

El turismo del té y la revitalización rural: conocimientos y evidencias desde Zhejiang, China.

Tea tourism and rural revitalization: insights and evidence from Zhejiang, China.

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Resumen

En China se ha prestado gran atención a la revitalización rural como resultado del rápido desarrollo socioeconómico, y se ha establecido oficialmente como estrategia nacional en los últimos años. El estudio pretende identificar el potencial del turismo del té, como forma específica de turismo gastronómico rural, que podría contribuir a la revitalización regional, sobre la base de los ricos recursos del té y la auténtica cultura del té en China. Desde una perspectiva orientada a los actores, el estudio comparativo de casos en la provincia de Zhejiang muestra que, la práctica real del turismo del té en las zonas del caso, está conformada por factores ambientales y personales. Mientras tanto, el potencial de los recursos del té no se ha integrado plenamente en las actividades turísticas, ya que la

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capacidad operativa de los profesionales se ve restringida por cuestiones conceptuales y otras autolimitaciones. A pesar de ello, la evolución del turismo del té se convierte en un canal para facilitar el sustento y la calidad de vida de los residentes, evitando su emigración y logrando la revitalización rural. Por último, también se discuten las implicaciones prácticas para ofrecer una visión de la práctica del turismo del té en la región.

Palabras clave: revitalización rural; turismo del té; turismo gastronómico rural; provincia de Zhejiang; China.

Abstract

A Rural revitalization has been paid great attention in China as a result of rapid socio-economic development, and officially established as a national strategy in recent years. The study aims to identify the potential of tea tourism, as a specific form of rural gastronomic tourism, could contribute to regional revitalization, on the strength of rich tea resources and authentic tea culture in China. From an actor-oriented perspective, the comparative case study in Zhejiang province shows that, the actual tea tourism practice in case areas is shaped by environmental and personal factors. Meanwhile, the potential of tea resources hasn't been fully integrated in tourism activities, as practitioners' operating capability restricted by conceptual issues and other self-limitations. Despite, the evolution of tea tourism becomes a channel to facilitate residents' livelihood and life quality, turning the situation of rural residents' outflow to inflow, achieved various aspects of rural revitalization. Finally, practical implications are also discussed to offer enlightenments to regional tea tourism practice.

Key words: rural revitalization; tea tourism; rural gastronomic tourism; Zhejiang province; China.

1 Introduction

Rural revitalization is the opposite of rural decline, referring to an inevitable issue concerning urban-rural relationship in human society (Hebinck, 2018). Rural decline begins with depopulation, particularly the outflow of young adults, followed by decline of services, business, and social capital (Li, Westlund & Liu, 2019). Global, national, and regional rural revitalization strategies have been launched, numerous empirical case studies suggest, rural revitalization is a common global issue, whereas the specific problems and development

paths vary in different regions (Hisano, Akitsu & McGreevy, 2018). In the case of China, the proportion of rural population decreased dramatically from 82.08% to 41.48% over the past 40 years, ever since the open-door policies in 1978. In 2018, China proposed implementing rural revitalization as a national strategy that began to draw certain attention. Then in the beginning of 2021, “rural revitalization” becomes the new national Five-Year Plan of 2021-2025 to connect “poverty alleviation”, the Poverty Alleviation Office of State Council was therefore formally renamed as National Rural Revitalization Bureau.

The strategy of rural vitalization aims to address the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development. Previous academic contributions and practical evidence revealed, rural diversification, such as rural tourism is being promoted as a tool to generate rural economic growth and improve life quality (Gao & Wu, 2017). In China, rural tourism is regarded academically as a friendlier pattern to urbanization; not driving the land-losing farmers suddenly shifted their identity as rural migrant workers (Huang et al., 2015). However, predominant homogenized and low-end rural tourism offerings have inevitably impacted on its image.

China is a main tea producing and consuming country, with profound tea culture and abundant tea resources, tea tourism is like wine tourism in terms of its history and the connections with travel (Jolliffe, 2007). Nevertheless, the topic of tea tourism remains under-researched, hasn't been globally accepted in academic and commercial world as wine tourism (Hashimoto, 2008). There's four large tea growing districts covering 21 provinces (municipalities and autonomous regions) of 34 in China, produce six categories of tea. Zhejiang province is one of the main areas that plant, produce and consume green tea. This explorative study seeks to discover tea tourism potential through field work in two representative case areas within Zhejiang province, additionally to explore the underlying factors such as actors' perception and roles played in the evolution, to provide a more holistic understanding and give insights to various tea destinations, consequently contributing to rural tourism upgrading and village revitalization.

In this regard, two main research questions were proposed:

(1) How's the potential of tea tourism to utilize local resources in developing diversified participatory offerings, thus facilitating rural area revitalization and development?

(2) How's the current development situation and key actors' perception and participation, what are the factors that impact on its evolution?

The present study could foremost provide inspirations to rural tourism development in China, respond to realistic problems that its government and people followed closely, from the perspective of a specific form of rural gastronomic tourism; Secondly, based on in-depth fieldwork of decisive actors in comparative case tea regions, the research adopted a phenomenological approach, could enrich the limited literature on tea tourism.

2 Literature review

2.1 Rural tourism as an essential channel to rural revitalization

Rural revitalization is becoming a global issue, for countries in different development stages, their conditions, specific problems, policies, and initiatives vary from each other. In the Europe, great emphasis was put on natural environment, balanced development, and competitiveness of agriculture since 1980s. A critical lesson identified is "promote rural and agriculture diversification to create and maintain rural jobs" (Matthews, 2019). In the case of African countries, where agriculture is still predominant in rural economic activities, the policies focus on diversification of agriculture to promote youth employment, accessing urban market, investments on basic services and social service (Diao et al, 2019). There's no single model of sustainable rural development, determined by specific geographic conditions, natural resources and social relationships, a common consensus is rural diversification as a key path to rural vitalization.

