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Relive the Ancient Trail in China

A Case Study on Huihang Ancient Road

China Team

Prepared by: Jie Zhou & Wanjing Zheng

Instructors: Ping Xuan & Zhichao Yang



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1. Background

1.1. Definition of adventure tourism

Adventure tourism is the burgeoning travel product in China, and not much research has been done on it. However, since 1989, the adventure tourism has maintained a 30% annual growth, indicating the huge potential of the Chinese market. Adventure tourism is generally referred to as the way of travel where the tourist activity participants conduct various outdoor travel activities in the somewhat remote or primitive locations, whether individually or on groups. Different from regular groups, they do not necessarily rely on regular tourist facilities, or mass travel routes and tourist resources as objects. During the whole process of the activity, the degree of risk varies according to the intensity of tourist activities, and the participants of the tourist activities enjoy high level of involvement.

1.2. Category of adventure tourism

Adventure tourism falls into the category of hard adventure and soft adventure. Hard tourism refers to the extraordinary, thrilling, high-intensive outdoor adventure activities, which are relatively riskier and require certain skills and professional equipment, such as free rock-climbing, mountaineering, etc. Hard adventure emphasize more on “sports”, while soft adventure on “travel”, only that it is riskier than regular travels, such as hiking in the wild nature, mountain biking, etc. Therefore, the soft adventure enjoys more popularity with majority of tourists for its comparatively lower degree of difficulty.

1.3. The Differences between general mass tourists and adventure tourists

	Tourist objects	Travel types	Participation	Tourist experience
Mass tourists	Extensive objects including natural and cultural resources.	No varied types, usually done in the form of sightseeing	Passive, lack of subjectivity and involvement	Pay a quick visit and have a preliminary impression
Adventure tourists	Focus on pure natural environment	Various types with rich content based on natural environment	Higher level of activeness, subjectivity and involvement	Gain a rich and profound spiritual experience from the involvement of various activities

1.4.Overview of Chinese adventure tourism.

China boasts abundant adventure tourism resources, densely distributed in the provinces of Northwest and Southwest borders. The activities such as mountaineering, hiking, rafting are popular with the tourists home and abroad, especially hiking is the most favored one. The Top 10 adventure tourism routes are as follows: Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon, Kanas Primitive Natural Area, the ancient Loulan - Lop Nur, Gao Li Gongshan Mountain - Nu River, Trekking Trail of the Three Gorges, Trekking across Dahaidao, Qinling Mountains, the Ancient Tea-Horse Road, The source of Yangtze River and Yellow River, and the Kingdom of Women at Lugu Lake.

2. Case study

2.1.The reasons why we chose the huihang ancient road

In this case study we choose the Huihang Ancient Road as the subject of research, taking into account of three factors: Firstly, it is the well-developed and the most popular hiking route in Southeast China. Secondly, as the entry-level hiking route, it has moderate degree of difficulty and intensity, suitable for the general public to participate in. Thirdly, located in the west of Hangzhou, it is the nearest destination of adventure tourism for both Zhejiang Business College and Zhejiang Tourism College, which is convenient for students to have field trip and research.

Huihang Ancient Road is one of the three most notable ancient pathways, along with Silk Road and the Ancient Tea-horse Road.

The Silk Road is an ancient network of trade and cultural transmission routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent. It took shape during 100 BCE to 200 BCE, and served its purpose till the 16th century, as an important means of carrying out economic, political and cultural exchanges. The road starts at China's ancient capital of Chang'an (known as Luoyang in the Eastern Han Dynasty), travelling through the Hexi (Gansu) Corridor, Jade Gate Pass, Yang Pass, Xinjiang, Pamir high plateau, Central Asia, and Western Asia, eventually leading to Europe. The Silk Road had two main routes stemming from Dunhuang, the south route and north route. Extending 6,000 kilometers (4,000 miles), the Silk Road derives its name from the lucrative trade in Chinese silk produced ancient China. In June 22, 2014 UNESCO designated the Chang'an-Tianshan corridor of the Silk Road as a World Heritage Site, as was jointly bid for UNESCO World Heritage status by China, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It is also the first World Heritage Site designated as the result of multinational cooperation.

