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**Evaluation of the Potential of Ecotourism to Contribute to
Local Sustainable Development:
A Case Study of Tengtou Village, China**

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Philosophy in Development Studies at Massey University, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

In the last few decades, “ecotourism” has emerged as a much talked about topic that is frequently linked to the term “sustainable development”. Despite the fact that the definition of ecotourism has been expanded from primarily pristine nature-based areas to modified areas, relatively few studies have been devoted to evaluating the relationship between “ecotourism” and “sustainable development” in those destinations. To address this research need, this thesis attempts to analyse the potential of ecotourism as a strategy for sustainable development, where it does not depend only on nature-based opportunities. Relevant literature on the topics of ecotourism and sustainable development was examined to develop a framework to assess ecotourism in a case study area.

The case study employed was Tengtou village, China, which is one of the earliest national eco-villages. Tengtou hosted 76,200 tourists in 2006. Data was collected using qualitative methods, which included semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, focus groups, participant observation and questionnaire surveys. The research revealed that ecotourism has brought a variety of favourable impacts, and the local people hold optimistic attitudes about ecotourism, which indicate the feasibility of the ecotourism industry and the comparative success it has achieved. On the other hand, the research also found several potentially adverse effects, which suggest that ecotourism does not yet make a full contribution to local sustainable development.

This thesis concludes that effective regulation and sound planning play a significant role in enabling the sustainability of ecotourism. Meanwhile, the importance of local people’s active involvement at different levels of ecotourism development in ensuring ecotourism’s success, in the long term, was also revealed. This issue of local participation, strongly pushed in the international ecotourism literature, is not something which has characterised most ecotourism initiatives in China to date. Further, considering the increasing number of tourists, the management of tourists and the expansion of physical infrastructure need to be strengthened in the research area.

This thesis is dedicated to
my beloved grandmother Xiubao Ge,
and to my loving parents, Guozhen Jiang and Sanyi Zhang

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1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I never thought that there would be so many tourists coming to my village, and people seem quite interested in the current level of sound development achieved in my village. Indeed, the original natural condition of Tengtou village was so poor and the land was totally not suitable for people to live on. No one would imagine that today we can also develop “ecotourism”. It is amazing that these flowers and trees can earn money and attract tourists. Ecotourism is a good thing. At least it upgrades our living environment (Member of Tengtou village, personal communication, May 2007).

There has been enormous growth in ecotourism globally in recent years, and this has been praised by many writers. It is not always clear, however, whether this ecotourism development equates closely with sustainable development. Sustainable development is a widely known term in contemporary society, which emerged from concern over increasing environmental problems in recent decades. Tourism, as the world’s largest industry, has also started to apply the sustainable development idea to its practice. The emergence of ecotourism, which is one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry, in particular, has lent itself to the concept of sustainable development, enthusiastically. Developing countries, to a great extent, welcome and value ecotourism as a promising strategy to promote their development without destroying their natural environment.

With the popularly-held justification of the promotion of ecotourism as a preferred means of achieving sustainable development, there emerged a growing body of studies in rural developing countries to examine the close relationships between ecotourism and sustainability. Ecotourism research has occurred especially in places such as Costa Rica, Nepal and Kenya, where the destination areas are endowed with

an exceptional abundance of natural resources. In other words, very often it appears that ecotourism is just about enjoying unadulterated natural landscapes, since there has been a great deal of literature that targets rural areas of developing countries that have outstanding natural qualities as the focus of study. Indeed, the story of ecotourism is quite often linked to settings like national parks or nature reserves; whereas there has been little scope given to assessment of the performance of ecotourism and its prospects for contributing to sustainable development in areas that are not based on naturally occurring features. Exceptions are newly emerging studies in urban ecotourism conducted by authors like Gibson, Dodds, Joppe and Jamieson (2003), Higham and Lück (2002), as well as Zhang and Ma (2006).

Therefore, the aim in conducting this study is to overcome this lack of empirical data on places where ecotourism development is not based primarily on naturally occurring features, by studying a village in China and investigating ecotourism's role in facilitating local sustainable development. This case study village is one of the earliest eco-villages nominated by the National Tourism Bureau, mainly by virtue of its sound living environment, rustic rural scenery, comparatively modern agriculture, and balanced economic development.

To introduce this thesis, this chapter begins by providing background information about rural problems in China and the strategies adopted by the Chinese government to solve them, which sets the broad context for the selection of this research topic. The second part of the chapter defines the study objectives and key research questions. The chapter ends with an outline of the structure and organisation of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the study

The vast rural areas in the world, especially in developing countries, have been widely viewed as experiencing economic stagnation problems (Heilig, 2003). In

addition to the growing gap between poor rural and prosperous urban areas, rural areas in developing countries also face a number of other serious problems, including low productivity traditional agriculture, out-migration of rural population to urban areas, lack of education and sound infrastructure development, as well as acute environmental pollution (e.g. water pollution, air pollution, soil pollution; Heilig, 2003). China, as a country with a large rural population, epitomises these rural problems. It is estimated that at the end of 2005, there were 745 million people living in rural areas of China, who occupied about 57 percent of the total population (Song, 2007). Due to the dominance of rural population and areas in China, agriculture is considered by the Chinese government as the foundation of the nation's economic and social development. Consequently, sustainable development of rural areas has been recognised as being crucially important to the whole country's well-being and sustainable development (Gao, 2002; Liu, Wu & Ru, 2002; Peng, 2001).

Since the establishment of the Republic of China in 1949, China's leaders have made a great effort to develop the country's rural areas by trying out many different strategies, from the mass mobilisation campaigns in the pre-1978 period, to institutional and structural reforms. The post-1978 reform, in particular, has largely promoted agricultural productivity, as well as successfully diversifying commodities (Heilig, 2003). However, the regional disparities between industrialised urban areas and the rural hinterland are increasingly widening. Meanwhile, there are still millions of people living in rural areas who are unable even to enjoy a level of subsistence. This imbalanced development of rural and urban areas has become one of the most outstanding inconsistencies in China's economic life. On the other hand, rural areas also face increasingly environmental deterioration. Consequently, solving rural problems has become a critical task.

In recent years, the Chinese government has implemented a variety of encouraging policies and strategies to alleviate rural poverty and promote rural sustainable

development, including providing subsidies to the relatively poor areas; mobilising the relatively rich areas to help the poor people and regions (e.g. through various donations); encouraging undergraduates to work in rural areas; and increasing investment in education, health and infrastructural development in rural areas (Anhui Government, 2004).

At present, ecotourism has become a much talked about fashionable model for sustainable development in rural China because of its potential in achieving some of the government's objectives, such as diversifying traditional agriculture, solving the problem of a surplus rural workforce, and adjusting the rural industrial structure. More importantly, rural ecotourism is recognised as an efficient form of land use, with low impact on the environment. Hence, although ecotourism is only a newly emerging alternative means to diversify rural area economies, rather than a dominant economic strategy, both national and local governments pay significant attention to its performance, and vigorously support and advocate for it as a desirable and sustainable development tool.

The earliest ecotourism destinations in China were mainly located in remote western regions and mountainous areas, which enjoy exceptionally outstanding natural resource features, mainly in the form of forest parks and nature reserves. Currently, many inland rural villages with simple rural scenery, and even urban areas, have also been developed as well-known ecotourism destinations. In other words, rural and urban ecotourism have emerged as new forms of development in China in order to cater to the increasing demand of Chinese people to experience ecotourism, as well as to promote people's environmental protection consciousness.

An eco-village is a form of rural ecotourism energetically promoted by the Chinese government as an ideal model to achieve rural sustainable development. There are thousands of national level eco-villages in China, however, only a small number have been successfully developed as ecotourism destinations, such as Liuminying

eco-village in Beijing, Biling eco-village in Guangdong, as well as Guodonggu and Tengtou eco-villages in Zhejiang. Tengtou eco-village is the focus of this study. The main criterion that distinguish eco-villages from other ordinary villages are clean and safe living environment, productive agriculture, high sanitation level, certain coverage of green areas, low usage of pesticides, and balanced and environmentally protective economic development (China Quality Newspaper, 2006). For those eco-villages that are able to become ecotourism destinations, are also have certain characteristics such as advantageous geographical locations, relatively high and stable economic development, sound social infrastructure, as well as forward thinking awareness and innovation from local leaders.

The topic of rural ecotourism in China has spawned an expanding literature (Fu, 2006; Lv & Liu, 2006; Xie, Liu & Li, 2002; Wang, 2006). However, limited empirical case studies have been undertaken qualitatively in specific rural areas of China to explore the notion of ecotourism and the actual impacts of ecotourism from local people's own perspectives. It is, therefore, crucial to understand whether, and how, ecotourism can actually help to achieve local sustainable development by using a specific context as the example. This is the focus of the present study.

Fieldwork was carried out in Tengtou village, Zhejiang Province, China, in May/June 2007, using qualitative methods. A case study approach was employed in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the existing level of ecotourism in the specific local context. The following section goes on to explain the research objectives and key questions. This is followed by an outline of the structure of the research.

1.2 Study objectives and key questions

The central purpose of this research is to examine what if any, role ecotourism has played in achieving sustainable development within the context of Tengtou village.

Specifically, the researcher undertook to determine: 1) what are the village management body's and local residents' definitions and expectations of ecotourism? 2) what are the perceived impacts of ecotourism (taking into account the local people's understanding and my own point of view)? 3) what factors that influence ecotourism's possibility to achieve sustainable development?

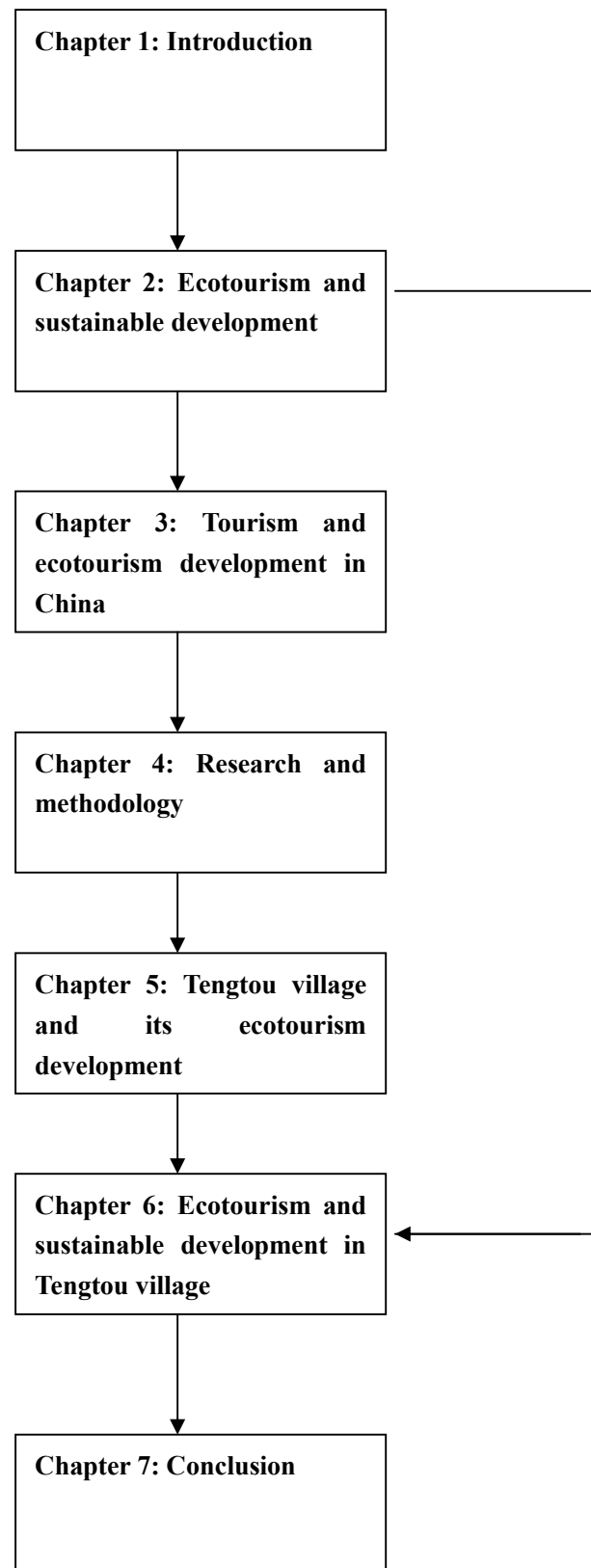
This study is exploratory in nature, and hopes to uncover suggestions for staff working in management, to help them to enhance the capacity of ecotourism at the destination area to generate more benefits for both the local village and the villagers.