Rural tourism is a growing branch in global tourism sector, previous research illustrated its economic influences and socio-political impacts on regional development. As a channel of "part-time farming" and "multiple job holding", rural tourism has become the principal or supplementary source of income that support farming households, to prevent migration of young, transfer ideas from urban into rural areas, and improve local infrastructure (Dimitrovski et al. 2012; Koutsouris et al., 2014). The rise of rural tourism recently in developing countries was demonstrated as a tool in poverty alleviation, economic diversification and income generating (Saarinen & Lenao, 2014; Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015). Empirical and case studies also revealed agritourism's contribution to landscape and

traditional culture preservation, improvement of residents' livelihood, promotion of local agriculture products to ease the pressure of rural decline (Torre et al., 2014; Lupi et al., 2017; Fuschi & Evangelista, 2017), enhancement of local identity and public participation (Pollermann & Neumeier, 2014).

Worldwide evidence affirmed that rural tourism as a vital channel of rural diversification to correct regional imbalances, appears to be a stable pattern of regional development (Guzman-Parra et al., 2015). By and large, extant literature in the developed countries featured a broader range of study, while cases of developing countries discovering their potential with an emphasis on development conditions.

Moreover, roles of decisive actors have been highlighted (Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015; Onitsuka and Hoshino, 2018). Rural tourism is a sophisticated phenomenon that involving multi-actors and stakeholders, their participation and partnership exert an inevitable influence on the development. "Actor" refers to those who have a stake in tourism planning, promotion, and development, such as policy makers, and community groups (Saxena, 2014). Through investigating Rural residents' perception, researchers could figure out their motivation to involve in rural tourism suppliers, operating capabilities, self-identity, and perceived impacts of tourism. The motivate factors were classified in economic, social, economic-social, and institutional dimensions (Diéguez-Castrillón et al., 2009), family and lifestyle reasons such as to live and work in rural settings (Getz & Carlsen, 2000), and more importantly, for additional income (Sharpley & Vass, 2006). Women's participation has attracted certain attention in rural tourism field (Annes & Wright, 2015). Local communities and residents engaged in diversification of rural business activities, meanwhile influenced by the new sector, their perception reflected the benefits and impacts of rural tourism (Pollermann & Neumeier, 2014; Fuschi & Evangelista, 2017). The role of government of different levels and multiple sectors has been highlighted, especially in developing countries like China. Case studies of villages in different context present the voice and actions of local communities in rural revival, and how they align with governmental development policies (Li et al., 2016). In the pursuit of rural tourism development, some villages experienced better development, owing to a better integration of endogenous and exogenous driving factors,

the supportive cooperation with public sectors, in respect of formation and evolution of actor networks (Li, Fan & Liu, 2019).

2.2 Emerging rural gastronomic tourism branches integrating local resources

In the recent years, gastronomic tourism appeared to be more popularized in both academic and business world, recognized as an opportunity to preserve regional food tradition and landscape, meanwhile a path of rural diversification in attempts to regional development (Privitera, Nedelcu & Nicula, 2018). Among the various forms of gastronomic tourism, wine tourism has been an emerged stream embodied in related researches. The traditional wine producing countries embraced direct sale to tourists in the face of rural restructuring and decline in wine consuming, further revitalizing rural areas by tourism. Following the prior experience of Mediterranean regions, in wine regions of Eastern Europe, less industrialized but with rich agriculture base, wine tourism became trendier to stimulate rural economic development (Kilimperov, 2016). Within the context of rural gastronomic tourism, wine tourism has inspired other forms that integrating regional and traditional agricultural resources (Fusté, 2016). Similarly, the rich literature on wine tourism would bring enlightenments for the underdeveloped tea tourism topic, same as territory-related gastronomic resources.

Tea tourism is defined as “tourism related to experiencing the many aspects of tea, including its history, growth, production, processing, blending and consumption” in the first English monograph on tea and tourism edited by Lee Jolliffe (2007). Regarding geographical scape, the existing literature discussed tea and tourism in either native tea growing and producing Asian countries, such as China, India, Sri Lanka, or other tea consuming countries like the United Kingdom and Canada. Early researches are descriptive concerning background introduction of tea destinations and resources, latterly appeared more specific studies focusing different perspectives. For instance, a case study indicated, tea tourism development didn’t achieve intended effects as a result of lacking close collaboration among identified key stakeholders (Cheng et al., 2012). Another qualitative investigation revealed, in the face of modern changing sociocultural circumstance, traditional Cantonese tea houses remained irreplaceable for both locals retaining unique lifestyle and tourists seeking for cultural authenticity (Chen, 2018). Besides, topics covered in tea tourism literature in

Chinese included exploitation of regional tea resources and experiential product development (Long, 2017; Fang & Deng, 2018), tea agricultural tourism and poverty alleviation in underdeveloped area (Lin, 2018), tea tourism branding and destination image (Han & Zhang, 2018).