The Ancient Tea and Horse Road was a network of caravan paths winding through the mountains in Southwest and Northwest China. It was the caravan thoroughfare of international commerce and corridor of economic and cultural exchanges among minority groups in southwest China. The Ancient Tea Horse Road originated from the tea horse trade markets in southwest and northwest border areas in ancient China, prevailed in the Tang and Song Dynasties, prospered in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and saw its heyday during the middle and later periods of the World War II. There are two ancient tea horse routes linking both Sichuan and Yunnan with Tibet, winding across the borders to the countries Bhutan, Nepal and India, further to the west Asia and the coast of Red Sea in west Africa.

2.2.Overview of Huihang Ancient Road

As one of Major National Historical and Cultural Sites, AAAA Class Scenic Area (second only to AAAAA Class in status), Huihang Ancient Road, at the mysterious 30°north latitude, is located at the experimental zone of Qiangliang Peak State Level Nature Reserve in Jixi County, Anhui Province, which is also the key area of historical and cultural conservation region in Anhui Province, and the key area of inheritance of National Intangible Cultural Heritage. According to the regulations of Chinese nature reserve protection, the whole reserve is comprised of core zone, buffer zone and experimental zone where tourism can be developed. It is a corridor with the most splendid scenery and mysterious culture. First built in the Tang Dynasty, it has exerted tremendous impact on the politics, economy and culture over the history of

more than 1000 years. Numerous people have left their footprints here, including Hu Shi the most eminent scholar, Hu Xueyan the most successful businessman in the Qing Dynasty, and Wang Hua the renowned peasant uprising leader in the Sui Dynasty

2.3. Methodology

The methods such as documentary research and survey research have been adopted in this case study.

By applying documentary research, we refer to relevant literature and articles, trying to identify the research findings in the scope of research subject, the conclusions that have been reached and those not yet. Then we analyze the result of research, based on which the research structure of the study is established.

Other methods such as questionnaire and interviews are also employed by the research team to collect relevant information and data. The respondents of questionnaire and interviews consist of the heads of tourism authorities, manager of travel agencies, managers of restaurants, local residents, tour group escort, and experienced outdoor enthusiast, etc.

2.4. Field trip process

For the field trip research we chose the 2-day travel product of Youxiake travel service, which was named “Relive the life of businessmen of Anhui by traveling along the Huihang Ancient Road”.

Itinerary: D1 Hangzhou—Anhui by coach. We arrived at the entrance of Huihang Ancient Road around 11:30, and walked across the field in Zhejiang before we officially ascended on the ancient Road. We passed by the gate of “Monkey King Watching the Sky” and reached Lantian’ao by dawn. Lantian’ao is the basin at the highest point of the trail, serving as the threshold dividing two provinces. Camping facilities and home-stay accommodation were provided after the bonfire party.

D2 Anhui-Hangzhou by coach. We left Lantian’ao in the early morning all the way downhill, passing by Upper Snow Hall and Lower Snow Hall, trekking along the mountain trail and across the single-plank bridge. It was truly breathtaking and thrilling. At noon, we arrived at the renowned pass which is known as the first pass south of Yangtze River and the highlight of the ancient trail. Stilted slab-stone walkways were dug out on the surface of the lofty cliff, creating an imposing atmosphere. We finished the hiking at around 3pm and took the coach ride back to Hangzhou.

Equipment: outdoor wear, hiking boots, backpack, scarf, kneecap, trekking pole, sunglasses, sun bonnet, tent, sleeping bag, moisture-proof pad, water, food, flashlight, etc.

