest to mitigate against overly nitrate rich waters and to better protect natural water drainage systems and thus the quality of the rain forest and its lakes and rivers.
- 2.6 The diversity of the Rain Forest also, as noted in paragraph 2.3, extends to its wild-life, and of specific tourism interest is the presence of Asian wild elephants. It is estimated that about 300 such elephants remain in China, of whom approximately 100 to 150 are to be found in Xishuangbanna as described below.
- 2.7 An additional feature of Xishuangbanna is the composition of its population. It represents an uncommon situation within China in that those of Han ethnicity are outnumbered in total by members of other ethnic and cultural groups. Census data indicate that Han form just over a third of the total population. Even within the city of Jinghong, according to the 2010 6th Census of population, those from differing ethnic groups form 61.4% of the population. In the two counties of Menghai and Mengla the ethnic minorities form 70% of the population.
- 2.8 The major ethnic groups within the Prefecture are the Dai, being about equal with the numbers of Han, followed by Hani who form about 20% of the total population. The next two largest groups are the Yi and Lahu. Of specific interest to tourism are the Jinuo who form about 2.5% of the total population, the Bai (who form about 1% of the total population) while Blang, Yao and Miao together form about a further 5% of the population.
- 2.9 As a result of policies directed toward the ethnic minorities of China, policies are being enacted to ensure that villages can participate in tourism in ways that

provide them with extra income yet protect their patterns of life. In this respect two key aspects are of importance. These are the national policies of China, and second the means of policy implementation that are being put in place by the Yunnan Provincial Government.

- 2.10 Chinese policies toward the ethnic minorities and their role within China are inherent in a series of plans that relate to the reinvigoration of the cultural industry in a wide context that also includes film and digital media, but under which cultural tourism can be included. The Plan was initiated under the Seventeenth National People's Congress, which sought to develop a cultural industry that would contribute toward the diversity of Chinese society. The initiative was prompted by a series of economic, cultural and indeed spiritual reasons – the latter because of the close relationship between culture and the faiths of Han and the ethnic minority peoples.
- 2.11 The policies are in accordance with concepts of the Chinese socialist market policies in that public ownership is reinforced in the programme. In the case of Xishuangbanna this has been achieved in part by the Provincial Government creating the Yunnan Tourism Investment Company (see paragraph 2.13).
- 2.12 The basic principles of the programme are important as they serve to determine the overall objectives of tourism policy as they relate to the visited sites. These principles can be summarized as:

The primacy of social benefits associated with economic gain;
A scientific basis for enhancing the cultural industries and their development;
An enhancement of commercial cultural enterprise; and
The development of urban and rural markets.

2.13 The establishment of the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company has been a key factor since the formation of tourism policies. One of its subsidiaries is the Yunnan Golden Peacock Tourist Group Limited which administers a number of locations including many of those visited during the inspection tour. The Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company is itself one of nine companies established by the Yunnan Provincial Government under the auspices of the Yunnan Provincial Development and Investment Co., Ltd, initially established in 1995. Total groups assets of Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company are significant at 3.5 billion RMB.

3.0 Background to Tourism Development in Xishuangbanna

3.1 Data derived from the Jinghong Travel Bureau indicates that in 2010 Xishuangbanna received over 8 million tourists, of which approximately 4.5 million stayed overnight. Of the total numbers of tourists about 250,000 were international visitors, of which 47% were from Thailand. A further 9% are from Myanmar. It is estimated that total numbers have increased by more than 30 % from that date. The role of Thailand as a source of visitation will significantly increase upon the completion of a rail link that will also cross Laos. The rail link was commenced in April 2011, and it is expected to be completed in about 2018/19.

3.2 Table One indicates the planned tourism development projects for Xishuangbanna under the 12th Five Year Plan for Xishuangbanna that covers the period 2010 – 2015.