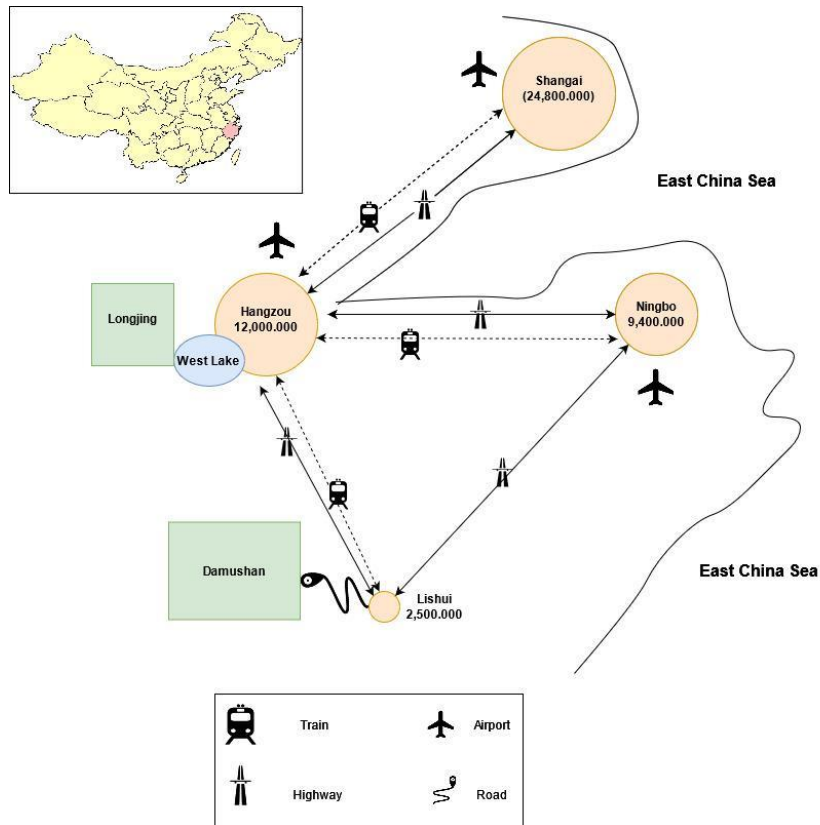
There is a marked absence of tea tourism literature, in terms of quantity and quality, rarely been encompassed by mainstream rural and gastronomy tourism studies. Thus, it's of significance to explore the potential to integrate local tea resources in developing distinct offerings of rural gastronomic tourism in China.

3 Research case

The research is to discover tea tourism potential in China, which is the main tea growing, producing, and consuming country with a rich tea culture. A comparative case study approach is applied, as China has four large tea regions covering several provinces, with estimated over 6000 tea estates, each region has its specialties of tea. Then we have chosen two representative tea regions in the green tea province, Zhejiang.

Zhejiang province located in South of Yangtze tea growing area, there's 13 certified tea-themed scenic spots until 2020, encompassing tea gardens, tea town, tea mountain, tea cultural park and tea market, covered eight of 11 prefecture-level cities in terms of geographical scope. In March 2021, China Tea Distribution Association launched a selection of "beautiful tea towns" in Zhejiang province, in theme of "Integrating tea culture tourism into rural revitalization to promote the development of tea towns".

Figure 1. Study area.



Source: Authors.

To apply comparative case study, two representative tea regions of different development conditions and phases in the green tea province were picked. The first is West Lake Longjing (Dragon Well) tea region in Hangzhou, Hangzhou is the capital city of Zhejiang province, as well as one of the most touristic cities in China. The tea area is located within the World Cultural Heritage West Lake scenic site, tea gardens and tea culture are integral part of the heritage. Field work was mainly conducted in two tea villages of core producing area, Longjing village and Yangmeilin village. The state used to collect national gift tea from these villages for unified distribution and management, since 1980s the tea output was contracted to households, villagers progressively involved in tourism.

Another case is Damushan tea garden area of Songyang County, Lishui City, where tea is the major cash crop and developed a whole tea industry chain. In the words of local agricultural department, almost 30% of residents are engaged in the tea industry, 40% of their income drawn from the tea industry, and 50% of its agriculture output value sourced from tea industry. Integrating tourism was until recent years, approximately in 2016 it

emerged as a tea tourism destination. Field work was accomplished in the two villages surrounding Damushan scenic tea garden, Hengxi village and Guanshanliao village.

4 Research methods

The study adopted in-depth qualitative approach, to provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon studied. For the comparative research of the two case tea regions, methods of semi-structured interview, participant observation and secondary data collection were applied. According to the exiting literature and current realities, two decisive groups of actors in regional tea tourism development were identified, the local government department or tea tourism site managers, local and non-local tea tourism practitioners.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out towards key actors by purposive sampling. For the actors of public sectors, two researchers (labelled as R1, R2 in table 1) of National Tea Museum in Hangzhou, three representatives (R9, R10, R11) from Association of Tea Culture Research, regional Tourism and Culture Bureau, and the public-owned enterprise called Songyang Culture and Tourism Investment Company were selected relying on our network and own knowledge as “information rich” (Brandth & Haugen, 2011). Criteria for sampling individual practitioners was firstly they’re actively participating in tea tourism in the case geographical region, derived from online comments on Ctrip (biggest travel booking platform in China) and Popular Reviews (application of leisure and entertainment recommendations); secondly, they’re of different categories of tea tourism, and diversify in their profile, mainly age, education level and origin (table 1), as vital sources that provide informed empirical resources, to give a more complete picture of the context (Tan & Tan, 2020). A total of six individual practitioners in West Lake Longjing tea region (labelled as R3-R8), and seven practitioners in Damushan (labelled as R12-R18) were formally interviewed from June to November of 2020. The interviews were audio-recorded with respondents’ consent, each interview lasted from 45 to 100 minutes, fully transcribed in Mandarin Chinese, then translated in target language English, and examined by bilingual researcher to facilitate the analysis.