2.4.1. Interview of the travel agency

According to the interview of the travel agency manager, the name of the travel agency, Youxiake which means an errant knight, was derived from the frontier poem by Wang Wei, which goes like this: “ the young errant knight in Chang’an ascended the garrison tower to watch the Venus at night.”, depicting a high-spirited and vigorous young man who yearned for victory. Youxiake is the first platform of social-network and tourist e-commerce designed for travelers to combine travel and friend-making together, creating a brand-new travel mode, somewhere in-between the group tours and individual tours. The users of Youxiake services fall into four categories, namely leisure traveler, trekker, photographer and cyclist. The website has 1,050,000 registered users at present with daily visitors of over 100,000 and an average of 2000 travelers going on tours weekly. The tenet of the company is to advocate responsible travel. It is required for both organizers and participants to be responsible for the tourism. As for the routes, Youxiake boasts strong and professional skills and abilities to plan and organize wonderful travel routes. Youxiake provide excellent service together with our hospitable service team, responsible and experienced group escorts. It will be a wonderful experience to have fun while walking, taking photos, and team building in a lively atmosphere. The route is more ecologically-oriented, as Youxiake pay special respect to the environment and local customs, and pay attention to environmental preservation and green travel. Besides travel, it is very important for the company to share our experience, for instance, the group guide is supposed to take group photo and share with group members. It is not so much the travel products that make Youxiake special, but the experience, stories, companionship, and friendship combined together.

Youxiake is the professional company that organized the most number of visits to Huihang Ancient Road, with more than 5000 visitors annually. Each weekend, one-day tour and two-day tour will be organized to the ancient road, escorted by professional guides. The safety of each guest can be guaranteed and will be insured in case of any travel accidents

2.4.2. Interview of the scenic spot personnel

According to the interviews to the manager of scenic area, Huihang Ancient Road has gained increasing popularity in recent years, with the total number of visitors over 1 million in 2014 alone and tourist revenue of more than 50 million RMB. The

tourists are mainly from neighboring areas in Yangtze River Delta. Since 2009, Huihang Ancient Road has successively obtained such titles as “National Model Leisure Base for Trekkers”, “Outstanding Route for Sports Tourism in China”, “Top Ten Sports Tourist Route in China”, etc. In the scenic area, the outdoor sports activities are organized for college students and companies, for instance, the annual trekker’s festival, when the competitions like cycling, cross-country race, mountain running, mountaineering, rock-falls, etc. With the launch of Hefu High-speed train, more and more visitors will be expected here. In order to meet the need of increasing number of visitors, The No.1 Village South of Yangtze River, a new resort project, will be newly built outside the scenic area, as well as some other farmer’s inns with local characteristics around Matou Ridge in the scenic area. In accordance with the growing need of the outdoor sports fans, more outdoor projects will be launched in the No.1 Village South of Yangtze River and as well as in and outside the scenic area, such as canoeing, shooting range, archery range, river trekking, snow skiing and grass skiing, etc, building up the brand of Huihang Ancient Road as the paradise of outdoor activities lovers. In order to enrich the experience of tourists, as they usually would like to share what they see and feel online with their friends, they will set up wifi hotspots all along the ancient trail, to increase the internet accessibility of tourists and popularize the ancient trail in the time of mobile internet.

2.4.3. Interview of the tour guide

According to the interview to the group guide, Huihang Ancient Road is suitable for hiking all year round, and the peak season ranges from May to October, especially during the weekends. The majority of travelers on the groups are the office workers of various companies. He is an avid outdoor adventure enthusiast, who has a full time job and work part time as a group guide in Youiake. He is highly experienced in outdoor adventure but does not have relevant certificates of qualification.

2.4.4. Interview of the local residents

According to the local residents, a few of them make a living by running home-stay hotels, camping bases and roadside stalls. However, as a result of transition of peak and off seasons, it is fairly difficult to maintain the normal operation. The majority of local residents have not benefited from the local tourism.

2.4.5. Survey on the adventure tourists

According to the adventure tourists, due to the increasingly fierce social competition, it is more favorable to modern people to relieve stress by the way of

travel and stay away from the hustling and competitive world. Adventure tourism satisfies the psychological need of curiosity, at the meantime, the sense of accomplishment of participants of adventure tourism, as during the process of challenging the nature, they will be able to experience teamwork spirit, friendship, mutual benefit, that gradually vanish from our life. With the pursuit of good health and colorful spiritual life, thrilling adventure tourism experiences meet Chinese young generation's psychological needs in terms of tourism culture. Adventure tourism has a higher requirement for physical and psychological qualities of tourists, especially the strong survival skills in the wild nature. Therefore, the participants of adventure tourism are mostly college students and white collar workers in companies.