1.3 Organisation of the thesis

This chapter has provided background information on the research topic, showing the importance of this research area. It has also illustrated the objective and the key questions of the case study. Moreover, a brief outline of the whole thesis is given. The following two chapters provide a review of the relevant literature.

Figure 1-1 shows the outline of this thesis and how the chapters are linked. It can be seen that Chapter 2, in particular, is closely linked to Chapter 6, with the former providing the framework for the data analysis in the later one.

Figure 1-1: Outline of the thesis



Source: Author

Chapter 2 reviews the two key concepts of “ecotourism” and “sustainable development”, and establishes a close relationship between these two. The chapter starts by tracing the simultaneous evolution of tourism and development theories, thereby, setting a broad theoretical and historical context for the emergence of the two key concepts discussed in this thesis. The chapter then goes on to examine the theoretical debates on “sustainable development” and “ecotourism” respectively. A discussion of how ecotourism can contribute to sustainable development is further presented, within which the sustainability goals for ecotourism have also been outlined in detail. This discussion provides a feasible framework for the subsequent data analysis, mainly by comparing these factors with findings of research undertaken in Tengtou village.

Having considered the two areas of concern broadly, Chapter 3 turns to China in order to provide a national context for the Tengtou village case study, by looking at how tourism and development are conceptualised and practised in a Chinese context. The chapter begins by presenting a discussion about Chinese ideas of development practice within a historical perspective. In considering the increasing role of tourism used by the State in promoting economic development, the section then focuses on providing an overview of tourism development in China, discussing its origins, as well as the characteristics and problems of recent tourism development in China. The specific focus of the chapter is, then, given to the analysis of the emergence of ecotourism in China and its potential in fulfilling sustainable development in rural areas.

Chapter 4 focuses on explaining the methodology used in this research. The chapter firstly discusses the motivation for conducting this research, and the importance of preparation work. The chapter then continues by considering ethical issues. Details of the methods used and the justification of methodology are also explained. The next sections cover data analysis and a reflection on the fieldwork methodology. This is followed, in turn, by Chapter 5, which presents findings based on the qualitative

research data.

Chapter 5 gives a detailed description of the research area and its people. It then moves to focus on discussing the ecotourism industry of the study area, specifically, explaining the initiation and characteristics of ecotourism, as well as the types of tourists and the purposes of their visitations. Moreover, this chapter also explores local residents' perceptions of and participation in ecotourism. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of local people's attitudes towards ecotourism.

Chapter 6 analyses the situations as illustrated in the previous chapter, examining whether ecotourism in Tengtou village can contribute to local sustainable development in light of the evaluation criteria developed in the literature review chapters. Firstly, this chapter discusses the definition of ecotourism as conceptualised by the researched people, in comparison with those identified by the existing ecotourism literature. The next sections look at the economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts and challenges of ecotourism in Tengtou village, in order to provide a comprehensive and balanced analysis of its contribution to sustainable development. The chapter concludes by exploring the specific factors that enable or restrict the sustainable development of Tengtou village, indicating how other sites of ecotourism can also learn from its experiences.

Finally, Chapter 7 draws together the research aims, the field research and the relevant theoretical context discussed throughout this thesis. It presents the key findings of the case study. The thesis concludes with some key recommendations for the improvement of current practice and policies of ecotourism development in Tengtou village.

2. CHAPTER TWO: ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Introduction

After the Second World War, development became the focus of many newly independent Third World countries (McMichael, 1996). Many development projects emerged, aimed towards promotion of the expansion of scientific knowledge, industrialisation, and the increase in productivity and trade. The underpinning ideology was modernisation theory. These projects have contributed to the rapid development of some economies and advanced technology, which, consequently, smoothed the way for the emergence of a number of new industries, among which the tourism industry is an important one (Smith & Eadington, 1994). However, during the mid-1960s, with the identification of social inequalities and increasing environmental problems within this development process, such as pollution, global warming, deforestation, and the depletion of the ozone layer, uncontrolled economic growth started to be questioned (Keyser, 2002). People began to be aware that the Earth's resources were not sufficient to sustain current levels of population and industrial growth (Keyser, 2002).

Out of these environmental concerns the concept of “sustainable development” emerged, mainly as a desirable alternative approach to conventional development. The term was most famously and officially used in the ‘Brundtland Report’ by the World Commission on Development and Environment in 1987, and has gained wide attention and acceptance since then (Keyser, 2002). Correspondingly, most economic activities have embraced the idea of sustainable development in their implementation (Bulter, 1993). The tourism industry, among many other economic activities, has also started to devote itself to apply the principles of sustainability into its practice.

Ecotourism, in particular, is seen as a promising tool to approach sustainable development.

The concepts of “sustainable development” and “ecotourism” have become two technical words that are welcomingly attractive and fashionable. Too many assumptions have been made however about the potential ability of ecotourism to contribute to sustainable development. The growing body of literature generally limits the focus on debating the usefulness of the term “sustainable development”, defining the term “ecotourism”, or discussing the impacts of “ecotourism”; while there has been an inadequate number of studies investigating the relationship between “ecotourism” and “sustainable development” directly. Thus, there is a need to explore the actual relationships between the two terms in an explicit way and in a broader context, in order to draw more comprehensive conclusions.

The purpose of this chapter is to specifically examine the concepts of ecotourism and sustainable development, as well as establishing a relationship between these two, with emphasis on the developing world, as a prelude to consideration of the case study. The chapter starts with an analysis of the ideologies of tourism under the development paradigms, in order to provide a broad historical and theoretical context for understanding the emergence of these two key terms of the research. This is followed by a review of the debates surrounding the concept of “sustainable development”, and the analysis of its strengths and challenges. The concept of ecotourism, considering its potentials and pitfalls, will also be explored. The chapter concludes by discussing whether ecotourism can facilitate sustainable development, within which the key sustainability goals of ecotourism and the possible factors contributing to successful ecotourism will be presented. In this way, this chapter sets the theoretical parameters for the evaluation of the achievement of Tengtou’s sustainable development that will be discussed in Chapter 6.

2.2 The evolution of tourism theory in relation to development theory

Development theory and tourism, it is argued, have evolved along the same time line since the Second World War, and have shared similar foci (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002). This section will trace the evolving tourism ideologies within the evolutionary historical stages of development theory, in order to examine the contemporary relationship between tourism and development.

2.2.1 Modernisation theory and the advocacy platform

The first generation of development thinking was dominated by modernisation theories, which emerged immediately after the Second World War. Modernisation theories hold the view that societies evolved through stages, from traditional society to modern society (Webster, 1990). Such an approach maintains that development in developing countries can be achieved through replicating the development path that has already been experienced by the developed countries (Webster, 1990). This implies that Western models of development offer a more desirable approach. Accordingly, importing of Western capital, technology and information, was largely encouraged in promoting development (Rostow, 1956).

Fuelled by modernisation theories, there was an overwhelming positive view towards tourism development. Tourism was widely viewed as an economic panacea, and a promising development strategy that was able to fulfill functions like transferring technology, increasing employment, and generating foreign exchange (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002). Jafari (cited in Weaver, 1998) defined this period of tourism development as an advocacy platform.

2.2.2 Dependency theory and the cautionary platform

During the 1970s, dependency theories, also referred to as the underdevelopment

paradigm, emerged from the “extensive Latin American debate on the underdevelopment problems”, which posed a strong critique of the optimistic modernisation theories (Hettne, 1990, p. 81). Such a form of paradigm takes the historical structures of developing countries into account in maintaining that underdevelopment is a historical product that is generated in the process of the expansion of capitalism (Preston, 1996). The persistent poverty was thus viewed as the product of the unequal power relationship between developed and underdeveloped countries (Lewellen, 1995).

Consistent with this shift of development thinking, a new cautionary platform of tourism has also emerged and has started to occupy the dominant position in tourism theories. Tourism, especially mass tourism, was broadly criticised as merely a means used by the developed core countries to continue their exploitation and domination of the underdeveloped periphery (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). Consequently, there emerged a large number of tourism writings critiquing the negative impacts of tourism, especially focusing on its economic leakages (Britton, 1982; Cater, 1993; Lindberg, 2000), as well as its commoditisation (Cater, 2002; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Orams, 1995; Thaman, 1994). Tourism was further criticised as ‘neo-colonialist’ (Mowforth & Munt, 1998).

2.2.3 Alternative theory and the adaptancy platform

The third generation of development theories began in the 1980s. The critique provided by dependency theory paves the way for a variety of proposals that are labeled collectively as alternative development theories, which include approaches like sustainable development, participatory development and gender development (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002). During that stage, development strategies were mainly focusing on issues like environment, gender and participation.

Based on the values of alternative development, the adaptancy platform of tourism

development emerged, which gives rise to many alternative forms of tourism development, including ecotourism, community-based tourism and the like (Weaver, 2001). It should be noted that ecotourism within this stage has achieved formal but still fringe status (Weaver, 2001). Like alternative development, the adaptancy platform of tourism development also emphasises the principles of sustainability, and advocates small-scale, locally controlled and participatory forms of tourism development strategies (Weaver, 2001).

2.2.4 People-led theory and the knowledge-based platform

The most recent development thinking can be viewed as composing of two perspectives: the radical post-development perspective and the milder people-led perspective on development (Overton & Storey, 2006). The post-development perspective rejects the concept of “development” and considers such a term as merely a form of Western invention (Siemiatycki, 2005). Under such a perspective, alternative development is critiqued as idealistic, which ignores the complexities of local context (Siemiatycki, 2005). However, such a perspective still makes efforts to pursue ideals of development — a form of development that is fully engaged with the indigenous and marginalised knowledge and promotes diversity, equity and justice (Siemiatycki, 2005).

This development discourse is relevant to the fourth platform of tourism development — the knowledge-based platform. Similar to the post-development challenge to alternative development, the knowledge-based platform criticises the adaptancy platform for over-generalisation, and seeks a more holistic and in-depth understanding of the whole tourism system. Meanwhile, ecotourism has shifted towards a formal and mainstream status during this tourism platform (Weaver, 2001).

The preceding sections have looked at the ideologies behind the concepts of development and tourism development. It can be seen that tourism development

thinking is largely influenced by development theories. This is especially the case with the relationship between sustainable development and alternative tourism. The third generation of development puts forward a key principle of development, namely, sustainability. Enlightened by the fourth generation of development, the extent to which ecotourism delivers on the high aspirations associated with sustainable development, requires detailed research into specific destination areas. This justifies the intention of this thesis — to conduct research in Tengtou village, China, in order to explore the level of sustainable development within the context of this particular site of ecotourism. The following section starts with the discussion of the first key concept of this thesis, sustainable development.

2.3 Theoretical discussion around sustainable development

Sustainable development, as mentioned above, emerged in the 1980s, as an alternative form of development. It is considered as both the most desirable goal of development and a means towards development. This section aims to examine the interpretations of such a concept, and to discuss its strengths. The section ends with exploring possible strategies towards achieving sustainable development.

2.3.1 Sustainable development: A contradictory term?

There are a variety of interpretations of the definition and practice of “sustainable development” (Elliott, 2006). Individuals perceive the concept distinctively at different stages, which serve to support diverse interests. Gould (2004) discerns variations in the needs and goals of “sustainable development” between the developed and developing countries, on account of their distinctive economic, social, cultural and physical contexts. Specifically, developing countries focus more on issues of empowerment, poverty, health care, and reducing of the gap of inequality in designing sustainable development (Gould, 2004). In contrast, developed countries pay particular attention to problems like the environmental protection and the global

market (Gould, 2004).