Table 1 Profile of respondents

No.	Category	Gender	Age	Education level	Origin
R1, R2	National tea museum (official)	M, F	30s	/	/
R3	Bed & Breakfast	F	30s	Junior high school	Non-local
R4	Bed & Breakfast	F	30s	Undergraduate	Non-local
R5	Tea house/Home cooking	F	50s	Primary school	Local
R6	Tea house/Home cooking	F	50s	Primary school	Local
R7	Homestay (Bed&Breakfast) + Homecook/tea house	M	50s	Junior high school (Master of hand frying of tea)	Local
R8	Bed & Breakfast	M	30s	Undergraduate	Non-local
R9	Association of tea culture research	M	60s	/	/
R10	Tourism and Culture Bureau	M	40s	/	/
R11	Songyang culture and Tourism Investment Company	M	30s	/	/
R12	Bed & Breakfast/ homestay	F	30s	Undergraduate	Local
R13	Bed & Breakfast/ homestay	F	40s	High school	Local
R14	Bed & Breakfast/ homestay	F	30s	Illiterate	Non-local
R15	Bed & Breakfast/ homestay	M	60s	Primary school	Local
R16	Bed & Breakfast/ homestay	M	40s	Undergraduate	Non-local
R17	Tea house/Home cooking	F	40s	Postgraduate	Local
R18	Tea house/Home cooking	F	30s	Undergraduate	Local

Source: Authors.

The semi-structured interviews enable investigators to control the interview procedure appropriately and collect useful data. Simultaneously, the respondents can express their ideas freely, as open-ended questions were used (Kim et al.,2019). The interview schedule for official departments was mainly based on their attitudes, measures towards tea tourism development, and interview schedule for individual practitioners was mainly based on their motivations, perceived impacts of tea tourism development. Raw textual data were analysed using ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software, firstly, concepts were extracted from the documents by open coding, such as “geographical location”, “tourism infrastructure”, “direct

tea sale”, “family reunion”. Then these concepts were categorized in various subthemes through axial coding, such as “development condition- advantage”, “impact-household”. And finally, three main themes were determined using selective coding as “development conditions and tea tourism offerings”, “motivation of tourism involvement and operating capability”, “development impacts and regional revitalization”, the findings presented in this paper also use necessary excerpts from interview transcripts to support arguments (Domenico & Mille, 2012). The results of data were validated through triangulation of sources, primary data of interviews and observation notes were compared and triangulated with secondary data (Tan & Tan, 2020).

5 Results

5.1 Development conditions and tea tourism offerings

The extrinsic factors interpreted from interviews (Table 2) showcased that West Lake Longjing tea area enjoy more favourable conditions of various aspects, which are fundamental in shaping its development.

Table 2 Comparison of conditions in two case areas

Case	Conditions	
	Advantages	Disadvantages
West Lake Longjing tea area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Natural environment and tea landscapes ● Geographical location ● Reputation of tea ● Historic tea attractions ● Tourism infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tourist exploitation of high-end tea ● Tea market disorder
Damushan tea garden area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Natural environment and tea landscapes ● Complete tea industry chain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Low-end tea ● Accessibility ● Weak infrastructure and service

Source: Authors.

West Lake Longjing tea enjoys a supreme reputation in Chinese teas, on the strength of its historical and cultural background, renowned from the legend with Emperor Qianlong of Qing Dynasty, as one of China Protected Geographical Indication Products and Diplomatic

Gifts. In contrast, the mass-producing tea in Damushan tea garden area is perceived as low-end and brandless:

R5: "The fame of West Lake Longjing tea is great, many people rush to the fame of Longjing, and within the West Lake scenic spot, it may also be its advantage (Home cook/tea house runner in West Lake, female, 50s, primary school, local)".

R13: "In fact, the price of our tea is very low, compared with West Lake Longjing, our tea is too low-end. West Lake Longjing tea was used by the emperor before, right? We can't have that brand anymore. (B&B runner in Damushan, female, 40s, high school, local)".

Besides, the West Lake Longjing tea area in Hangzhou superior to Damushan tea garden area in Songyang County on essential development conditions, in respect of accessibility and facilities. Largely because it's part of West Lake scenic area, close to downtown and other highly visited attractions. Tourism facilities are well equipped with convenient public transportation, even exists a special line connecting the tea related attractions such as the National Tea Museum branches:

R4: "The basic supporting facilities are perfect. Like You can order takeaway food and call a taxi on an application in the village too. The basic tourist facilities are here anyway. (B&B runner in West Lake, female, 30s, undergraduate, non-local)".

As for Damushan tea garden area, the shortage of commercial services and public transportation is evident for tourists, although appeared accommodations in the tea villages. During fieldwork investigation, the first author was transported by B&B operators, a non-local B&B operator complained:

R16: In this place really doesn't have many commercial things. We run a B & B, it's even difficult for some guests to buy a beer...a bit inconvenient here (B&B runner in Damushan, male, 40s, undergraduate, non-local).

The deputy manager of Songyang Culture and Tourism Investment Company further explained the reasons of budget, passenger flow to open a tourist shuttle bus:

R11: "The transportation really needs to be improved. We have few shuttle buses to travel to various rural points, it's a bottleneck that needs an important breakthrough...compared with big cities like Hangzhou, there's several tourism bus lines, you spend 2 yuan and the bus take you everywhere, it has passenger flow".