3.A SWOT analysis of Adventure Tourism at Huihang Ancient Road

3.1.Strengths:

1. It enjoys good location as it is well located in Yangtze River Delta. 2. It enjoys convenient transport, and the launch of Hefu Highspeed train will further improve it. 3. Located in the region of abundant resources, it neighbors the first class scenic attractions, such as Yellow Mountain and Xidi Hongcun Ancient Villages. 4. Huihang Ancient Road is the ecological landscape pathway with a long history, rich ecological views, well-preserved vegetation and intact ancient stones.

3.2.Weaknesses:

1. It has not been marketed properly, thus, the image of adventure tourism destination has failed to be built up. 2. It is insufficient in effective infrastructure needed for adventure tourism. 3. Low level of involvement of local community 4. Lack of emergency security and rescue scheme, and frequent occurrence of accidents. 5. Most of organizers are adventure societies, clubs or small or medium sized travel agencies. There is no tour operator that specializes in adventure tourism.

3.3.Opportunities:

1. Adventure tourism has gained increasing popularity and it is regarded as a green, ecological and healthy way of travel. 2. The rapid development of outdoor clubs in China have provided great opportunity for adventure tourism. 3. Local governments have provided remarkable support to develop adventure tourism products and build up national trekker bases.

3.4.Challenges:

1. Weak in local financial funding 2. The adventure tourism atmosphere in China is not strong enough and does not have an outstanding industry image. 3. Despite of the great efforts to develop adventure tourism products, the local

governments do not pay special attention to the sustainable development of tourism.
4. Sustainable mode of profit making and sales has not be built.

The reason we adopted the method of SWOT analysis is to find the strengths and weakness of Huihang Ancient Road, and identify the favorable and unfavorable conditions for the development of adventure tourism here, so as to make a development plan of adventure tourism at Huihang Ancient Road.

4.Sustainable development of tourism

As an adventure tourism destination, Huihang Ancient Road is gaining popularity. In 2014 alone, the number of visitors reached more than 1 million. But it is also a double edged sword. When faced with its increasing popularity, the risk of being over-developed and over-crowded with tourists also increases. How can we achieve the sustainable development of adventure tourism? How can we rectify the notions that we can make a living by fully exploiting the local resources?

4.1.The definition of sustainable tourism

The sustainable tourism can be defined as “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UNWTO, 2004).

4.2.Basic Contents of sustainable tourism:

Sustainability in Ecology: To maintain healthy way of nature process, preserve the productivity and functions of ecology, and maintain the basis and environment of natural resources.

Sustainability in Economy: To guarantee steady growth, and boost the personal income per capita in developing countries. To manage resources and environment with economic means and internalize these extrinsic factors

Sustainability in Society: To meet the basic needs of society in the long run, guarantee the equitable distribution of resources and income (between the generations and within generation).

4.3.Approaches to the realization of sustainable development of adventure tourism destinations

4.3.1. Exploitation of tourism resources and sustainable development of tourism

Tourism resources are the basis of the survival of tourism and the basic condition of the development of it. They are not renewable. As a special product of tourism, adventure tourism is different from the mass tourism and involves a higher requirement of tourism resources. First and foremost, the resources should be unique, mysterious, novel, thrilling and irreplaceable so that they are worth the adventure. In development, no large scale artificial transformation should be employed to the landscape and scenery. Instead, the artificial constructions should be restricted to primary level and only for safety purpose so as to keep the resources original, natural and intact. However, the services should be technologically well-supported, well-guaranteed in supply, punctual and prompt, secure and well-planned for emergencies.

Large scale facilities such as hotels and guesthouses should stay away from the core scenic area. Instead, the facilities for rest in and accommodation should be simple but special and fit well into the surrounding environment. Wood cottages or sheds are good examples. Highway is not preferred to go straight into the core area.