3.3 The tourism product for Xishuangbanna is predicated on a mixture of visitation to tropical rain forest, the villages of different ethnic peoples, a culture of tea as exemplified in the Tea-Horse Trail, nature based tourism and to some degree wellness and spa tourism. River cruises on the Mekong are available and food and cuisine is another attraction with the area being noted for tea and tropical fruits.

Table 1. Tourism Development Projects of Xishuangbanna (2011-2015 Plan)

Tourism Development Projects (Areas)		Total investment(RMB, million)
1. Development of public tourist services and Infrastructure	5 projects	148
· Tourism information and service center	1	37
· Tourists rest stop	12	12
· tourism toilet	88	44
· Tourist public sign system	--	5
· Self-driving tour camp	some	50
2. Tourist Attractions Improvement	10 projects	2,765
3. Tourist small town development (Menglung, Dadugang, Menghan, Gasa, Yiwu, Daluo)	6 towns	29,091
4. leisure and recreation base for sport and fitness	13 projects	37,095
5. Tourist featured villages (one village one product, one household one skill)	4 projects	105
· Villages in Jinghong	11 villages	25
· Villages in Xishuangbanna Tourist Resort	3 villages	30
6. Tourist route traffic	5 projects	2,955.3
· Airport reconstruction and expansion		986.99
· 2 nd Class Road of Jinghong-Menglung		1,668.3
· Lancing – Mekong river international shipping and tourist facilities		100
7. Build high-end resorts and 4 star upper hotels, and improve supporting facilities	30 projects	7,564
8. Other tourist projects	13 projects	96,606

(Source: 12th Five-Year Tourism Development Plan (2011-2015) of Xishuangbanna)

3.4 Accommodation is generally centered in Jinghong. Mengla has one 5 star hotel (as at 2013), none are found in Menghai and 6 five-star rated hotels exist in Jinghong.

4.0 Sites visited and appraisal.

4.1 *The Valley of the Wild Elephants*

This is located off national highway 213 and is easily accessible from Jinghong.

The location is central to two main feeding areas and thus elephants cross between the two zones. The valley also has saltpeter pits used by elephants, and since 1985 these have been supplemented by officials and rangers from the park to ensure continued use by the elephants. There are estimated to be approximately 300 wild Asian elephants remaining in China, and the Valley and surrounding areas are thought to be home to about 100 to 150 elephants. It is one of the attractions that fall within the remit of the Yunnan Tourism Investment Company and marketed through Xishuangbanna Golden Peacock Group.

The whole zone is protected as a reserve and has various designations such as a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve and is a National Nature Reserve.

While there are supplementary wild life exhibits the primary attraction for the Valley of the Wild Elephants lies in the opportunity for tourists to see elephants. From this perspective there are 3 locations. The first is an elephant sanctuary for the recovery of elephants. Here elephants are allowed to recover from injuries often caused by hunters or being caught in traps, and also allowed to recover from drugs used on the elephants to calm them when used in logging camps and similar locations. The overall objective is to return elephants to the wild, and this may take a period of 7 years and success is difficult to achieve. The care facility commenced in 2004.

The main visitor attraction comprises of a Museum with displays and information pertaining to elephants, a cable car ride that takes visitors just over two kilometres over the forest on a ride of 35 minutes duration, a board walk at the height of the trees which is 920 metres in length, and an elephant performing area using troupes and elephants brought in from Thailand. Supplementary areas include a butterfly area.

One other aspect that is significantly mentioned is the existence of a rich diversity of wild life and birds. It is also possible to stay overnight in the zone using accommodation originally provided for science staff studying the zone. This represents the best opportunity for actually viewing the elephants and most visitors do not actually see the animals.

Appraisal

It was stated that the zone attracts about 1 million visitors a year, and currently has a daily carrying capacity of about 15,000 visitors. There is an intention to extend the board walk to a total of length of approximately 7 kilometres. It was observed that tour guides use loud speakers to convey information, and given the volume of visitors and conducted tours, especially during peak periods, it is evident that noise intrusion is high. The board walk itself is well constructed with the use of open spaces and glass areas to permit vegetation to grow naturally in terms of access to light and space.