The absence of a universally agreed interpretation of sustainable development has led to criticism based on ambiguity and inherent contradictions of the term (Sharpley, 2000). Aronsson (2000) maintains that “sustainable development” is a contradictory term because it is impossible for society to achieve environmental protection and economic development both at the same time. Boff (2003) echoes Aronsson’s concern by insisting that the two terms used within “sustainable development” are mutually exclusive, due to the incompatible nature of economic and ecological parameters. On the one hand, “development” implies the maximisation of benefits with minimisation of investment in money and time (Boff, 2003). As a result, this can lead to resource depletion and unequal and uneven distribution of goods and services (Boff, 2003). On the other hand, “sustainability” pays special attention to the interdependence of all systems and calls for maintaining the ecosystem’s equilibrium (Boff, 2003).

There are three presentations of “sustainable development” referred to most frequently in the development literature, namely weak and strong sustainability, and the mainstream version (Burgess & Barbier, 2002). Weaker discourse of sustainable development adopts an anthropocentric perspective on considering the relationship between humans and nature (Kallio, Nordberg & Ahonen, 2007; Williams & Millington, 2004). Such an interpretation sees natural and manufactured capital as interchangeable, and is optimistic towards future technology as providing answers to environmental problems, which, in turn, justifies continuing economic development and resource exploitation (Getzner, 1999; Williams & Millington, 2004). Unlike this perspective, strong sustainable development considers preservation of other life forms as the principle aim of sustainability (Burgess & Barbier, 2002). It regards economic growth as inherently destructive, which implies that sustainable development can only be achieved by adhering to the constant natural assets rule without economic growth (Burgess & Barbier, 2002).

The third version of “sustainable development” has evolved over time, which defines “sustainable development” as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” by the ‘Brundtland Report’ (WCED, 1987, p. 43). This comes some where between the weak and strong sustainability positions. This has, however, been severely criticised as being fraught with contradictions, while lacking a clear solution. This is because such an approach does not imply absolute limits to growth, nor provide any feasible suggestions to balance the continued economic growth against the need of conserving natural resources in practice (Purvis & Grainger, 2004). In other words, the underlying idea of such an approach remains as sustaining the growth in material consumption (Shiva, 1992).

Similarly, authors like Beder (1994), Bugge (2002) and Hunter (1997), believe that the mainstream interpretation still endorses a growth-oriented and human-centered objective, with the underlying purpose being only to satisfy basic human needs, instead of concerning nature first. Therefore, the term “sustainable development” is criticised as merely a new name for economic growth, despite its incorporation of environmental assets into the economic system to ensure their sustainability (Bugge, 2002).

2.3.2 The strength of sustainable development

Although sustainable development is widely debated as a controversial term that is filled with disagreement and vagueness, it has gained extensive popularity and has become a useful tool. The inherently vague nature of the concept is actually considered as its strength by authors like Redclift (1987) and Wall (1997). Many development agencies have adopted the principles of sustainable development in producing long-term desirable goals (Overton, 1999). To some extent, “sustainable development” does provide a simple, comprehensive and practical theoretical framework to guide development practice in reality, from planning to decision

making processes (Buchsbaum, 2004). Such a term is feasible, since it goes far beyond simply identifying causes of unsustainable development and shifting the emphasis from endless theoretical debates to serve the real problems of current society (Dale, 2001).

There are three main measurable objectives of sustainable development that have been widely encompassed in a variety of definitions, namely, economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and social sustainability. Elliott (2006) further illustrates the components of each system in detail. Specifically, economic sustainability requires the achievement of poverty reduction, equity and efficient use of resources; environmental sustainability includes maintaining ecological diversity, productivity and resilience; and social sustainability calls for elements like maintaining cultural diversity, social justice and participation (Elliott, 2006).

Authors like Baker (2006) and Batty (2001) claim that the version of “sustainable development” under the ‘Brundtland Report’ is politically significant, with its underlying principles helping to achieve consensus among politicians. In addition, it is also unifying, enabling people around the world to work towards a sustainable future (Baker, 2006). Wall (1997) holds the same view, arguing that such a concept is capable of encouraging communication and discussion among different groups of people with diverse interests to achieve an appropriate level of trade-offs.

In addition to its feasibility, the concept of “sustainable development” also gains credit for its flexibility and appropriateness. It allows each society to define it in their own way, based on their own specific needs and abilities (Redclift, 1987). Moreover, the power of such an approach also lies in its ability to provide a multi-dimensional and holistic way of thinking about close interdependencies among natural environments, societies and economic systems (Overton, 1999). It is successfully addressing the global concerns for poverty reduction, meeting basic needs, achieving social equity, protecting the environment and other qualitative dimensions where

non-economic values are emphasised, which largely broadens the scope of development (Dale, 2001; Overton, 1999).

Further, the term acknowledges the independent relationship between human beings and their surrounding environment, and pays particular attention to incorporating notions of environmental impacts (Overton, 1999; Wall, 1997). As Shiva (1992, p. 192) argues, the real meaning of sustainability relies on “maintaining the integrity of nature’s processes, cycles and rhythms”. Much the same views are shared by Drummond and Marsden (1999), who further suggest that sustainable development should not be treated merely as a multi-dimensional concept, but each part within it should be considered as fundamentally integrative. Such a suggestion implies that the real sustainable development should develop both human beings and the Earth equally, instead of developing one at the cost of the other.

The benefits of future generations, on the other hand, are also incorporated into the practice of sustainable development (Overton, 1999). Therefore, the concept aims to alleviate the global crisis in more systematic and ethical ways, and constructively moves forward to provide long-term strategies (Overton, 1999). Overall, despite reservations about the term noted in the previous section, “sustainable development” interpreted in the ‘Brundtland Report’ can be argued as a practical and optimistic tool that aims to work towards the balance of the economy, the environment and society.

2.3.3 Possible strategies for sustainable development

The policy implications of sustainable development vary in a similar way to its diverse interpretations. The mild versions suggest that sustainable development can be achieved by putting prices on environmental resources and taking environmental costs into account (Williams & Millington, 2004). In contrast, more radical approaches maintain that it is impossible for the existing economic system to achieve

sustainable development, and call for profound changes in human behaviour (Overton, 1999; Shiva, 1992).

Among the variety of proposed development strategies, a “development from below” or “ecodevelopment” approach has gained currency among developing countries (Adams, 1990). It can be argued as a more appropriate and sustainable way to achieving long-term sustainability, with an emphasis on the two significant elements in the process of development, namely, local participation and empowerment. Such a perspective encourages full use of local resources, labour, capital and knowledge, which can promote local people’s independence, confidence and enthusiasm. Participation, in the context of development, signifies in addition to consultation, the control over and ownership of natural resources, land and development practice by the local people (Overton, Scheyvens & Purdie, 1999). Meanwhile, empowerment within the process of development is regarded as an important means towards development, rather than merely an end, which entails profound political and social alterations (Overton, 1999). Closely related to participation and empowerment is the factor of capacity building, which is addressed as a driving force for sustainable development by Agenda 21, as well as by the World Bank (Leautier, n.d.).

On the other hand, environmental protection strategies are also crucial in achieving sustainable development, within which education can be considered as a useful tool. Tlhagale (2004) elaborates upon the powerful role of environmental education in promoting local sustainable development in detail. For example, education can facilitate fostering responsible attitudes towards the environment among local people, as well as enhancing people’s consciousness towards the interdependent relationships between economic, social, political and ecological systems (Tlhagale, 2004). Indeed, through education, people will be aware of the symbiotic relationships between human beings and their surrounding environment. Once people understand natural process, it is easier to design and implement sustainable and ethical development strategies more efficiently.

The foregoing review has examined the contradictory nature of the concept of “sustainable development”, and explored the strengths of such a concept. The possible strategies to achieve sustainable development have also been discussed. As has been mentioned earlier, there exist close theoretical links between tourism and development theories, and tourism has always been promoted as one of the attractive strategies for development, among many others. The increased concern for sustainability has been incorporated into the emergence of alternative tourism, within which ecotourism receives the most attention and has been widely documented as one of the promising alternative strategies to achieve sustainable development (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002). Many developing countries, in particular, are turning towards ecotourism as a strategic means to achieve sustainable development, due to its perceived potential in implementing dual roles, namely, conservation and economic development (Cater, 1994; Shaw & Williams, 2002). The following section will analyse this newly emerging strategy towards sustainable development in length.

2.4 An overview of ecotourism

As mentioned at the beginning, ecotourism has evolved as a subset of alternative tourism, which emerged in the mid-1980s within Jafari’s adaptancy platform (Weaver, 2001). It has gained substantial attention and interest from governments, industries, academics and communities (Blamey, 1997). This section commences by introducing the nature of ecotourism. This is followed by evaluating the potential benefits and challenges of ecotourism.

2.4.1 The nature of ecotourism: definitions, characteristics

The term of ecotourism was first advanced by Hector Ceballors-Lascurain, and has generated support, as well as debate, since that time (Beeton, 1998). Factors like the increasing awareness of world environmental problems, and the rising desire of rich

Westerners to visit nature-based environments and encounter 'others' are identified as the main driving forces behind the dramatic expansion of the ecotourism industry (Hawkins, 1994; Scheyvens, 2002). In addition, the upsurge of dissatisfaction with unregulated mass tourism is also an important contributor promoting the emergence of ecotourism (Blamey, 1995; Orams, 1995).

There is no universal definition embraced in ecotourism, and there are at least 85 definitions about ecotourism in circulation (Fennell, 2002). In addition, there exist different classifications of ecotourism, such as 'hard' versus 'soft' (Weaver, 2006), 'deep' versus 'shallow'³³ (Cater, 2002), 'active' versus 'passive' (Buchsbaum, 2004), and 'environmentally sensitive tourism' versus 'environmentally dependent tourism' (Tisdell, 1996). Some (Boo, 1990; Kutay, cited in Gould, 2004) consider ecotourism as equal to nature-based tourism. In contrast, authors, such as Blamey (1995), Page and Dowling (2001), and Weaver (2005), are aware of the distinctive difference between ecotourism and nature-based tourism, especially in terms of ecotourism fulfilling an educational purpose, as well as promoting conservation (Weaver, 2005). Rymer (cited in Page & Dowling, 2001) makes further remark about the distinctive feature of ecotourism, which lies in its striving purposefully towards minimum environmental problems.

Moreover, different countries define and implement ecotourism in different ways, according to various countries' own national conditions, which is especially the case for developed and developing countries (Lindberg & McKercher, 1997). For example, the developed countries emphasise environmental protection and sociocultural aspects of ecotourism, while developing countries are more focused on economic perspectives in developing ecotourism (Lindberg et al., 1997). Thaman (1994) further argues that the idealised Western view of ecotourism does not work in the Pacific Islands, where residents rely heavily on sustainable utilisation of natural

³³ It should be noted that 'hard' versus 'soft' and 'deep' and 'shallow' classifications of 'ecotourism' are in line with 'strong' and 'weak' division of 'sustainable development', with the underlying perspectives of such groupings either prone to 'eco-centric' or 'anthropocentric' perspectives.

resources to meet their needs, earn their living and maintain cultural integrity.

According to Scheyvens (2002), the concept of ecotourism is more than a mere product that takes place in nature-based environments. Rather, it is viewed as a potential tool to empower the destination people through their active participation (Scheyvens, 2002). Wearing and Neil (1999), on the other hand, appreciate the concept of ecotourism from a deeper philosophical perspective, considering it as an enlightened experience to foster appropriate attitudes and behaviours towards nature.

Taking a closer look at the ecotourism literature, it can be seen that the majority of conventional definitions limit ecotourism to highly natural, environmentally-dependent tourism. However, more recently, nature-based ecotourism is challenged by the emergence of ecotourism practices in highly modified and urban environments (Higham & Lück, 2002; Weaver, n.d.; Zhang & Ma, 2006). In other words, due to the identification of the diversity of national and regional contexts, as well as the need to satisfy the growing demand for ecotourism experiences, the definitions of ecotourism has been modified and expanded (Dodds, Gibson & Joppe, 2002; Higham & Lück, 2002). In particular, this new conceptualisation of ecotourism can be demonstrated via the broadened scope of ecotourism destinations. The new understanding of ecotourism focuses more on the relationship between the environment and tourism as opposed to being focused on nature-based characteristics of ecotourism. As Newsome, Moore and Dowling (2002) highlight, ecotourism is far more than merely being a form of tourism that depends upon the natural environment. Rather, its central purpose is to support and enhance the environment. Similarly, Ross and Wall (1999) emphasise the significance of the establishment of positive relationships between natural environment and local people in defining ecotourism.