Apart from the differences, tea landscapes can add to natural environment as key motives to attract tourists in both case areas, and distinct from conventional rural tourism products:

R4: "During the tea season, the village is full of tea fragrance, every household is frying tea at the door, and the women wearing special costumes pick tea leaves in the fields, it should be attractive to both domestic and foreign tourists".

Unexpectedly, the high value of West Lake Longjing tea to some extent prevent the villagers from utilizing in experiential tourism activities, for instance, tea-leaves picking. The practitioners prefer to target a niche market, or to offer such activities during off-season of tea, and insist the tourists to be accompanied by professionals. Another side effect is, some profit-seeking practitioners would sell cheap tea from Damushan area to tourists as West Lake Longjing tea, impacting tourists' authentic experience.

Based on the development conditions, the two tea regions have evolved their tourism offerings integrating tea resources (Table 3). Both public sectors and individual tea tourism practitioners attempt to offer various tea tourism products, not only develop tea tourism scenic sites, tea house, home cook (tea gastronomy), Bed & Breakfast in tea villages, but also offer experiential itinerary that incorporates diversified activities, tea garden sightseeing/cycling, tea leaves picking, tea frying and tea ceremony class etc. A typical case is the family of R7, who exploited their basement as tea frying workshop, ground floor as tea gastronomy restaurant, and the rest floors upstairs as B&B rooms, making full use of house space. Individual tea tourism practitioners are mostly economic interests driven, while the public sectors, National Tea Museum in West Lake Longjing tea area and the public-owned enterprise in Damushan, would provide publicly beneficial educative programs.

Table 3 Summary of tea tourism offerings in case areas

Area	Common offerings	Other offerings
West Lake Longjing tea area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tea garden sightseeing • Home cooking • B&B/homestay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic tea attractions • Tea ceremony class • National tea museum activities (Regular tea parties, Tea tree adoption etc.)
Damushan tea garden area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tea house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tea garden cycling • Parent-children study tour

Source: Authors.

Indeed, individual practitioners substantially offer a series of tea related experience in response to tourists' request, regarding tea elements as adding value products to achieve a better overall revenue from tourists:

R8: "It's more like up to the guests' needs that we use elements of tea...according to the needs of the guests, I may take them to the tea mountain, tell them knowledge of tea in this place (B&B runner in West Lake, male, 30s, undergraduate, non-local)".

R12: "In spring, only for the guests who live in my B&B, if they want to experience, we will allow them to pick tea leaves, then teach them tea frying. It's for free (B&B runner in Damushan, female, 30s, undergraduate, local)".

The average level of tea tourism participation in Damushan tea garden area is much lower, in term of the number of villagers who involved in, and the forms of tea tourism services that available. For individual practitioners within same tea region, intrinsic attributes such as cognitive level and operating capability must not be overlooked.

5.2 Motivation of tourism involvement and operating capability

In accordance with previous rural tourism research, tea tourism practitioners in two case areas were driven by some common motives (Table 4), such as direct sale and family reasons, while also exist distinct motivation factors that reflect the regional tea tourism development.

Table 4 Summary of Motivation of tourism involvement in case areas

Area	Motivation of tourism involvement	
West Lake Longjing tea area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Naturally involved: ● Self-interest ● Lifestyle pursuit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Direct tea sale ● Diversified livelihood
Damushan tea garden area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Government driven: ● Incentives and subsidy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family reunion ● Inspired by informed people

Source: Authors.

First common critical motivation engaging practitioners in both areas is for direct tea sale, through tourism they were able to obtain own clients base, and improve bargaining power, in view of tea merchants dominating tea sale in West Lake tea area. Villagers in the emerging case of Damushan, are especially surprised by the trading volume done by tourists:

R3: "I am not a native here...When I run a B&B, the guests of B&B could drive tea sale, and tea could also attract B&B guests... (B&B runner in West Lake, female, 30s, junior school, non-local)".

R13: "Tourists who come to stay in my home, can also buy green tea or black tea from me. There's one independent guest who bought the most. Do you know how much he bought? He bought 110 catties! I am surprised...".

The second point is tourism facilitated in family's diversified income sources, which bring them a sense of certainty. In different season, family members put priorities alternatively on tea or tourist services, to ensure a more reasonable family income structure:

R3: "It's not like that we only run B&B, or we only make tea. Presently, I am in charge of B&B guests and tea, my husband has other job".

R12: "My husband found a job nearby, and I am in charge of B&B and bicycle rent at home. Every spring with our parents we're busy on tea...".

Then particularly for women practitioners, family reunion at certain period of lifecycle is affirmed a key motive, as indicated by R4 and R18 who're in their 30s to set up a family:

R4: "I had a new-born child, in this way, I have more time to accompany the baby and take care of the family...".

R18: "At that time, we planned to get married and have children. When we came back (from another city), it happened to be the construction of tea garden tourist site... (home cook runner in Damushan, female, 30s, undergraduate, local)".

Last common motivation of "inspired by informed people" appeared in several pioneer families, for the sake of interpersonal relations, initially encouraged by knowledgeable tourists or tourism practitioners from large cities, their practices in the village further inspire other followers. Except for the shared motivations, some motives distinct two cases from each other. In West Lake Longjing tea area, mostly non-local practitioners regard tea tourism services as their lifestyle pursuit and self-interest:

R4: "Because I can live here freely. In the past, I work overtime very often...the living conditions here are really good...and I can use the tea room as a small club, my friends can also come and spend leisure time with us...".