Tour guides are offered special training in terms of seeking to ensure that the information being provided to tourists is accurate, and annual meetings with tour operators are organized.

It is suggested that a reduction of noise intrusion is possible by managerial techniques that can reduce the need for human intrusion into the forested areas such as the use of high technology visitor information shows. Such shows can be of 45 to 60 minutes duration and can convey a significant amount of information to tourists. It would reduce (a) the need for tour guides conducting groups and using loud speaker and (b) given that most groups stay for about two hours, reduce the time they are actually in the forest. Further time in the forest may be reduced by offering catering facilities, opportunities to purchase souvenirs and

books and videos of the area in an area associated with the suggested Visitor Centre. The Centre could be located at the Museum Site – which while very informative is very conventional and static in its nature.

The use of such a Visitor Centre could generate additional revenue for the Valley and also reduce the need for extending the board walk, again reducing intrusion impacts.

If the Valley wishes to attract international visitors from the west at some subsequent time it needs to be aware that many such visitors would have reservations about the Thai Elephant Show. It is evident this is currently very popular with the domestic Chinese audience, but as such groups become increasingly environmentally aware they too may come to voice concerns similar to those voiced in the West. One concern is about the training methods used to get elephants to perform what are essentially circus tricks. It is also suggested that using elephants as entertainers in this way is inconsistent with the environmental messages that are otherwise disseminated and which imply a need to respect animal life. From the perspective an elephant being swung by its tail around a small podium appears somewhat incongruous.

There is undoubtedly much good intent and good practice and care being shown, but it is suggested that processes of monitoring by MCSTO would be of benefit to the Valley.

4.2

Ji'nuo Village

This too is an attraction managed and marketed under the remit of the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company and the Xishuangbanna Golden Peacock Group. The group was asked by the government to take over the operations of the

Ji'nuo Village in the aftermath of a previous financial failure that left a debt of 400 million RMB. This has required to group to make an initial further investment of 11 million RMB and the current mode of operation commenced in June 2006. Currently the village employs 170 staff of whom 74% are members of the Ji'nuo people.

In addition to the investment in tourism infrastructure the company has also undertaken significant investment in both environmental improvement programmes and in ensuring a better water supply system for the village, stabilizing of soils on the hillside and the refurbishment of people's homes.

The Ji'nuo people number approximately 21,000 of whom over 90% actually live in Jinghong City. Approximately 900 live in Mengla County. Living in a very isolated part of China they were one of the last groups to be designated as a 'national minority' which status was approved in 1979. Their economy was based upon agriculture and hunting. Traditionally they were a matriarchal people where permission for marriage was sought from the uncle, and they lived communally. Their religion was animistic in nature.

Appraisal

The village currently attracts about 450,000 visitors a day and it has been estimated by the company that daily visitor capacity is about 5,000 visitors, indicating therefore a current spare capacity – although visitor flows are both seasonal and impacted by holiday periods. The main themes of the visitor experience are based upon traditional music while visitors can also tour that part of the village which is primarily designed to highlight key aspects of Ji'nuo culture. As they do so local people have stalls to sell foodstuffs and various artefacts such as smoking sticks. Local people continue to live in the village, but with there being opening hours to the village traditional patterns of life are able to continue. On the other hand tourism has provided a means for older people to continue to have an economic function demonstrating traditional practices such as weaving when they reach an age when working in the fields becomes too difficult.

The village offers a sequence of attractions that have been spatially based upon a one-way tour of the village that shows various aspects of traditional life and which includes local sports and activities. The village currently is open for approximately 300 visitor days. As with many such villages activities such as drum dances, climbing the bamboo pole are now performed on a daily basis, especially during the main holiday periods. Certainly Ji'nou culture has become a commodity, but as in many cases has specific economic benefits.