Further, as the concept of “ecotourism” evolved over time, it tends to be linked more with the principles of sustainable development. The objectives of ecotourism that

have been frequently addressed by the extensive ecotourism literature adhere to the principles of sustainable development. For example, the definitions of ecotourism interpreted by Ceballos Lascurain, the Ecotourism Society and the World Conservation Union can be considered as holistic, since they embrace environmental, cultural and socio-economic dimensions. Meanwhile, the more recent interpretations tend to be more advanced in directly addressing the issues of conservation and local development.

2.4.2 Potential benefits of ecotourism

Having discussed the concept of ecotourism, the potential benefits of ecotourism will be considered, mainly from economic, environmental and socio-cultural perspectives respectively, within which there are some overlaps. In other words, the impacts of ecotourism based on the above three dimensions are not mutually exclusive. These three aspects of advantages of ecotourism, which have been widely addressed in a large number of ecotourism writings (Beeton, 1998; Wall, 1997; Weaver, 2001) reflect three dimensions of sustainability within sustainable development.

Firstly, from an economic perspective, ecotourism is believed to have potential to contribute to local economic development through a substantive channel. More specifically, it can help to provide jobs for local people, as well as drive the development of related industries, such as the service and accommodation industries (Lindberg, 2000). In addition, ecotourism can also facilitate the upgrading of local infrastructure through its economic earnings (Beeton, 1998). Moreover, ecotourism development can stimulate consumption and production, which, in turn, further drives the local economy (Beeton, 1998).

Williams (cited in Gould, 2004) specifies employment benefits by using the Uganda Community Tourism Association program as an example; this provides local people with a variety of jobs, including tour guides, campground operators, and craft and

food producers. Similarly, Lindberg, Enriquez and Sproule (1996) draw on case studies done in Belize to show that nearly 70 percent of the non-tourism jobs are dependent on ecotourism. Taking Costa Rica as another example, where ecotourism has also successfully led to increases in jobs, improvement of standard of living, and better service infrastructure (Weinberg, Bellows, & Ekster, 2002).

It is understandable that when local residents receive sufficient benefits from ecotourism, they are more willing to welcome and support such an industry. Consequently, the substantial economic revenues combined with local people's active participation are more able to contribute to local sustainable development. This is the case in Belize, ecotourism was found to play a significant role in creating economic benefits to local people (Lindberg et al., 1996). The economic revenues, in turn, have led to increases in local people's support for conservation (Lindberg et al., 1996).

There exists a substantive amount of literature discussing the positive environmental impacts generated by ecotourism. One of the outstanding environmental advantages of ecotourism, which is closely related with economic benefits, is its ability to "provide a direct financial incentive for the preservation of relatively undisturbed natural habitats that would otherwise be exposed to more exploitative and profitable activities" (Weaver, 2006, p. 201). Indeed, ecotourism can be considered as a beneficial industry that can provide a healthy and sustainable alternative to the environmentally destructive industries (e.g. logging and mining), where the establishment of positive relationships between local people and conservation becomes more desirable (Beeton, 1998; Lindberg, 2000). In addition, ecotourism is perceived as a promising tool to finance the establishment and maintenance of protected areas (Lindberg, 2000). For example, in nature reserves in western Sichuan, China, ecotourism is utilised successfully as a tool to protect the natural environment, and this has resulted in forested area increases by 6.7 million hectares (Alexander & Whitehouse, 2004).

The significance of ecotourism also lies in its potential to increase environmental consciousness, and foster healthy attitudes and behaviours among both local residents and tourists (Weaver, 2001). For example, ecotourism can help to encourage donations and assist in mobilising ecotourists as volunteers (Weaver, 2006). This is the case in Botswana, where visitors were found as happy to donate 4 percent of their total spending to a Botswana conservation fund (Weaver, 2001).

The final dimension is socio-cultural. The social and cultural benefits are closely related with economic advantages, mainly in terms of the upgrade of public infrastructure and the improved social welfare. In addition, the successful local-based ecotourism can also lead to the empowerment of local people in economic, social, political and psychological aspects (Scheyvens, 1999). In a manner similar to what Scheyvens comments on, Haas (2003), Ross and Wall (1999), as well as Weaver (1998) suggest that ecotourism can function as an important role in building up locals' confidence, promoting local ownership, and establishing a sense of pride and self-worth. Moreover, ecotourism can help to encourage intercultural appreciation, communication and understanding between local cultures and visitors' own cultures (Ross & Wall, 1999). Further, through increasing people's environmental consciousness and cultural sensitivity, ecotourism can lead to the enhanced experiences for both locals and tourists (Weaver, 1998).

2.4.3 Critique of ecotourism: Operational problems

Like many other forms of tourism, ecotourism is endowed with both merits and shortcomings. Although there are high expectations of ecotourism and it is theoretically attractive, ecotourism is also criticised for failing to live up to its potential roles in practice. There is a growing gap between its potential in theory and practice, which has been widely highlighted (Cater, 2002; Lindberg & McKercher, 1997; Ross & Wall, 1999). Further, ecotourism is criticised as merely a product of Western construction that reflects the uneven and unequal relationship between

developed and developing countries, and helps to reinforce Western hegemony (Cater, 2006). The following discussion will focus on examining negative impacts of ecotourism, mainly from operational levels, in comparison to its theoretical implications.

Firstly, there is a danger within ecotourism that it may be manipulated merely as a label to increase sale and interests, in order to make a profit, without implementing any principles of ecotourism in practice (Cater, 2002; Orams, 1995; Scheyvens, 2002). This point is strongly emphasised by Thaman (1994, p. 185), who insists that “ecotourism in the Pacific Islands has become the modern marketing manager’s source of inspiration for the new sell”.

In addition, ecotourism practice encompasses the potential to contribute to environmental deterioration, both from on-site and off-site (Cater, 1994; Wall, 1997). Although small-scale ecotourism is often accepted as environmentally healthy, authors like Cater (1993) and Wall (1997) point out that even a small number of tourists can also lead to serious environmental degradation without appropriate regulation. This is because ecotourism is quite often taking place at ecological sensitive or vulnerable places, and visitation tends to happen during the very acute times (e.g. the mating or breeding seasons) (Cater, 1991; Wall, 1997). Consequently, it can pose a serious challenge to the environment, as well as disrupting local culture.

Lindberg and McKercher (1997) provide a full list of unfavourable environmental outcomes arising from an ecotourism operation. The negative environmental consequences include soil erosion and compaction, disturbance of wildlife, trampling and removal of vegetation, pollution through littering, waste and vandalism, water and air pollution, and many others (Lindberg & McKercher, 1997). Moreover, the serious consequences derived from going over the carrying capacity are considered as a major environmental cost (Croy and Hogg, 2003). Cater (1994, p. 4) concludes that “ecotourism may be ecologically based but not ecologically sound”.

Indeed, it is evident that in some circumstances, ecotourism tends to violate its objectives to bring benign environmental consequences and to contribute to environmental conservation.

Secondly, from an economic perspective, ecotourism has been noticed as failing to deliver its promises in generating benefits to local people, as well as enhancing their livelihoods (Caroline et al., 2003; Cater, 2006). As Horwich and Lyon (1999) argue, the local people and communities rarely share any benefits from ecotourism, as it is supposed. Factors like revenue leakage, limited number of tourists and lack of the local community's participation and control are contributing to such a phenomenon. Goodwin (2003) further links the causes of economic leakage of ecotourism to the importation of goods from outside the destination areas and the domination of foreign enterprises. It is noted that a large proportion of money spent by the tourists is used to pay for transportation and accommodation, which are largely owned by the developed countries (Cater, 1993; Wall, 1997). Consequently, a considerable amount of money spent on ecotourism is actually returned to those developed countries (Weaver, 2001). It has been observed that only 22-25 percent of the total economic benefits of ecotourism are retained in the destination areas (Cater, 1993). Taking Costa Rica and the Annapurna of Nepal as examples, the local communities receive less than 6 percent of the total income generated by the ecotourism industry, and the figures are much lower for whale-watching in Baja (Lindberg, 2000).

The absence of relevant skills in communicating with visitors and managing the ecotourism industry, as well as the lack of capital to develop ecotourism, are other factors that inhibit local residents from obtaining more economic benefits (Wall, 1997). As a result, local residents are only involved in low-skilled, low-paid and often seasonal jobs, such as selling crafts (Cater, 2006).

Further, the limited local economic benefits are also related to the small-scale type of ecotourism, upon which the ideal of ecotourism is based. The small number of

tourists can reduce down the economic revenues generated to the locals (Wall, 1997). For example, in Niue, an island in the South Pacific, ecotourism is found to be unsustainable in terms of economic viability, due to the limited number of visitors (Haas, 2003). Moreover, many of the places attractive to ecotourists are located in relatively remote areas, and with minimal infrastructure (Cater, 1993). Consequently, only a little money is spent at the destination areas, which largely restricts the economic earnings.

Thirdly, ecotourism can bring a number of adverse socio-cultural impacts, mainly in terms of land-use conflicts, intrusion on traditional local cultures, disruption of local social relationships, and destruction of local values and customs (Weaver, 2001). The negative social impacts are believed to increase in proportion to the number of tourists, as well as the degree of difference between visitors and local people, mainly in terms of cultural and economic disparities, such as distinctive wealth, language and ethnic characteristics (Bulter, 1974; Lindberg & McKercher, 1997). This is especially the case when the total number of the destination population is small and when the relatively rich Westerners visit the destinations located in poor developing countries (Wall, 1997).

The reinforcement of existing local inequalities and the unequal distribution of income to community members are recognised as one of the serious costs of ecotourism (Weaver, 2001). This is the case in a village in the Solomon Islands, where the existing elite groups tend to reap the dominant share of revenue through controlling and operating the ecotourism project (Weaver, 2001).

In addition, displacement of local people can be another detrimental social-cultural consequence of ecotourism, which helps to fuel the intensification of local resentment towards managers and tourists, especially when local residents are not getting sufficient compensation. This occurs when certain areas are claimed for the purpose of preserving environments for ecotourism, such as creating protected areas

(Wall, 1997). Taking Costa Rica as the example, with the establishment of Tortuguero National Park, a large number of locals are deprived of their livelihoods (Wall, 1997). In order to make a living, these people have to consume the scarce natural resources, which will lead to severe environmental degeneration. Further, the commodification of culture, and local people's eagerness to emigrate to other places, especially among the young, are other potentially unfavorable social impacts brought by the influx of tourists, though it is not always the case, since tourism may lead to more economic opportunities, meaning the young will stay (Caroline et al., 2003; Gould, 2004).

In conclusion, this section has reviewed the origins, characteristics, and current trends of the newly emerged, fashionable term, ecotourism. The advantages and disadvantages of ecotourism development were also discussed and illustrated, mainly from economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects. It can be seen that the successful practice of ecotourism corresponds to the idea of "sustainable development", and mirrors the key elements constituted in this term. The following section will take a close look at the potential contribution of "ecotourism" towards "sustainable development".

2.5 Can ecotourism contribute to sustainable development?

The foregoing sections have examined two highly controversial but increasingly popular terms, namely, "sustainable development" and "ecotourism". Authors like Sharpley (2000) and Wearing (2001) noticed that there was an oversight in the literature surrounding the relationship between tourism and development. This point is well illustrated by Wall (1997), who shows that the most frequently used definition of "sustainable development" presented in *Our Common Future*, does not address the significance of tourism in contributing to sustainable development. Attention paid to sustainability of tourism development has occurred relatively recently (Buchsbaum, 2004; Sharpley, 2000). Ecotourism, in particular, has been advocated

as a favourable tool to achieve sustainable development, especially in rural areas of developing countries.

It has become evident that almost all the recent work discussing ecotourism employs the principles of sustainability, from initially focusing on economic criteria, to currently encompassing environmental and social dimensions (Buchsbaum, 2004). Economic viability, environmental protection and socio-cultural appropriateness are widely viewed as three key prerequisites, with equal significance, for attaining sustainable development (Alexander & Whitehouse, 2004; Wall, 1997). To some extent, ecotourism can be argued as being established based on the philosophy of sustainable development (Buchsbaum, 2004).