While in the emerging Damushan tea garden area, a predominant motivation of tourism practice is government incentives and subsidy. The initial idea is to take advantage of local government's subsidy for B&B house decoration, passively involved in tea tourism services. Economic benefit is a key driving force for the villagers who weren't conscious about tourism development to participate in. Not only that, non-local practitioners in this case were attracted by local governments in investment promotion projects:

R12: "The government informed us that we could run B&B around the Damushan tea garden. At that time the renovation subsidy was good...I feel that even if no tourists come, I have each room equipped with separate bathroom, at least it's comfortable for my children to live".

R15: "I was once the director of the Land Administration Office of town. After I retired, the town government here requested me to come back, like play a leading role...They were encouraging villagers to open B&B. I agreed. (B&B runner in Damushan, male, 60s, primary school, local)".

Motivated by the various factors above, tea tourism practitioners show different levels of operating capability. In both tea regions, there's two major categories of practitioners divided by their origin. Generally, local operators tend to be resources-oriented, as owner of tea

garden with rich experience on tea producing, while operators of external origin are more tourism skill oriented, in their eyes, some local practitioners' room service fail to achieve standards of hospitality industry:

R7: "I am a tea farmer and master of hand fry tea, I got certification from Hangzhou municipal government, I fried tea for 45 years... (B&B/home cook/tea house runner in West Lake, male, 50s, junior school, local)".

R4: "Our room cleaning, and laundry are outsourced, a professional come after tourists leave...then (a local) his family cleaned the rooms by themselves..."

The interviewed practitioners are all participating in receiving tea tourists, relevant working experience, education level and internet skills are identified to be the main factors (Table 5) that formed their operating capability in our case.

Table 5 Factors of individual practitioners' operating capability

<p>Relevant working experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R7: My wife once worked in a big hotel...So she suggested to build each room with a bathroom in the renovation of our house... • R18: I realized that there was no restaurant near the Damushan tea garden...My father used to be a cook, and my husband likes to cook... Then we decided to open a home cook.
<p>Education Level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R12: My parents-in-law were illiterate, they only know numbers, could not handle this reception thing... • R14: I didn't go to school, and I can't read, usually my husband communicates with tourists (B&B runner in Damushan, female, 30s, illiterate, non-local married to local)
<p>Internet skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R8: They (villagers)'re not good at online business. For example, the parents are taking care of tourists here in the house, and their children are in charge of online communication... but it will cause problems between online and offline communication. • R15: Online promotion is all done by my children, I am learning it myself... Now I am more familiar with it, that is not easy for me.

Source: Authors.

Not surprisingly, despite the endeavours that practitioners have made, it's difficult for them to overcome self-limitations on education level and internet skills, while online platform is becoming a crucial source of tourists. Moreover, currently they're actively involved in tea tourism, yet holding different mindsets towards future development. Majority of local practitioners in West Lake Longjing area regard tourism as an extension to promote direct tea sales, emphasizing the priorities of the renowned tea:

R3: "...We mainly make tea. Tourism can bring clients to my tea, and other local products... It's possible one day we don't run the B&B anymore, but we cannot quit on tea. West Lake Longjing tea is a gold business card for us".

In Damushan tea garden area, there exists conceptual problem even for young college graduated operators, as they barely understand the attractiveness of routine tea work to tourists, thus greatly depend on local government to achieve intended effects:

R12: "I am pleased that more tourists come to rent bicycles and reserve rooms. But I really don't know for what the tourists come here. Especially from Shanghai, Beijing, for me it's nothing (worthy to be seen), but they can stay for a long time. I don't understand the tourists who want to pick tea leaves neither. For us, we have to pick them and sell in markets...".

Ultimately, representative for non-local practitioners in West Lake Longjing tea, and local practitioners who returned in Damushan tea garden area from working in large cities, R4 and R 17 recounted explicitly their intention to expand and enrich tea tourism offerings, as if by prior agreement, highlighting tea features in providing targeted delicate small groups of tourists with immersed experience:

R4: "I wanted to rent several rows of tea trees next to my B&B from local. My guests can enjoy from picking tea to frying tea here, then we've a large classroom on the third floor, enable tourists to taste tea, attend tea ceremony class of Longjing...I've discussed with a travel agency in Shanghai before the epidemic, we plan to receive small tour groups, about six or seven people".

R17: "I talked with travel agencies from Beijing, Shanghai etc., I told them what I can provide in my tea house...Small family customized groups can go to the mountains to pick tea leaves, visit our tea factory, and learn tea art/ceremony... Many activities can be developed, I have a lot of ideas in my mind (Teahouse runner in Damushan, female, 40s, postgraduate, local)".

5.3 Development impacts and regional revitalization

Practitioners in the two tea regions witnessed impacts of its regional tea tourism development, their perceived impacts were classified into household level and village level.

Table 6 Summary of impacts of tea tourism development

Impacts	Household	Village
West Lake Longjing tea area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase/diversify of income • Higher/flexible price to sell tea • Repeat tea consumers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of living conditions • Infrastructure • Villagers' qualities
Damushan tea garden area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend tea processing • Sense of achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning permanent residents • Tourism infrastructure • Village environment and living condition

Source: Authors.

West Lake Longjing tea area is largely perceived as a revitalized case by the interviewees, on the grounds of earlier development and favourable circumstances. From the perspective of rural households, practitioners expressed an intuitive awareness of the positive economic benefits from integrating tea resources to tourism:

R6: "To be honest, when the tourism was not developed, our village was not rich, it was hard we live here (tea house runner in West Lake, female, 50s, primary school, local)".

R3: "By selling tea to individual visitors, we have more repeat clients of tea, and the price is flexible, then we won't worry about tea sales in the future".