At least two issues therefore exist that would deserve monitoring from MCSTO. The first is to assess Ji'nou attitudes towards their own culture and to advise means by which Ji'nou can determine those aspects they wish to retain as personal and community assets specific to their own community, how to protect means by which they can be enacted within the community without becoming a tourist attraction. Associated with this are issues of retaining intellectual property in their own artefacts and maintaining control over the representations of their arts, music and performance. Given that sustaining this integrity is part of the State's concerns over intangible cultural resource and the care being shown by Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company and its associated companies this is not thought in itself to be a major issue.

Of greater long-term concern is the issue of forecast tourist numbers. The impact of the planned rail links with Laos and Thailand will generate many more visitors, and forecasts exist for possibly 60 million visits to two Ji'nou villages in 2015. This significantly exceeds current carrying capacities and raise significant questions for all stakeholders including the Ji'nou themselves. Various policies can be enacted such as replication of product using a diffusion approach, the use of transferring product to say a central location such as in Jinghong which relieves pressures on a road network, but which raises issues over ownership and right to culture, to using the price mechanism to charge very high prices to cut demand (but which in turn raises the issue of providing value for money and the need to present a high quality product – however defined) to the use of quota systems of

entry. Given the significance of these problems it seems appropriate for stakeholders to avail themselves of the UNWTO resources and skills of personnel associated with the MCSTO.

4.3 *Mengjing Dai Village*

Meng Jing is based upon an area of 5.6 square kilometers on the China-Myanmar border comprising a community of about 110-140 people maintaining an agricultural life-style and sustained by a belief in Theravada Buddhism. The people belong to the Dai ethnic minority who are, however, the largest ethnic grouping to be found in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

The tourist product is based upon Dai culture, traditional practices and artefacts, and the Buddhist faith. The village has a monastery and thus plays a role in the immediate region as young men come to serve a period as a novice and monk as required by traditional practice. Visitors can therefore see various natural and built aspects relating to the Buddhist lifestyle and be provided information and the history and meanings of these sites including the holy well and stories of the banyan tree. In addition there are examples of pottery, tools and in addition home-stay facilities are also available complete with wifi connections.

Currently the staff number is 121 and the average monthly wage bill is 300,000 RMB, Approximately 50% of the staff are village members, and it is estimated that these receive an annual income from the company of about 1.3 million RMB. In addition village members will receive an income from the sale of souvenirs and foodstuffs, and from those tourists who choose to stay in the village.

Because of the provision of accommodation the village does not close at night and is open to visitors throughout the whole day.

The management of the village as a tourist attraction commenced in August 2003 when the State Planning Commission to Xishuangbanna Menghai Development Planning Bureau issued a “Xishuangbanna scenic view to the approved project proposal and the Golden Peacock Travel Group agreed to the construction of the project area. Subsequently a plan was developed with advice as to architectural design and this commenced in October of the same year with visitors and trial starting in January, 2004. By April 2005 the village and the surrounding area was designated as a national AAA tourist spot. Maintenance and improvements as to infrastructure including sewage and water supplies continued and a further impetus toward planning occurred in November, 2010 when by the West China Planning Institute - the Institute of Research Ltd was commissioned to undertake further detailed planning for the long-term development of scenic spots. By 2014 the facilities were such that Golden Peacock commenced a programme of branding to incorporate the Village into an integrated marketing system that includes the other assets mentioned in this report. More specifically the brand positioned the village as “the edge of the border river winds Buddha Dai Yun”.

The initiatives reported here have permitted the development to acquire a number of awards and work has now commenced to develop the village as an AAAA scenic and cultural location.

Not surprisingly one outcome has been a rapid increase in the number of tourists visiting the village, with there being less than 20,000 in 2010 to about 82,000 in 2012 and just under 180,000 in 2013. Under the current sets of circumstances

there is little doubt that figures may well double in a short period of time and by growing yet faster by the time of completing the Laos-Thailand-Yunnan Railway.

Appraisal

Currently it is suspected that the residents feel they have gained much from tourism. Their village houses have been improved, their living conditions are better and their incomes much improved. That they have entered the world of the 21st century is symbolized and made functional by their easy access to the internet. In addition their culture and the aspects of the Buddhist belief system is portrayed through a small museum.