It is relevant and useful to incorporate and expand the principles of sustainable development into the assessment of ecotourism development. These measurable indicators are considered as convenient tools in facilitating the evaluation of the capacity of ecotourism to achieve sustainable development (Buchsbaum, 2004; Wight, 1995). The following table develops sustainability goals of ecotourism, by consulting Alexander and Whitehouse's (2004), as well as Wall's (1997) studies of three dimensions of successful ecotourism practice, which correspond to the principles of sustainable development advanced by Elliott's (2006). This table will be used later (in Chapter 6) as a framework to assess to what extent the case study area's ecotourism development has achieved sustainable development.

Table 2-1: Three systems of sustainability in ecotourism development

Sustainability goals of ecotourism

A: Economic sustainability goals of ecotourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·contributes to lasting local economic development –creates permanent jobs for local people –drives the development of other related industries (restaurants, hotels, etc.) –upgrades local infrastructure ·profits earned retained within local communities ·equal distribution of revenues ·promotes consumption and production ·finances the establishment and maintenance of protected areas ·uses natural resources efficiently
B: Environmental sustainability goals of ecotourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·promotes environmental protection ·provides environmental education –increases public environmental consciousness –fosters healthy attitudes and behaviours towards nature ·encourages donations to contribute to the protection of local natural resources ·mobilises ecotourists as volunteers
C: Sociocultural sustainability goals of ecotourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·promotes local people's active participation ·promotes local ownership ·empowers local people –e.g. builds up local people's confidence/self-esteem ·enhances local community's equilibrium ·encourages intercultural appreciation and communication between host communities and tourists

Source: Author, drawing upon Wall (1997), and Alexander and Whitehouse (2004).

A large number of case studies have been done in developing countries, such as Costa Rica, Indonesia, Kenya, the Caribbean and many others, to evaluate levels of ecotourism based on the above three dimensions. Each place has its own strengths and weaknesses in developing ecotourism. For example, in Costa Rica, ecotourism is successful in generating economic revenues in terms of providing jobs and improving living standards for local communities (Weinberg et al., 2002). However, ecotourism has also brought problems like increasing environmental pollution and

destroying traditional cultures and relationships (Weinberg et al., 2002). In addition, the lack of local people's participation in the decision making process is also identified as a serious problem that limits the development of sustainable ecotourism (Weinberg et al., 2002).

In contrast, in Niue, an ecotourism operation was successful in achieving social and cultural sustainability, but failed to generate sufficient economic benefits (Haas, 2003). This is largely due to the limited number of tourists Niue receives and serious economic leakage through importing goods and services (Haas, 2003). Taking the Pilanesberg National Park as another example, it is effective in providing environmental education to the surrounding Mowase-Saulspoort communities, which improves people's environmental consciousness. However, issues like the lack of participation in environmental decision-making, as well as the continuing conflict between traditional uses of natural resources and environmental principles of conservation, still inhibit local communities from achieving sustainable development (Tlhagale, 2004).

It is clear that in reality, it is difficult to practice ecotourism that is successful in satisfying all of the three indicators mentioned above. Ecotourism practice is typically accompanied by both encouraging benefits and unpleasant negative consequences. In addition, there is also no fixed absolute answer for successful ecotourism, since different places have different political, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts, as well as being endowed with varying physical attributes.

According to Lindberg and McKercher (1998), the question about how to achieve sustainable ecotourism can be reduced to the problem of finding efficient ways to maximise positive impacts, while mitigating the negative ones. Effective management and planning are widely recognised as crucial tools to fulfill this purpose, while badly planned and controlled ecotourism are revealed as the key causes of drawbacks brought by ecotourism (Keyser, 2002; Lindberg & McKercher,

1998; Ross & Wall, 1999).

Authors like Buchsbaum, (2004), Scheyvens and Purdie (1999), as well as Wall (1997) promote community-based model ecotourism as a suitable management strategy towards achieving local sustainable development. Such an approach focuses on a livelihoods perspective and addresses the significant importance of local people's active participation in the processes of planning, managing, and monitoring tourism development. It can be justified by the fact that only when local communities' own needs and interests are satisfied, will sustainable development become more meaningful and achievable (Cater, 2002; Sharpley, 2000). Cater (1994) further indicates that the true participation practised by local people should not be limited to issues like ownership and control, but should also involve local people's enjoyment of their own natural attractions.

Hence, empowering local residents by effectively encouraging them to actively participate in the whole processes of ecotourism development, rather than merely being passive receivers of economic and social benefits, is proposed as a crucially important factor in ensuring long term sustainable development of ecotourism business, by authors like, Brandon (1993), Buchsbaum (2004), Scheyvens (1999), Stone and Wall (2003), and Whelan (1991), to name a few. Scheyvens (1999), in particular, advances four levels of empowerment (e.g. social, economic, political and psychological empowerment) in facilitating local people's control over ecotourism. Wall (1997), on the other hand, suggests that strategies like providing appropriate training and access to capital can assist in helping local people to gain certain levels of control. Orams (1995) agrees with Wall's (1997) point in considering education as a useful tool in promoting sustainable ecotourism. This is because education can help to foster a more environmentally responsive attitude, and environmentally healthy behaviors among both locals and visitors (Orams, 1995).

Sustainability is an elusive concept that is difficult to grasp, hence, it is important to

focus attention on the sustainability's intention, rather than its outcomes (Buchsbaum, 2004). In other words, the means towards achieving sustainable development is far more crucial than solely pursuing sustainable development as the end goal (Buchsbaum, 2004).

2.6 Summary

This chapter set out to explore the role ecotourism played in achieving sustainable development within the developing world. In so doing, it has analysed two key concepts, namely “sustainable development” and “ecotourism”. Both of these terms are subject to substantial criticism, but are still very appealing and popular, especially among developing countries. It can be seen that more recent definitions of ecotourism have been inclined to incorporate the key principles of “sustainable development”. There emerges an increasingly large amount of literature discussing popular assumptions about ecotourism's hypothetical benefits, as well as its potential drawbacks. Meanwhile, a considerable number of studies have been conducted in a wide range of developing countries to assess the achievements of ecotourism.

There is no simple answer to the question of whether ecotourism can contribute to sustainable development based on the variety of existing literature. However, appropriate and effective planning and management, with a careful emphasis on local people's active involvement and empowerment, can at least productively enhance the positive impacts and reduce negative effects.

Now that this chapter has reviewed the existing literature related to debates surrounding the validity of ecotourism's contribution to sustainable development, this thesis will examine their relationships more closely by drawing upon field research from Tengtou village, China, a village that is claimed to have successfully embraced principles of sustainable development in operating an ecotourism industry. Hence, to some extent, this chapter works as a theoretical background, paving the

way for the case study that will be carried out in China. The following chapter will thus turn to look at tourism and development issues in China, which constitutes another part of the literature review, mainly as providing the national context for the case study.

3. CHAPTER THREE: TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA

3.1 Introduction

China's tourism has developed dramatically since 1978, which has led to China becoming one of the most popular places in the world for travellers (Wen, 1998). Before 1978, tourism was viewed as unproductive, and thus, was not encouraged as an appropriate tool for development; however, since then, tourism has been deliberately regarded as a tool to promote economic development by the Chinese government. Currently, tourism is deployed as an important industry in the national economy by the Chinese government, one which acts both as a revenue earner and a promising instrument to develop rural areas (Han & Ren, 2001).

This chapter thus provides the national context for the case study set in Tengtou village, China, by looking at the underlying approach to development in China, as well as the current trends and practical problems of development processes (Section 3.2); the history of China's tourism development and its current problems (Section 3.3); and the emergence of ecotourism, as well as its potential and challenges (Section 3.4). This provides the context within which this research can be placed (Section 3.5).

3.2 Overview of government-led development in China

In China the government is the major player and operator in development, and tourism development, as a component of the national social and economic development, always mirrors the whole country's overall development direction (Zhang, 2003). Hence, it is necessary to look at the broad context of China's

development in order to understand the underlying ideologies of tourism development and to predict its trends more comprehensively. The following sections will start by exploring the purpose of the initiation of development in China, illustrating the process of recent economic development, especially focusing on characteristics that are relevant to tourism development. It will also examine problems brought about by the government's approach to development.

3.2.1 The purpose of development in China

China is a large country with a long history spanning over of 5000 years. It has 1.3 billion people and includes 56 distinct ethnic groups. According to Shih (2002, p. 1), China has been a sovereign state only since 1911, and before that "China was a concept defined by people, rather than by territory". Both the leaders of pre-sovereign China and the Chinese people considered China as the greatest empire under heaven, with an abundance of natural resources and vast territory; hence, they thought there was no need to make any borders, which would deny their moral superiority (Shih, 2002).

However, since the mid-19th century, China was forced to open its doors by Western forces, and was subsequently reduced from a feudal society to a half-feudal and half-colonial society. Accordingly, China's national territorial integrity and sovereignty were destroyed. Shih (2002, p. 2) concludes that the concept of sovereignty emerged as "a response to Western imperialism", and since then "unification" and "modernisation" have become two intrinsic factors encompassed within the discourse of China's development. Ogden (2003) agrees that it is national dignity that gives rise to China's nationalism and fuels its desire to pursue the development path.

China's recent economic development can be divided into two main periods, by

using the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee³⁴ as the dividing line. During the first period between 1949 and 1978, the main goals of China's development were focused on strengthening and unifying of the country, in order to achieve China's independence, territorial integrity and national sovereignty (Knight, 2003; Shih, 2002). However, the newly established China was plagued by the disintegrating power of the state in the period of warlordism, the discontent of the peripheral ethnic communities towards the unification of the whole nation, and foreign invaders' interference (Shih, 2002). Consequently, China's economy and technology, as well as the living standards of the Chinese, were still far behind the more advanced countries, though China made some progress during that time (Lin, Cai & Li, 2003; Naughton, 1995). All these operational problems signaled the failure of the traditional Soviet-style economic system, and justified the emergence of more deep-reaching modernisation in 1978 as a promising way to secure both national and social advancement (Talas, 1991).

The post-1978 reforms were considered as both a reaction against the chaos and disorder caused by the endless political struggle in the previous years, especially referring to the ten-years of Cultural Revolution³⁵, and a strategy to "solidify the Chinese leaders' political position" (Mackerras, Taneja & Young, 1998; Naughton, 1995, p. 61). In other words, development in China is criticised as being manipulated as a tool by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to control the nation ideologically and politically (Naughton, 1995). The Chinese government's great emphasis was on maintaining and consolidating state power, which distinguishes development here from modern Western countries (Kraus, 1982). Kraus (1982, p. 1) shows how this

³⁴ The Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee: was held in December 1978, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, which was one of the most important conferences in China's history (Shi, 1988, p. 3). During this session, the Chinese Communist Party decided to shift the emphasis in the Party's work from endless class struggle to socialist modernisation and construction (Shi, 1988, p. 3). It is also the starting point from which China takes policy for opening to the outside world as one of its basic national policies (China Internet Information Center, 2006).

³⁵ China's Cultural Revolution: it was launched by the chairman of Chinese Communist Party –Mao Zedong during his last decade of power (1966-1976) (Gu, n.d.). It was officially initiated as a campaign to rid China of its "liberal bourgeoisie" elements to continue the revolutionary class struggle (Gu, n.d.). Unfortunately, it ended with throwing the whole country into tremendous chaos (Shi, 1988, p. 2).

approach was justified, quoting Sun Yat-sen's³⁶ words: it is because the Chinese “had too much individual freedom, and people are as unbound as loose sand”. Indeed, China's long history of fragmentation and of imperialists taking advantage of China's weakness, led to the loss of China's sovereignty, destruction of people's lives, and the weakening of national power; all of which make the Chinese people prioritise state-led development, even at the expense of individual freedom (So, 2003).

3.2.2 The process of China's recent development and emergence of sustainable development

In the period between 1948 and 1978, China adopted the typical centralised planned economy, which was based on public ownership as the main target of society's transformation (Chow, 2002). In addition, the emphasis was on building self-reliance and maintaining equality, with “the expansion of heavy industries as the key for economic growth”; while the service industries, including tourism, were believed to be unproductive and consequently prohibited (Wen & Tisdell, 2001, p. 2). Talas (1991) considers this period of development as a radical people's revolution that aimed to improve the backward socioeconomic situation.