4.3.2. Tourism enterprises and the sustainable development of tourism

a. The sustainable development of travel agencies, tourism companies and tourist attractions

Keep off the ecologically vulnerable and sensitive areas while planning the travel routes. Control the size of tour groups. Small groups are easier for the tour leaders to manage so that they have less impact on and damage to the natural environment. Properly guide the consumption of the tourists, cultivate their environmental awareness and drive home the concept of sustainable tourism by means of video, brochures and so on. Train the tour leaders and guides to enhance their knowledge of sustainable tourism. Reduce the pollution from tourism traffic.

b. Hotel management and the sustainable development of tourism

Rapidly develop green hotels. While selecting and planning the campsite on the ancient Hangzhou-Anhui path, take into consideration not only the protection of ecological environment but also the provision of basic facilities for the tourists and the assurance of safety and convenience of maintenance. It should be in a scenic location with access of walking path. The southern or eastern slopes are more open and enjoy better sunshine. They drain better and are close to the major attractions

4.3.3. Tourists' consuming behavior and the sustainable development of tourism

Show respect to the local culture. Do no damage to tourism resources and be a civilized tourist. Don't litter. Minimize the white pollution like the disposable plastic lunch boxes and beverage bottles. Don't interfere in the normal life of wild animals or gather wild plants (Lantian'ao is a high mountain steppe and the main origin of Tianmu Mountain azalea). Don't tread on the valuable plants. Don't eat or buy protected animals or their products. Actively participate in ecology protection activities.

4.3.4. Community involvement and the sustainable development of tourism

As tourism rapidly develops, problems in tourism destinations become more and more serious, urging people to study the relationship between tourism and community and find a way to realize the sustainable development of tourism from community perspective.

At present, community involvement in China is only in theory. In reality, tourism is enterprise-oriented or government-guided. It is also true with adventure tourism. Residents in the community can hardly participate into the tourism activities. Even if they are employed by the tourism enterprises, they are limited to the low-paid and insignificant positions as they are lack of formal education and experience. Therefore, they are restricted from the opportunity to improve their skills and life.

a. Local community should take part in the planning and management of the adventure tourism to determine the development and scale of it.

b. The larger part of the profit of adventure tourism should be reserved in the local community. Apart from being directly used as the income of the residents, it should also be applied to the improvement of health care, education and infrastructure of the community by means of setting up funds.

c. Replace the non-ecologically friendly production activities with tourism and create a sustainable ecology to enhance the protection awareness of the locals.

d. Keep the scale small and the impact low. The tourism activities are in small scale and the traditions, culture and social structure are respected. The negative impact on the natural and social environment is minimized.

e. Explain the authenticity. Provide the visitors with interpretation service without any improper ceremonial performance.

4.3.5. Government departments and the sustainable development of tourism

Enact relevant policies, laws and regulations to accomplish sustainable

development of tourism (Tourism Law, Rules for Nature Reserve). Provide training and education for the related tourism departments, enterprises and practitioners. Make plans for sustainable development of tourism. Set up index systems of assessment and statistics for sustainable development of tourism and work out methods. Strengthen the communication with other countries in information, skills, technology, experience and lessons. Safeguard the security of the tourists.

Security is the basic requirement of tourists and the precondition of tourism activities and the sustainable development of tourism. Adventure tourism is high risky. There have been frequent security accidents.

a. Learn to set up professional organizations and accident prevention system. Adventure tourism in our country is mainly organized by clubs or individuals. It is not standardized. Professional organizations such as special travel agencies should be set up to offer systematic training to relevant people. There should also be clear division of labor and government's interference in its management.

b. Strengthen the building of rescue teams and establish adventure tourism emergency rescue system. At present, there are two kinds of rescue teams: one is organized by industry association and the other is the spontaneous folk teams. Combine the advantages of the two and build professional teams.

c. Legal system should be established. Adventure tourism should be legally standardized. The adventure tours should be reported and the tour leaders should be certified. The tour organizers should take the responsibility to inform the tourists of the risk in written form. Set up responsibility identification system and improve the personal accident insurance service.

d. Popularize the knowledge for adventure and field survival, including meteorological and geographical knowledge, equipment and emergency handling, and etc.

5. Conclusion

Up till now not much research has been done on adventure tourism and its sustainable development in China. By doing this case study, we made an analysis of the sustainable development of an adventure tourism destination from five aspects. It is also our hope that this case study can to some extent contribute to the sound development of adventure tourism in China.

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