The immediate concern here is akin to that of the Ji'nou village, and that is the impact that tourism will have upon village life. Not only might the number of tourists grow, but the economic opportunity they represent will come to challenge the current small scale of operations that cater for the present numbers. There will probably emerge demands for larger scale retail and accommodation provision of a more up-market nature and the village will come to closely resemble a commercial, professional themed village. Examples elsewhere would suggest that the current residents will move out into houses that offer modern conveniences such as air conditioning, and the current village becomes a place of work. The nature of the community will change.

MCSTO can aid in this process by monitoring resident attitudes and offering advice. It is the view of the report's author that residents as stakeholders in tourism and as beneficiaries need to be informed about the choices that face them as tourism develops. Residents may choose not to sustain patterns of life in their entirety and may well wish to adopt alternative modes and patterns of life that possibly entail adopting roles different to those of today. With the help of the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company and Golden Peacock Tours it is suggested that this is better done as a proactive rather than reactive process. One way of doing this is to work together to identify potential future scenarios, look at the resource implications of those scenarios and identify possible consequences.

These can then be examined more closely before making choices. MCSTO with its monitoring processes can aid in scenario development.

4.4 *Tea Horse Trail Theme Park*

This is situated in Menghai and is based on a previous tea research station, the China Pu'er Tea Scientific Research Base, which continues to operate. It is managed by Yunnan Golden Peacock Tourist Group.

The Ancient Tea Horse Road was a network of trading routes linking the tea producing areas of Yunnan (mainly concentrated in the southeast of the province in Pu'er 普洱 and Xishuangbanna/Sibsongbanna, 西双版纳) and Sichuan 四川 (around the area known as Ya'an 雅安) with the markets in China and particularly Tibet. It first emerged as being important during the Tang dynasty (618–907), and flourished specifically in the late-Qing period (1790s to 1911) and retained its important until approximately the mid-twentieth century. While possessing various offshoots the main route begins in Menghai 勐海 (Xishuangbanna), then proceeds to Pu'er (the first major trading town en route), and through to Feng Qing 凤庆, Dali 大理, Lijiang 丽江, Zhongdian/Shangrila 中甸/香格里拉. After this it continues to its final destination of Lhasa.

Contemporary tourism development arguably commenced with the initiatives undertaken by the Yunnan Tourism Investment Company and the upgrading of the current structures that were initially based on the passion of Mr. Zhou Jianming who collected remnants of buildings, signage, walls, cottages, tools and paraphernalia from the slowly dilapidating former stations of the trail. Today there are trekking and horse riding companies offering tea horse trail experiences. The concept of tea horse trail tourism was given a boost by a re-enactment undertaken in 2005 of a tea caravan engaging over 100 mules was undertaken accompanied by significant publicity, and by the success of a popular television drama *The Ancient Tea Horse Road* set in the 1940s. A Tea Horse Trail festival was established in 2010.

There is little doubt that the festival, restoration and marketing activities have helped to revive an increasingly forgotten aspect of Yunnan heritage and culture as the need for the Trail had disappeared under modern means of transportation of tea. The commercial links with Pu'er tea form a symbiotic relationship that benefits both the tea industry and tourism. It is arguably a case of *tian shi di li ren he* (天时地利人和) (which stresses the intersection of 'time, place and people') as, in part, a constructed tradition has come to represent something that is unique to this part of China – thereby providing a tourism story found in few other places (see Sigley, 2012).

Appraisal

At the time of the visit there were few other tourists present, and as such the party was able to enjoy the mule rides and wander through the premises at will. The story that is told is well displayed, guide are available and a final section replicates a trip into Tibet by a short walk to a display that informs the visitor about the feudal class structure and slavery that existed in Tibet in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

No doubt at times during festivals the location would be crowded, but for the most part the buildings complement a story of Yunnan and Xishuangbanna and possibly represent a means of adding to a tourism portfolio as discussed in the final section of this report.