The real full-scale economic reform in China was believed to start from 1978, in both rural and urban areas, with an emphasis on a market oriented and increasingly privatised economy (Lin, 2003). The development process of so-called socialist modernisation with Chinese characteristics includes strategies like introducing the household responsibility system in rural areas, decentralising power to state owned enterprises in urban areas, liberalising foreign trade and investment, relaxing state control over some prices, and many others (Hu & Khan, 1997; Lin et al., 2003).

One of the distinctive features of China's economic reform, as identified by Pei

³⁶ Sun Yat-sen: the leader of the republican revolutionary movement and founder of Republic of China (Kraus, 1982, p. 1).

(2006, p. 3), is “China’s integration with the world economy”. Under the open door policy, China is playing an active role in international trade and investment. Likewise, it has also established considerable connections with the West in educational, social and cultural areas, among which tourism was confirmed as one significant channel for growth (Pei, 2006).

China has experienced unprecedented economic growth under such profound reforms, with per capita income increasing dramatically from US \$151 in 1978, to US \$1097 in 2003 (Pei, 2006). Social-culturally, economic reform has facilitated the Chinese citizens’ ability to get more information; it functions to increase the Chinese people’s physical mobility; and it also contributes to the improvement of infrastructural facilities, especially transportation (Pei, 2006). Pei (2006) further links economic progress with rapid tourism development, by using outward tourism as the example. This was once only considered as a privilege to few ordinary citizens, but now has become more a common phenomenon. It is estimated that in 2002, the number of the Chinese that travelled out of China reached 16.6 million, compared with 3.74 million in 1993 (Dai & Wu, n.d.; Pei, 2006). Similarly, China’s domestic tourism is also increasing at a fast pace, with the number of domestic tourists increased from 524 million in 1994, to 1100 million in 2004 (People’s Republic of China’s National Statistics Bureau, n.d.). It can be concluded from the above discussion that China’s economic reforms are closely intertwined with the overall tourism development.

In addition, the process of China’s recent reforms does not solely focus on economic development, but also incorporates environmental protection and social development, in order to achieve sustainable development. For example, the Chinese government started to pay some attention to environmental protection in the early 1980s, and environmental protection was included as one of the two fundamental national policies adopted by the Chinese government in developing socialist modernisation (Chow, 2002; Suliman, 1998).

Moreover, the approval of China's "Agenda 21" in 1994 led to the greater acceptance of sustainable development in China, and indicated that the Chinese government had started to pay serious attention to social, economic and environmental sustainability (Tubilewicz, 2006). In 1996, sustainable development was further declared to be China's national development strategy in its ninth 5-year plan (Wen & Tisdell, 2001).

3.2.3 Problems with market-oriented reforms

Although China has made impressive progress in socioeconomic development since its reform in 1978, the slow pace of political change has been criticised by many (e.g. Naughton, 1995; Pei, 2006; So, 2003). Even some government officials argue that the open door policy has not brought political democracy to China (Pei, 2006). Rampant official corruption is also recognised by the common Chinese and in many widely used international indexes, as a serious problem that mirrors the failure of political reform and ruins the CCP's reputation. This can lead to a series of problems, such as reducing state agencies' effectiveness and causing tremendous economic loss (Mackerras et al., 1998; Naughton, 1995).

The widening regional income disparities (e.g. between coastal and inland areas, eastern and western regions, as well as urban and rural areas) is considered as another notable negative consequence of market-oriented economic reform. Authors like So (2003) and Wang (2006) maintain that the Chinese government should be responsible for such disparity, since it gave priority to coastal development deliberately, both in terms of policies and foreign investment. It is suggested that regional inequalities will, in turn, undermine China's territorial unity and lead to social and political instability (Mackerras, 2006; Wang, 2006). Wang (2006) believes instability originates from the already developed regions, who tend to seek separation from Beijing in order to protect their own benefits and as a resistance to the government's redistributive policies. Mackerras (2006), meanwhile, sees the

causes of social unrest from the ethnic minorities' perspective, who are unsatisfied with the biased economic development, can also trigger social unrest.

In addition to the above two disadvantages caused by the transformation towards a market economy, there are many other forms of social problems related to economic reform, including rising urban unemployment due to the privatisation of state-owned enterprises; and rising crime rates (e.g. thefts) and illicit activities (e.g. beggars) as a consequence of increasing urbanisation, from a massive influx of rural immigrants into urban areas (So, 2003).

Moreover, environmental deterioration is another serious problem facing China, as a result of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation (Gerstlacher, Krieg, & Sternfeld, 1991). Environmental problems in contemporary China include acid rain, deforestation, desertification, shrinking biodiversity, soil degradation and water pollution. Deforestation, which is a result of commercial and domestic uses, has led to nearly 79 million hectares of forest lost over the last forty years, which consequently accelerated water and wind erosion (Mackerras et al., 1998). Taking water pollution as another example, both the quality and quantity of fresh water is decreasing at an alarming rate (Mackerras et al., 1998). It is estimated that in China “nearly a quarter of all fresh water is polluted”; and “85% of the river water flowing through urban areas is heavily polluted” (Mackerras et al., 1998, p. 152).

Chow (2002) is particularly concerned about pollution problems in urban China, which are largely caused by factors such as the extensive unsustainable use of coal for energy, the high level of industrialisation and massive consumption. It is reported that in 1999, nine out of ten of the most polluted cities in the world were found in China (Chow, 2002). The environmental problems in rural China have become increasingly acute during the process of urbanisation, which can largely restrict rural sustainable development, and pose challenges to urban sustainable development. The unsafe disposal of solid waste in rural areas, in addition to the abuse of chemical

fertilisers, transformation of urban industrial pollution to rural areas, among many others, have led to serious rural environmental deterioration, which, in turn, can lead to health problems and reduce the well-being of the population (Su, 2006).

In summary, the above sections identify the process of China's development from an historical perspective. The emergence of development in China is for the purposes of maintaining the integrity of China's sovereignty and territory, and the well-being of its people (So, 2003). Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese government has adopted a variety of strategies at different stages, but with the same intention of achieving China's power, security and respect internationally. The recent market-oriented economic reform has made a significant contribution to the development of China's economy; however, it has also given rise to a variety of problems, especially the growing gaps between rural and urban economic development, and the worsening environmental problems. These issues signify the importance of sustainable development and the development of rural areas, which, in turn, justify the emergence of one of the sustainable strategies for development, ecotourism. The following sections will commence by discussing China's tourism development in general, and then will focus on examining ecotourism development in particular.

3.3 Overview of tourism development in China

3.3.1 Tourism before 1978

Leisure travel in China has a long history which can be traced back for thousands of years (Zhang, 2003). Emperors, scholars and monks are identified as the most common travellers, and they were often rich, had high positions of power, or were following intellectual interests (Zhang, 2003). The earliest international tourists to China, dated from the Qin Han period, and were primarily from neighbouring regions, such as Middle Asia and South Asia, travelling along the Silk Road (B.C.

221-220) (Zhong guo gu dai, 2007). According to Zhang (2003), Westerners began to travel to China as early as the 13th century, and it reached its peak in the 19th century. However, tourism development in China was halted in the turbulent times from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, by events such as the Opium Wars³⁷, warlordism, and Japanese and colonial Western invasions (Gerstlacher et al., 1991; Sofield & Li, 1997).

Many authors (Sofield & Li, 1997; Wen & Tisdell, 2001; Zhang, 2003) observe that both domestic and international tourism hardly existed during the early years of the Republic of China (1949-1978). This can be illustrated by the fact that only diplomats and government officials were allowed to travel abroad; while internal travel was very rigid under the household registration system, which largely restrained people's movement (e.g. travelling and migration) from one's local district to other places (Wu, Zhu & Xu, 2000; Zhang, 2003). In other words, it was not a common phenomenon for the general Chinese populace to travel around. Tourism was not "an approved reason for travel" (Sofied & Li, 1997, p. 124), since it was considered as "a representative of a bourgeois capitalist lifestyle", which violated the communist ethic and hence was prohibited (Zhang, 2003, p. 15; see also Zhang, 1997). Meanwhile, travel to China from Western countries was also largely reduced to serve the purpose of political diplomacy, such as to "expand China's political influence" and to "promote the achievement of Socialist China" (Lam & Mao, 2001, p. 114; see also Lew, 2000; Wen & Tisdell, 2001).

Some commentators (Lam & Mao, 2001; Sofield & Li, 1997) directly attribute the lack of tourism development to rigid control of the Chinese government, while others (Wen, 1998; Zhang, 1997) more tactfully link such a phenomenon with the inadequate development in economic and physical aspects, including low living

³⁷ The Opium Wars arose from China's attempts to suppress the opium trade (Mao & Chen, 1998). There are two wars between China and Western countries. The first was between Great Britain and China, which occurred between 1839 to 1942; while the second war, which took place between 1856 to 1860, was fought by Britain and France against China (Mao & Chen, 1998).

standards and shortage of infrastructure facilities (e.g. transportation system).

3.3.2 Growth of domestic and international tourism in China since 1978

China's tourism development has experienced substantial transformation since 1978. The open door policy, where travel and trade barriers were removed, was adopted as an integral part of China's new development strategies, within which tourism development was one of the essential features (Chai, 1997; Ghimire, 2001). Such a shift in government policy indicated that the Chinese government began to recognise the potential of the tourism industry in contributing to national economic development (Lam & Mao, 2001). During the early stage of China's economic reform and opening up, the Chinese government gave much priority to encourage the development of international tourism, in order to earn badly needed foreign revenue to fund the modernisation programme (Zhang, 1997). This led to a steady increase in international tourist arrivals (See Table 3-1).

Table 3-1: International tourists in China (1978-2006)

Year	Total number (million people)	Tourism receipts (billion US\$)
1978	1.81	0.3
1979	4.20	0.4
1980	5.70	0.6
1981	7.77	0.7
1982	7.92	0.8
1983	9.48	0.9
1984	12.85	1.1
1985	17.83	1.3
1986	22.82	1.5
1987	26.90	1.9
1988	31.70	2.2
1989	24.50	1.8

1990	27.46	2.2
1991	33.35	2.8
1992	38.11	3.9
1993	41.53	4.7
1994	43.68	7.3
1995	46,.39	8.7
1996	51.12	10.2
1997	57.59	12.1
1998	63.48	12.6
1999	72.80	14.1
2000	83.44	16.2
2001	89.01	17.8
2002	97.91	20.4
2003	91.66	17.4
2004	109.04	25.7
2005	120.29	29.3
2006	124.00	33.5

(Sources: Zhang, 2003; China National Tourism Administration, 2007; Statistics on China's tourism 2003, n.d.; Chinese Travelling Newspaper, 2006.)

Note: This table comprises different sources of information. Statistics may have been compiled differently by different sources)

From the table, it can be seen that in 1989, there was a sharp decline in international arrivals. This is due to the Tiananmen Square incident³⁸. However, this did not influence the overall tendency of tourism development since 1980, with the average annual growth of tourist arrivals still remaining at 19.2 percent, which greatly exceeds the world wide average rate of 5.5 percent (Lew, 2000). In 2002, China received 97.9 million international tourists, with US \$ 20.4 billion in receipts, which

³⁸ Tiananmen Square incident: in June of 1989, the Chinese People's Liberation Army moved into Beijing's Tiananmen Square to suppress a mass pro-democracy demonstration. It is estimated that about 3000 people were killed and thousands more were wounded (Wright, 1989, p. 6).

led to China being ranked fifth in the world in terms of both international tourist arrivals and international tourism receipts (Aramberri & Xie, 2003). Nevertheless, in 2003, the number of international tourists declined heavily again, due to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Fortunately, in 2004, China's tourism industry grew in spite of the impact of SARS, and experienced strong recovery, with the inbound foreign tourists increasing by 25.99 percent, compared with 2002 (Liu, Zhang, & Song, 2005). In 2006, China received 124 million international tourists, which led to it being ranked fourth in the world in terms of international tourist arrivals (Zeng, 2007).