More importantly, tea tourism development benefit tea villages with respect to improvements on living condition, infrastructure, and villagers' qualities. Local government strived to attract tourists with the current overall environment, to renovate village appearance and provide necessary facilities for tourism activities (Figures 2 and 3). Such changes meanwhile bridge the urban-rural gap, enable local residents to enjoy a similar level of living standards as urban residents:

R3: "The government has attached great importance on overall planning ...there's travel maps and signs in the village...the weak electricity and strong electricity were all underground. And in the house, we use natural gas, like you in downtown".

R6: "The village becomes more and more beautiful in continuous renovation. They have made the greenbelt of village, and we are a national civilized village".

Speaking of civilized village, the villagers' qualities are transformed in communication and interaction with tourists, exuding a sense of recognition and pride of their own tea culture:

R7: "The villagers including me used to fight with tourists, as villagers in the mountains, our temper was irritable. Then because we had more contacts (with tourists) and realized that the civilized society is necessary to attract tourists...":

Figure 2 Public tourist restrooms in tea fields



Figure 3 Walking trail and B&B



Source: Authors.

As we can see, villagers in West Lake Longjing tea area engaged in tourism spontaneously and basically achieved regional revitalization. In the Damushan tea garden area in Songyang, rural revitalization has been officially identified as an urgent realistic issue, since a number of villages vanished following the outflow of residents. Tea tourism was initially designed and promoted to revitalize rural area, as explained by the Deputy General Manager of Songyang Culture and Tourism Investment Company:

R11: "We constructed the tourist site of Damushan Tea Garden mainly to activate this area, instead of profit driven. For example, when we build the tourist center, we chose where the original environment was very messy. So, the site of Damushan Tea Garden is born to promote rural revitalization, especially for several villages around, it's still strong incentive to flourish".

After short-term development, a primary perceived impact of household level is the extension of tea processing, the villagers used to sell large volume of fresh tea leaves (raw material) at extremely low price, the integration of tourism enable them to produce high value-added tea products according to tourists' needs:

R11: "Now what we pursue is the integrated development of the first, second and third industries. Villagers were originally selling fresh leaves, but now selling fried tea and scenery, right? Moreover, we can produce tea wine, tea pillows etc. as souvenirs...".

Another positive point is, engaging in tea tourism increased the employment and empowerment of female practitioners, the women interviewees in our case showed a sense of achievement:

R13: "... the Culture and Tourism Bureau had been promoting my B&B, later my house is designated for incentive tourism. And I became provincial women representative, of the four women representatives from this county, I was the only one from hospitality industry".

Similarly, villagers in Damushan tea garden area witnessed and perceived transformations of village appearance and living conditions, could also benefit from tourism infrastructures that intended to attract tourists. More importantly, the evolution of tea tourism provides chances for vanishing villages and left-behind residents. The president of Association of Tea Culture Research in Songyang has been visiting tea villages and tried to record before disappearing. He noted that:

R9: "I went to a village that is to develop tourism, there's already some infrastructures, a couple of nearly 50 years old, said that they are engaged in tourism and they're not leaving. Somehow, the village is saved...that is meaningful".

The statistic of tourism bureau reported a net inflow of 6.400 permanent residents in Songyang county during past three years, reversing the outflow situation. Indeed, the interviewees R12, R17 and R18 are all examples of young educated residents that returned to the tea village homeland from working in other big cities, becoming main force in providing

qualified tea tourism products. Furthermore, in Damushan Tea House, a site for the purpose of receiving tourists, tea art/ceremony training courses for residents are arranged regularly and subsidized by local government, thereby enhancing the participants' employability skills in tea tourism.

Figure 4. Rural tea house



Figure 5. Tea art training for residents in tourist site



Source: Authors.

6 Conclusions

The context of this research is Rural Revitalization established as a national strategy to correct urban and rural imbalance in accelerated urbanization of China, research concerning rural development whereupon becomes a hot topic. The paper examines the potential and evolution of tea tourism development in China that contributing to rural revitalization and rural tourism updates, through empirical data collected in two comparative case areas in Zhejiang Province.

Despite the limited literature on tea tourism, previous research on general rural tourism shows its economic, socio-cultural influences on regional development (Guzman-Parra et al., 2015). Tea tourism as an emerging form of rural gastronomic tourism, similar impacts especially from economic perspectives were perceived by key actors interviewed. From household perspective, tea tourism has increased and diversified the family income

(Saarinen & Lenao, 2014; Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015), enable them to obtain repeat tea consumers with flexible price in West Lake Longjing tea area, as well as adding value to tea products by extend tea processing in Damushan tea garden area. As new business opportunities to improve the employment and empowerment of female practitioners in tea villages, repopulating the declining rural communities (Annes & Wright, 2015; Slusariuc, 2018). From village perspective, in both areas the rural population benefited from improvements of living conditions, village appearance and tourism infrastructures, which targeted in attracting tourists (Dimitrovski et al. 2012; Koutsouris et al., 2014). Not only the gap of rural-urban life quality has been narrowed, but also enhanced community pride and social harmony (Pollermann & Neumeier, 2014). Some social positive effects in existing literature like “landscape and traditional culture preservation” (Lupi et al., 2017; Fuschi & Evangelista, 2017) wasn't mentioned by selected respondents but also evident in observation. The perceived impacts of tea tourism development in two tea regions accord with five aspects of expectations proposed in national strategy of Rural Revitalization, which are thriving business, pleasant living environment, social etiquette and civility, effective governance, and prosperity (Sun, 2019). Accordingly, responding to the first research question, whether in the mature case or emerging case in Zhejiang province, despite their different development conditions, levels of practitioners' capability, in general, the development of tea tourism as a specific rural gastronomic tourism, could promote to rural and agriculture diversification, and further contribute to regional development of rural areas from their original situation.