4.5 *Parashoreas Scenic Zone within Xishuangbanna National Rainforest Park*

The park has been operating commercially for tourism since at least the 1990s and has World Conservation Union (IUCN) classifications. From the outset the commercial activities have been perceived as being of importance to help fund the

conservation work and to provide employment opportunities for local people, many of whom work within the Park Administration and as guides.

The visitor experience, if a total trip is undertaken, can include access to the Park by a boat trip across a lake, to arrive at a reception area that is also accessible by road. From this point the visitor walks along a path designed to display the many different orchids that can be found in the Park to arrive at a 'Sky Tree' Walk. This is based upon the structures left by a previous research station. The rope bridge walk extends for approximately a kilometer at a height of approximately 30 metres and permits visitors to look down at the rainforest canopy while still being below the crown of the sky trees.

From this point the visitor can return to the visitor centre and reception area by a walk that is well paved and signposted with occasional information points about the vegetation including name tags based on the appearance of entwined trees. The exit finally takes the visitor past a stream so that the sound of trickling waters can be heard – creating thereby a walk of both visual and aural qualities.

Certainly it is easy to find a wealth of scientific literature on the rainforest area including some work that relates to tourism.

The accompanying guides indicated a number of additional future projects, which included in the longer term the replacement of some of the current tarmac and concrete pathways with more ecologically friendly walkways – one aspect being that during periods of heavy rain the current paths will tend to both divert rain water from otherwise natural flow paths while potentially increasing the flow of water.

There are also informational centres including a small museum that includes details about plant species, mammals and birds that can be found in the area.

As is not uncommon with natural areas heavily used by tourists a displacement effect occurs whereby many of the bird species that are less tolerant of human species will move away to more distant zones, but in this case the visitor will still

be able to observe many butterflies, thereby reinforcing a perception of natural harmony. In practice the walkways act as collection points for tourists, and being easy to follow can be planned to take tourists away from the more environmentally fragile areas, thereby effectively creating quieter zones where species of mammals and birds less tolerant of intrusion can continue to feed, nest and breed young.

Appraisal

The impression gained was that the Park is capable of absorbing for most periods of the year its current numbers of visitors, and entry ticket prices by Chinese standards tend to be quite high if one considers that many make visits as part of a family or group of friends. The main threat to the Park may not in fact come from tourism, but from the surrounding development of plantations and to some extent urban intrusion with their impact on soil and water qualities as described in paragraph 2.2 above.

4.6 *Tropical Parks in Jinghong*

A visit was also made to tropical and botanical gardens in Jinghong. These are zoned into different locales based upon themes of botany and culture. The paths are wide, and visitors can either walk or take advantage of electric vehicles. Additionally interpretation by guides is offered. These gardens therefore act as an escape from the urban nature of Jinghong for residents, as an easily accessible source of information about the tropical plants and nature for tourists, and also continue to operate as centres for research. They are designed for large numbers of people to enjoy and their use could possibly be enhanced by the provision of higher quality restaurants without impinging overmuch on the natural environment.

4.7 *The Yunnan-Laos Retail Zone (Daluo, Mengla).*

Given that mean incomes in Yunnan are significantly below those of much of the rest of China, significant interest has been expressed in the development of Thailand-Yunnan development and trade that in part would involve Laos and Myanmar due to the geography of the region. The development of routes R3A and R3B connecting Chiang Mai to Kunming through Jinghong are all part of a planned North-South Economic Development Zone.

At the time of the visit there was little sign of activity. The retail outlet was notable for the absence of tour buses rather than the presence of busy shoppers, but the stores were well stocked and the premises open and easily accessible. The area was much busier when a casino existed on the Laotian side of the border, but these were closed in 2011 after a series of stories emerged of crime, prostitution and corruption emerged. However in April of 2014 the Laotian government has recently given permission for a new casino to be developed by the Australian company, Donanco, and one awaits the outcome of that development.