Although China's domestic tourism did not attract much attention at the beginning, it has developed rapidly in recent years, and become a new growth point of the local economy (Wu, Zhu & Xu, 2000; Zhang, 1997). According to Lew (2000), the Chinese government started to recognise the increasing potential of the expanding domestic tourist market since the end of 1980s; consequently, it transformed its policies to promote both international and domestic tourism. Such a transformation can be indicated by one official's declaration: "domestic tourism should now be the foundation of China's tourism" (Zhang, 1997, p. 566). In 2001, there were 784 million domestic tourists in China, which generated 3522 billion Yuan³⁹ earnings; and the number reached 878 million domestic tourists in 2002 (People's Republic of China's National Statistics Bureau, n.d.) (See Table 3-2). In 2006, the number of domestic tourists reached 1.39 billion (People's Republic of China's National Statistics Bureau, 2007). Wu et al. (2000) further forecast that China's domestic tourism will continue to grow at a rapid rate.

³⁹ Yuan: is the name of China's currency, 8 Yuan equals to 1 US Dollar.

Table 3-2: Total Number of Domestic Tourists from 1994-2006

Year	Total (millions of people)	Revenue (billions of US dollar)
1994	524	1023.50
1995	629	1375.70
1996	640	1638.40
1997	644	2112.70
1998	694	2391.18
1999	719	2831.92
2000	744	3175.32
2001	784	3522.36
2002	878	3878.36
2003	870	3442.27
2004	1100	4711.00
2005	1212	5286.00
2006	1390	6230.00

Source: People's Republic of China's National Statistics Bureau, 2006; People's Republic of China's National Statistics Bureau, 2007; People's Republic of China's National Statistics Bureau, n.d.

Many authors, like Qiao (1995), Wen (1998), and Zhang (1997), believe that the dramatic growth of domestic tourism cannot be separated from the development of China's overall economic growth and the rising living standards. In addition, the implementation of the nationwide holiday system in the early 1990s is recognised as another significant contributor to impressive expansion of domestic tourism (Zhang, 1997). Moreover, the growth of domestic tourism is also facilitated by the introduction of the "Western consumer lifestyles and leisure ethics" through the rapid globalisation (Ghimire, 2001, p. 8). The expansion of domestic tourism, in turn, can assist in stimulating domestic consumption and speed up economic development (Aramberri & Xie, 2003).

As Aramberri and Xie (2003) note, in almost all regions, except the Caribbean, the

contributions of domestic tourists far exceed the contributions of international tourists, in terms of tourism expenditure. Similarly, by citing information from WTO, Ghimire (2001) also highlights the significance of domestic tourism. It is believed that the number of domestic tourists in developing countries will probably be 10 times greater than the current number of international tourists in the near future (Ghimire, 2001).

3.3.3 Problems of tourism development in China

The rapid growth of China's tourism industry has contributed to economic development. However, it has also brought a series of negative impacts, including a widening gap between and within regions, environmental deterioration and cultural degradation. More specifically, tourism development, especially the development of international tourism, has aggravated the existing regional inequality already caused by post-1978 economic development (Wen & Tisdell, 1997). This point can be supported by the fact that nearly 90 percent of total tourism receipts in China were earned in cities; leaving rural areas in a disadvantageous position (Lindberg et al., 1997). Wen (1998) further elaborates upon the causes of such remarkable disparity, by arguing that coastal provinces tend to have more advantageous geographical conditions and policies to develop their tourism, rather than non-coastal areas. For example, six of the seven key tourism localities promoted by the Chinese government are located in the coastal area during the seventh five-year plan (from 1986 to 1990) (Wen, 1998). The skewed growth pattern of China's tourism development is recognised as more than an economic problem, since it can also lead to serious social and political instability, with regions seeking independence from the Chinese state.

The second negative effect of tourism is the environmental problems. Gerstlacher et al. (1991) are aware of the increasingly evident ecological destruction in many tourist areas, especially where there has been expansion of domestic tourism. Factors

like overcrowding in tourist hotspots and the tourists' lack of environmental awareness are found as being responsible for such problems (Gerstlacher et al., 1991). The increasing number of tourists not only leads to increasing demands on resources like gas and water, but it also produces more rubbish. In addition, tourism also increases demand for the building of the hotels, highways, cable cars, cableway, and airports, which can all threaten natural features (Zhen, 2005). It is estimated that China spends 95 million Yuan in dealing with environmental pollution, within which the tourism industry plays a significant role (Wen, 1998).

Security problems are another negative influence that can arise with the tourism development. Such problems include cases like theft, traffic accidents, disease, murder and other crimes (Wen, 1998). Wen (1998) cautions that these problems will destroy China's positive image as a safe tourist destination. In addition, the commercialisation of local cultures and heritage, changes in moral systems, destruction of cultural integrity, loss of educational value and alterations of the original life-style are further identified as significantly negative social and cultural impacts of tourism development (Sofiled & Li, 1998; Wen, 1998).

In summary, the foregoing discussion reviewed the background of tourism development in China. Particular attention is paid to the post-1978 modern tourism development, during which both the international and domestic tourism increased at a dramatic rate. The post-1978 modern tourism development has made significant economic contributions; however, such an unprecedented and uncontrolled industry has also brought extensive environmental degradation and social-cultural problems. Parallel with mass tourism development, as well as the economic development, as discussed earlier, there is an increasing awareness of the nation's environmental well-being, which has fuelled the emergence of ecotourism (Liu & Dowling, 1992). The following section will focus on China's ecotourism by discussing its emergence, characteristics and current trends; by exploring its potential; and by examining the existing problems encountered in China, based on available literature.

3.4 Ecotourism development in China

Like elsewhere in the World, ecotourism, as the fastest growing segment of the world's largest industry, has gained rapid popularity in contemporary China. The Chinese people are becoming bored with traditional mass tourism; they turn to ecotourism, which is considered as containing high-rated attractions (Han & Ren, 2001; Wu et al., 2000). The year 1999 was declared as the "Year of China's Ecotourism", by the State Tourism Administration, with the theme of "touching nature, understanding nature, and protecting nature" (Dijk, 2006, p. 3). At present, both national and local governments pay much attention to ecotourism, and largely encourage it as a desirable means to reduce the economic gap between the coastal and inland areas, to support conservation of biodiversity, and to promote rural sustainable development (Wen & Tisdell, 2001; Wu et al., 2000).

3.4.1 The nature of ecotourism in China

The origins of ecotourism in China can be tracked back to the Shang Dynasty (1766 BC – 1122BC), as Studley (1999) indicates, where there were signs of the awareness of environmental processes and conservation consciousness. The earliest conservational activities were always linked with the religious practices conducted by Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, which distinguishes them from the current ecotourism in terms of attitude and behaviour (Studley, 1999).

There are a number of advantages to China to developing ecotourism. Firstly, the improving living standards help to facilitate tourism development, since people now have more money to spend and thus a greater ability and desire to travel. Secondly, China possesses an abundance of unique natural resources, especially famous mountains, lakes, rivers and caves, mainly in inland areas (Liu & Dowling, 1992). Thirdly, as the world's oldest civilisation, China has a rich and diverse cultural and ethnic heritage, which can provide tourists with distinctively attractive traditional customs and festivals (Studley, 1999).

Although there exists a diversified interpretation of the definition of ecotourism in China by different authors, many of them share some similarities with an emphasis on the following factors, such as promoting environmental protection and improvement; bringing economic benefits to local communities; and encompassing ecological features, as well as destinations' distinctive cultural characteristics (Chen, Wang & Liu, 2006).

According to Lindberg et al. (1997), one of the distinctive characteristics of China's ecotourism development that differs from Western countries is that biosphere reserves in China are designed towards an "open style", which emphasises both the protection of natural resources and the development of destination areas (Lindberg et al., 1997). In other words, these biosphere reserves do not strictly restrict human use of natural resources and actually encourages extensive human activity, in order to produce sufficient economic benefits for local communities and reserves (Lindberg et al., 2003). China is a large country with a considerable number of people, many of whom have low levels of living standards. Hence, an "open style" model is widely accepted as a realistic option for designing protected areas to cater for this socioeconomic situation. Further, another feature of ecotourism practised in the context of China that differs from Western countries' ecotourism is the fact that it is always accompanied with a large number of tourists and an emphasis on development of tourism-related facilities, in order to maximise economic benefits (Lindberg et al., 1997; Lindberg et al., 2002).

The dominant ecotourism sites are natural reserves, forest parks and scenic areas (Dijk, 2006). For example, Xishuangbanna in southeast Yunnan Province, and Hainan Island in the South China Sea are promoted as the main ecotourism destinations in China, and the former is particularly famous for its rich natural resources and unique ethnic culture (Dijk, 2006). The first nature reserve in China was established in 1956, named Dinghu Mountain, which is situated in Guangdong Province, for the purpose of scientific research (Wen & Tisdell, 2001). China's first

large-scale natural conservation area was set up in Changbai Mountain Area in 1960, which aimed to conserve the unique local natural resources (Wen & Tisdell, 2001). However, both of the two earliest nature reserves were not designed for the intention of ecotourism development. The establishment of the first state-level forest park, known as ZhangJiaJie, in 1982, is considered as the indication of the formal emergence of ecotourism in China. This was the first time when the goals of tourism development and environmental protection were combined together (Song, 2003).

The number of nature reserves has significantly increased over the last decade. For example, the number of nature reserves has increased from 34 in 1978, to the current 1551 (Ge & Young, 2004; Lindberg, Tisdell & Xue, 2002). Similarly, forest parks have also expanded dramatically. By 2003, China had established 1658 forest parks, including 503 national forest parks (Ge & Young, 2004).

3.4.2 Rural ecotourism

The earliest ecotourism practices often took place in rural areas, which were provided with rich natural assets. More recently, the destinations for ecotourism have expanded from a variety of natural reserves, forest parks, or other natural beauty spots, to artificial parks, farms, urban areas and other diversified sights (Xie, Liu & Li, 2002; Xu, 2006; Zhang & Ma, 2006). Due to China's specific national and social-cultural context, it is hard to practice ecotourism that is strictly defined as nature-based tourism (Xu, 2006). In order to enrich the content of ecotourism, as well as to enhance ecotourism's capacity to sustain the increasing demand from the huge number of Chinese people, many non-nature-based areas are deliberately promoted as ecotourism destinations (Luo, 2006). In other words, ecotourism has been loosely defined as any tourism activities that pay special attention to environmental protection, and conform to the principles of sustainable development (Xu, 2006).

One of the new forms of ecotourism emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where ecotourism has overlapped with rural tourism, and the two are often indistinguishable. This particular form of ecotourism is usually named ‘rural ecotourism’, and is frequently used interchangeably with names like ‘countryside ecotourism’ or ‘agro-ecotourism’ (Wang, 2006; Wei et al., 2004). Heilig (2003) and Wang (2006) attribute the emergence of ‘rural ecotourism’ to the increasing demand from the Chinese middle class in urban areas, who live in stressful, crowded and polluted cities, and therefore are particularly interested in the pleasant ecological environment and characteristics of agriculture provided by the rural areas. Rural ecotourism has gained much attention and support from the Chinese government, due to its potential roles in adjusting the structure of agriculture, prospering rural economy and culture, increasing farmer’s incomes and contributing to environmental protection (Fu, 2006).

There is no unified definition of rural ecotourism. Many authors (e.g. Wang, 2006; Wang & Huang, 2006) tend to combine the characteristics of rural tourism and ecotourism in defining the concept of ‘rural ecotourism’. As a type of ecotourism, ‘rural ecotourism’ shares similarities with ecotourism. Meanwhile, it also has its own characteristics. For example, rural ecotourism is based on the distinctive features of rural areas, which include the rustic scenery, as well as unique rural cultures and customs (Fu, 2006; Wang, 2006). In addition, ‘rural ecotourism’ is linked more with the human capital of local communities, than conventional ecotourism, which is linked more to natural assets and the cultural capital of local destinations. ‘Rural ecotourism’ is perceived as a highly effective industry, which combines agriculture with nature, as well as combining the traditional cultural and social elements with the modern tourism industry (Lv & Liu, 2006).

There are numerous different modes of ‘rural ecotourism’, such as agricultural park patterns, folk customs and cultural patterns, eco-village styles and many others (Wang, 2006; Xie, Liu & Li, 2002). Eco-villages, in particular, have been

energetically promoted by the Chinese government as favourable ecotourism destinations, as well as a useful means to enhance Chinese people's environmental protection awareness, to improve rural people's quality of life, and to facilitate the achievement of rural sustainable development. As mentioned earlier, eco-villages differ from ordinary villages based on a variety of evaluation criterion, and only those eco-villages that meet high level of requirements and possess certain internal and external attributes can be developed as ecotourism destinations. This is the case in Tengtou village, which is the focus of this case study.