On the basis that previous literature of rural revitalization and rural tourism highlight different development paths and key actors' participation (Matthews, 2019; Diao et al, 2019; Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015; Onitsuka and Hoshino, 2018), the second research question referring to tea tourism evolution paths and influencing factors was also uncovered. The actual tea tourism practices in case areas are greatly shaped by its environmental factors, development conditions including tea resources and tourism infrastructures etc., as well as personal factors of practitioners such as motivation of involvement and operating capability. Generally, the case West Lake Longjing tea area is summarized as a revitalized case, while the Damushan tea garden area is considered as an urgently to be revitalized case.

The comparative results suggest, West Lake Longjing tea area benefited from its favourable conditions, in terms of socio-economic background, tourism infrastructures and accessibility, as well as unique cultural connotation of renowned tea, attracting tourists from national wide to international scope. However, similar with some “old world” Mediterranean wine regions, local villagers tend to be stick to their tea tradition, considering tourism solely as an extension of tea sale, the high-value tea prevent tea farmers from integrating tea recourses into tourists’ experiential activities to some extent (Charters, 2009). While the emerging case Damushan tea garden area, has a complete tea industry chain that accounts a great part in residents’ life, resembles more off-limits “new world” wine regions, local government regarding tourism as a mechanism to stimulate regional development. Yet the destination inherits previous existing problems in respect of tourism development, similar with some eastern European countries in developing wine tourism, for instance, poor infrastructure and absence of tea brand (Nedelcu & Brankov, 2014; Mardare, Eva & Bulai, 2015). For this purpose, its tourist source is limited in self-driving tourists from nearby big cities.

Tea tourism practitioners’ personal features also reflect the distinct development paths of two cases under different circumstances. Individual tea tourism practitioners in the mature case of West Lake Longjing tea area, mentioned “lifestyle pursuit and self-interest” as a main motive, while in the emerging case, “government incentives and subsidy” becomes a critical motive, one is still driven by basic economic benefits while another is pursuing higher level motivations for spiritual needs. Practitioners in two case areas are driven by some common motivations in line with previous rural tourism studies, for direct tea sale, diversified livelihood (Sharpley & Vass, 2006), family reasons (Getz & Carlsen, 2000), what is newly discovered in our case is “inspired by informed people”, in accordance with the importance of rural elites’ role in existing Chinese rural tourism literature (Li, Fan & Liu, 2019).

In both tea regions, two types of key actors, official departments of public sectors, tea tourism practitioners are aware of tea tourism, and hold a positive attitude towards future development. Yet their operating capability is influenced by factors of origin, relevant working experience, education level and internet skills, therefore further restricted the evolution of tea tourism offerings presently. Moreover, the degree of tourism participation is

much lower in Damushan, individual practitioners showing a great dependency on local government, since the cognitive barrier of understanding on tea tourism resources has restricted their planning capability. Rural community's human capital building is always a discussion point in relevant literature, Razzaq et al. (2013) suggested that notably residents' awareness, knowledge, and skills to involve in tourism activities should be improved.

The findings further implied that rural tourism development in China follows a collective mode (Wang, 2018), different levels of governments have played a crucial role in implementing rural tourism or other rural revitalization policies and initiatives (Chen, Gao & Chen, 2019). Especially in the initial stage of an emerging tea tourism destination, local government ought to play an essential and fundamental part with practitioners' dependency (Cheng et al., 2012). In Damushan tea garden area, tea tourism was destined by the public sectors to revitalize the villages, and carrying the work forward by attract large-scale investments, provide basic facilities in tea tourism sites and tea villages, as well as engage private sectors and organize human capital training. For such an ordinary case, local government' policy making, and effective implementation have been vital, then in the further development, more social capital and social forces could be coordinated and involve in, its role could be gradually adjusted to supportive and supervision, just as in current West Lake Longjing tea area.

The findings not only extend previous literature of rural revitalization from a perspective of rural gastronomic tourism, but also supplement the scant literature on tea tourism by a comprehensive case study from a main tea producing and consuming country. Despite the results are destination-specific and limited to be generalized, it could offer enlightenments for regional tea tourism practices.

First, an important practical implication from the case study is, the potential that integrating tea resources into tourism offerings is still to be further explored, and tea tourism practitioners' capability is a critical factor to achieve intended effects (Komppula, 2014). In both tea tourism areas, the value of regional tea resources isn't fully discovered, but mainly as adding value products for individual practitioners to ensure their tourism revenue on accommodation and catering. In view of the rich tea resources in case areas, the key is to integrate practitioners' comprehensive capability, for both resources-oriented local

practitioners and tourism skill oriented non-local practitioners. Relevant working experience, education level and internet skills are factors influencing individual practitioners' operating capability of tea tourism, local government shall assist practitioners with specific training courses to overcome self-limitations.

Second, although the potential of tea tourism isn't fully discovered, the contribution to regional revitalization has been verified. Yet compared with some wine tourism networks with high coordination (Hall, Johnson & Mitchell, 2002; Alonso & O' Neill, 2009), in tea regions, series of offerings that deeper integrating tea resources, coordinating various groups of actors are to be further developed. Particularly for the Damushan Tea Garden, as an isolated tea tourism site, there's little coordination with other regional attractions. West Lake Longjing tea area is integrated in West Lake scenic spot, could go a step further to highlight tea themed attractions as tea tourism routes or trails with close collaboration in joint promotion.

7 References

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