Certainly business interests on both sides of the border continue to more closely mesh the economies of Yunnan and Laos together. It seems, for example, that the Chinese owned rubber plantations are undertaking significant development on the Laotian side of the border.

Given this the retail development may be likened to a parent who buys a shirt too large for their son. The son will grow to fit the shirt, and so too business may grow to fit the retail and souvenirs stores at the frontier.

5.0 ***Recommendations***

5.1 In making the following recommendations it is necessary to note and thank the staff from the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company and Golden Peacock Tours who accompanied us, willingly provided information both during and after the completion of the visit, and who proved to be well informed and

professional in their approach. However, the responsibility for the following recommendations rest with the lead researcher, Professor Ryan.

5.2

A number of observations have been noted in the text above which highlights both macro- and micro- concerns at a site level. In one sense it would be easy to extend a list of such observations, but to do so on the basis of a brief visit and limited discussions may mislead due to inadequate information. What was observed however does lead to the first recommendation, namely

There is value for the Yunnan Provincial Government and the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company and its subsidiaries such as Golden Peacock Tours engaging in the monitoring processes that can be provided by the United Nations World Tourism Organization Monitoring Centre for Sustainable Tourism located at Sun Yat Sen University It is suggested that this will be of benefit for the following reasons:

- a) It is evident that Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company and Golden Peacock Tours have well qualified staff who strongly wish to work in a manner consistent with China's policies on intangible tourism resources as outlined in paragraphs 2.10 to 2.12. Being able to draw upon the expertise and access to international staff possessed by the Centre at Sun Yat Sen University will enable such Company staff to utilize an easily accessible outside source of informed advice designed to aid the company achieve its objectives of securing a sustainable economic, social and environmental outcome from tourism development. Such access would also be cost effective.
- b) The use of such services by the Company will in itself indicate the Company's willingness to engage in policies envisaged by Chinese National Policy.
- c) Given future issues facing tourism development arising from the completion of the Thailand-China Railway allied to the growing wealth of China's own population, one can only envisage a

significant increase in tourists over future years that could overwhelm the social fabric of the ethnic villages visited during this visit while additionally creating further potential environmental stress. However, with reference to the latter issue, published research by Chinese scholars indicates that a greater threat to the natural environment may arise from an extension of current agricultural practices that have permitted plantation development with the implications noted above.

This therefore leads to a second recommendation.

There is a need for the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Investment Company and its associate bodies to determine planning policies that will generate a vision of the type of tourism it wishes to possess in a decade.

China's national tourism policies desire a form of tourism that generates economic benefit for residents in the tourist receiving zones, that aids ethnic peoples to rediscover and reinforce their own cultural traditions and yet be citizens of a twenty-first century China, earning high incomes, having access to education and enjoying a high quality of life. That same policy also envisages a country that provides Chinese citizens with an ability to travel, discover their own country and enjoy high standards of life with good work-life balances. In short, domestic demand will continue to grow. But to achieve these ends requires planning decisions with reference to:

- a) Land use decisions – where are the hotels to be built, which areas can absorb the higher numbers of visitors, how does one avoid overcrowding, how can the economic benefits of tourism be extended and disseminated across a region or province, and what are the patterns of access and how are individual sites to be managed? Equally, how are the subsequent income flows to be treated (e.g. see Donaldson, 2007)?

- b) Often tourism regional policies can be classified as being based upon ‘honeypots’ – that those areas designed to handle large numbers of tourists, which become increasingly commercial, dominated by externally located corporations, yet which serve a function by which other areas can continue preferred life styles relatively undisturbed. In terms of local culture indigenous people can travel to the ‘honeypot’ to entertain tourists, but their own villages and farms can then choose to remain aloof from tourism or engage in smaller scale tourism more consistent with their norms.
- c) One problem with the ‘honeypot’ approach is that economic benefit becomes concentrated in a few zones, there are often high leakage effects with profits and income reverting to outside corporations, and areas outside of the economic mainstream may continue to be marginalized. An alternative policy is therefore to distribute tourism development across a wider area, but this carries risks of introducing social changes that challenge the status quo, especially with reference to ethnic minorities.
- d) Many regional administrations therefore adopt a mix of the two policies, but often this is easier said than done and raises the questions listed above, especially those relating to identifying zones and patterns of land usage.

Already practices that challenge the conventional patterns of village life of the ethnic minorities have occurred. For example Yang and Wall (2008) comment on the commercialization of ‘wedding ceremonies’ and the request for cash ‘dowries’, and the entertainment provided for tourists that depart from customs where songs were used for specific purposes. Indeed Yang and Wall (2008) note that often they are substituted by the use of popular Han songs.

Tourism development raises tensions, which may be classified under four headings, namely:

State regulation vs. ethnic autonomy

Cultural exoticism vs. modernity

Economic development vs. cultural preservation

Authenticity vs. commercial commodification

It must be emphasized that these dichotomies are not simple cases of the best vs. the worse scenario. Nor is each pairing separate from the other dualities. They are all intertwined. Thus authenticity of culture is desired by the State's Cultural Policies, but equally there is a need for commercial presentations to generate the income needed by regions such as Xishuangbanna and its minorities.

Hence there exists a need to consider what form of tourism Xishuangbanna wishes to pursue and achieve over a decade. To do this requires informed decision making. One aspect that arose in discussion with staff from Golden Peacock Tours that may help was an initiative to invite members of another ethnic minority experienced in issues of development of tourism product based upon ethnic values and presentation. Through contacts with the Maori Arts and Crafts Institute and a member of the tourism advisory group of the Maori King in New Zealand, it is suggested that a dialogue be established that may be of value to both the Yunnan Tourism Investment Company and the ethnic minorities in terms of identifying good practice.

In making this suggestion, no motive exists other than to commence a dialogue. It is for the Chinese and Xishuangbanna ethnic minorities to determine if value is to be gained from such discussions, but Maori in New Zealand have been involved in tourism for over 150 years and have generated commercial product consistent with their own ethical and tribal cosmology – and it is suggested that such contact may have much to offer Xishuangbanna stakeholders.

It is not for any outside body or consultant to determine what people should choose to do, but to the writer of this report various issues appear clear, and these are:

Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture has retained a dynamic and diverse cultural mix and is at a stage where the different peoples are rediscovering and taking pride in their culture;

That this represents an asset for China and the world that is worth conserving;

That such conservation can benefit tourism and be benefitted by tourism in creating a better economic base for the peoples of the Prefecture;

That choices and decisions need to be made as to what form of tourism the Prefecture wants, and those choices need to be made relatively quickly and then implemented as policies simply based on growing numbers of tourists will overwhelm the current social fabric of the villages;

That choices can be informed as to the possible consequences of alternative policies by using the services of the Monitoring Centre for UNWTO and looking at practice elsewhere as suggested above with reference to a dialogue with people such as Maori;

That these choices are not easy, but the choice to do nothing other than build more facilities and cater for more tourists is a formula for short term success but longer term costs as the Prefecture will lose its uniqueness as existing social and natural environments become degraded under the weight of numbers. Such degradation only then serves to undermine the quality of the visitor experience. The Butlerian concept of the Tourist Area Life Cycle notes inherent tendencies to decay unless informed intervention occurs – generally (albeit not always) by the public sector.

Tourism does not exist in a bubble complete in itself, but as part of an interconnecting array of assets, organizations and frameworks. That array of assets includes the natural environment. This too is part of the assets of Xishuangbanna and as noted, this too is under threat, implying again a need for careful zoning policies with reference to urbanization and agricultural policies.

These policies require continuous monitoring and discussion involving all stakeholders, and hence it is considered advantageous that the appropriate authorities avail themselves

of the advice that can be obtained from the UNWTO Monitoring Conservancy based at Sun Yat Sen University.

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