Eco-villages and most other forms of 'rural ecotourism' share similar activities, such as sightseeing, picking fruit and vegetables from on-site vegetable gardens, and visiting agricultural production and livestock farming (Wang, 2006; Xie et al., 2002). Introducing and displaying local farm products, pictures, agricultural tools and techniques, and other information to visitors is another typical activity of 'rural ecotourism', which aims to promote the understandings of visitors of the history of local agricultural production (Wang, 2006). Consequently, it can inspire them to love agriculture, develop agriculture and be devoted to agricultural development (Wang, 2006). In some places, 'rural ecotourism' is also linked with local cultures and customs and provides activities like visiting temples, viewing dancing and drama, and attending traditional wedding ceremonies or local festivals (Wang, 2006).

3.4.3 The potential roles of ecotourism in China

As discussed previously, China has experienced increased environmental problems and widening regional inequality since it initiated economic reforms. Both tremendous economic development generally and mass tourism development give rise to environmental and socioeconomic problems, which legitimates the emergence of more sustainable forms of tourism such as ecotourism. Consequently, ecotourism has become the subject of high economic, social and cultural expectations in China. It has been promoted vigorously by both the Chinese central government and local

governments.

The roles ecotourism are expected to play by the government will be discussed here in detail. Firstly, ecotourism is largely promoted by the Chinese government as a sustainable strategy to balance the uneven regional development between coastal and inland areas (Wen & Tisdell, 1997). The inland areas are endowed with a rich diversity of natural and cultural resources, as well as many historical monuments, which constitute desirable tourism attractions (Dijk, 2006; Heilig, 2003; Wen & Tisdell, 2001). Consequently, ecotourism is perceived as playing a function to disperse tourism to these underdeveloped regions, by taking their resource advantages, in order to achieve balanced tourism development, and to catch up with the comparatively developed regions (Lindberg et al., 1997). Meanwhile, China's tourism market in rural areas is far from saturated, with an increasing tourist demand in those areas, driven by urban residents (Heilig, 2003).

Secondly, Heilig (2003) and Mu (2002) suggest that ecotourism can help to facilitate rural sustainable development in China, since rural ecotourism is perceived as an environmentally friendly industry that can provide viable economic alternatives to environmentally consumptive industries, such as agriculture and logging. In addition, rural ecotourism can provide employment for agricultural populations, solving problems of surplus labour in rural areas (Fu, 2006). Moreover, ecotourism development can drive the development of relevant industries, such as the transportation industry, manufacturing industries, and rural commercial business (Wang, 2006).

Taking Jiuzhaigou Biosphere Reserve as an example, ecotourism has successfully brought concrete economic benefits to local residents (Lindberg et al., 2003). It is reported that the per capita income has increased from 2000 Yuan per year in 1995 to 10000 Yuan in 1999 (Lindberg et al., 2003). In this context, local residents gained benefits from ecotourism industry from involvement in a variety of local based

industries, such as operating family hotels, handcraft shops and restaurants, and horse and yak riding (Lindberg et al., 2003). The indirect economic benefits, on the other hand, are manifested in the improved infrastructures, such as the establishment of waste water treatment plants and the replacement of old buses with natural gas green buses (Lindberg et al., 2003). Meanwhile, the economic gains have also assisted in transforming agricultural land within the reserve areas into forest regeneration (Lindberg et al., 2003).

Mu (2002) further points out that rural ecotourism can also help to solve the problem of the country's lack of finance to fund agriculture, as well as to open up green agricultural market places. Green or organic agricultural products are widely recognised healthy foods that have high quality and rich nutrition in China, and which are produced without using any pesticides, chemical fertilisers or biological hormones (Mu, 2002). Wen and Tisdell (2001) conclude that properly managed ecotourism in China helps to diversify the rural economy and improve local infrastructure, which all contributes to long-term economic stability.

Thirdly, the economic profit gained from ecotourism is always closely related to socio-cultural benefits. It is believed that the development of ecotourism can bring new ideas, economic opportunities, cultures, and up-to-date science and technology to relatively backward rural areas. As a result, rural areas will be armed with a more civilised and advanced direction in developing their economy (Wang, 2006). It should be noted that there are limited studies focusing on exploring the positive impacts from social and cultural aspects.

Fourthly, another important role of ecotourism in the context of China is to conserve biodiversity and the rural scenery, which, in turn, can further facilitate the development of ecotourism (Wen & Tisdell, 2001). Ecotourism is viewed as a vehicle to promote conservation through providing economic funding to conserve the natural heritage, as well as directly conserving natural resources by recognising

and respecting their intrinsic values (Tisdell, 1996). Lindberg et al. (1997) agree that ecotourism is a crucial force for conservation, and can also help to facilitate the restoration of degraded ecotourism. Many biosphere reserves have been designed to integrate conservation and development. Taking Xishuangbanna State Nature Reserve as an example, ecotourism encompasses activities of preserving biota, conserving physical features and caring for attractive natural scenery (Tisdell, 1996). Accordingly, protecting non-consumptive values of natural resources and promoting environmental education are considered as important ecotourism roles expected by the Chinese government (Tisdell, 1996). Ecotourism is expected to fulfill the roles of improving environmental knowledge and consciousness of tourists, through which the quality of ecotourism experiences will be increased and further ecotourism development will be guaranteed.

3.4.4 Problems in developing ecotourism in China

Although it is theoretically sound to develop ecotourism in China, where ecotourism has made certain achievements, in reality the theory and the practice seems to come apart, which makes it difficult for ecotourism to fulfill its potential roles. Currently, there exists a large amount of literature that focuses on discussing the practical problems existing in developing ecotourism in China, many of which share similar views.

Firstly, ecotourism is criticised for not contributing to environmental conservation; instead, it tends towards the destruction of natural environments. Specifically, the majority of tourists lack adequate ecotourism consciousness with low levels of appreciation for protecting the environment, which leads to environmental deterioration (Song, 2003). For example, tramping of surface soil and vegetation and other movements of tourists (e.g. removal of flora and fauna) can lead to soil compacting or erosion; meanwhile the breeding and activities of wildlife will also be negatively impacted (Han & Ren, 2001; Tisdell, 1996). The inappropriate disposal of

waste and rubbish is another kind of unpleasant behaviour practised by tourists that can pose a threat to the environment (Tisdell, 1996).

Not only tourists, but also local people, play a part in the increasing environmental damage. Driven by the current short-term economic profit, local people sometimes pilfer and sell locally precious and rare animal or plant resources, which leads to irreversible damage to the ecosystem (Hou, 2006). Taking two protected areas of Hainan as the example, Stone and Wall (2003) observed that local people had high levels of dependence on natural resources, and there were occasions of illegal resource harvesting practised by some residents, due to the fact that ecotourism had reduced residents' access to protected areas and led those who previously made a living from resource-based industries to lose their jobs.

The lack of unified planning in ecotourism development is recognised as another cause of environmental problems. The management of nature reserves has lagged far behind the expansion of the numbers of reserves. Problems like developing ecotourism without working out any detailed plans, or mapping out plans but not implementing them properly has been identified by Song (2003). In addition, both Tisdell (1996) and Young (2006) consider the massive infrastructure construction (e.g. building massive accommodation or constructing roads) and improper tourist management, as significant factors that contribute to the negative impact on the environment. For example, in the cases of Zhangjiajie National Forest Park and Jiuzhaigou, mass construction gave rise to water pollution, and has cost local governments 10 hundred million Yuan and 300 million Yuan respectively to restore the original scenery (Young, 2006).

Another example is the overloading of tourists, which is also linked with inappropriate tourist management, such as lack of regulation of tourists' numbers. This poses tremendous challenges to the environment, such as through increasing use of motorised transport, especially during the peak periods (Lindberg et al, 1997).

This is when the number of tourists overweighs the natural environment's carrying capacity. Consequently, this leads to reduction of the living space of biodiversity, destruction of the beautiful scenery and the ecosystem balance, and ultimately a reduction in the tourists' interest (Tisdell, 1996).

Lindberg et al. (1997) further explore the underlying causes of poor management more in depth and argue that there are different actors involved in ecotourism practice, with inconsistent interests that are difficult to keep in harmony. For instance, industry is always interested in maximising profits, even at the cost of environmental destruction; hence, it prefers to increase visitation beyond the acceptable level of protected areas (Lindberg et al., 1997). In many cases, local government agencies can benefit from increased visitation. Accordingly, it becomes hard for protected area managers, who have limited economic power and ability, to restrict the number of tourists and associated infrastructure development (Lindberg et al., 1997).

Secondly, ecotourism is criticised as being used merely as a label to increase interest and sales. As mentioned above, many enterprises target ecotourism to maximise its monetary benefits, sacrificing natural environmental protection (Wen & Tisdell, 2001). Moreover, ecotourism development is noted also as lacking local people's participation. As has been discussed in Chapter 2, in order to maximise local benefits, ecotourism requires high levels of local participation. It can be seen that this does not characterise ecotourism in China at present, since the state-led development focuses on increasing satisfaction, rather than empowering people to take full participation in the whole process of ecotourism development. Hou (2006) argues that local communities are only involved in limited tourism related activities, such as providing room and board, or selling souvenirs. Such activities cannot usually bring sufficient benefits to the local people.

Similarly, Stone and Wall (2003) found that the local residents were excluded from participating in the processes of planning and decision-making, by using the two

protected areas in Hainan as an example. Consequently, ecotourism in Hainan failed to generate socioeconomic benefits for the local people or for conservation (Stone & Wall, 2003). Further, many protected areas are managed by tourist departments, which leads to less benefits being generated for local people than expected (Hou, 2006). As a result, this will reduce the local people's enthusiasm to improve tourist conditions. However, this is not always the case, such as the exception in Jiuzhaigou biosphere reserve in Sichuan province, China, where ecotourism was found largely to be contributing to the improvement of local people's well-being, in terms of livelihoods, choice, and social cultural belonging (Dombroski, 2005).

The third practical problem of ecotourism development in China concerns lack of adequate attention to environmental education as an integral part of its role (Tisdell, 1996). This problem is identified as closely related with the absence of qualified tourist guides and managers in managing and developing ecotourism (Han & Ren, 2001). Tisdell (1996) draws on his case study in Yunnan to support this point by arguing that the local tourist guides were largely found with poor professional training and inferior interpretative skills. Therefore, ecotourism will fail to fulfill one of its core functions of educating tourists and enhancing the public's consciousness about natural conservation, which, consequently, largely reduces the opportunity of ecotourism to generate funding for protection. Lindberg et al. (1997) further link the causes of the shortage of qualified staff with lack of funding and the remoteness of natural reserves.

Finally, the shortage of money to fund natural reserves is recognized as another serious challenge facing ecotourism in China. Since China is a developing country with minimal funds, the government has failed to invest large sums of money in nature reserves. This problem is also identified by 67.1 percent of the nature reserves as the main problem facing development of ecotourism (Han & Ren, 2001).

3.5 Research context

The above discussion illustrates the process of current economic development and the history of tourism development in China. It has shown that due to its specific historical and national contexts, China has adopted state-led development, where decisions are made by the government for its populations. The chapter also pays special attention to the rapid emergence of ecotourism in China, describing its current trends and characteristics, as well as examining its existing practical problems. Ecotourism, which is one of the newly emerged promising industries, is initiated by national and local governments, with local people enjoying the governments' benevolence, rather than being involved in decision-making processes. In other words, China's current ecotourism development is not characterised by high levels of local participation, which can inhibit local people from obtaining more benefits. Meanwhile, the ecotourism destinations have been intentionally expanded by the Chinese government to pursue a wide range of sustainable development in both rural and urban areas.

On the other hand, it can be seen that ecotourism in China has attracted increasing interest and has gained in popularity, and a substantial amount of research has emerged discussing its advantages and disadvantages. However, most of the literature about ecotourism rests on its theoretical aspects, with limited case studies carried out by researchers on evaluating the current level of ecotourism. In particular, Lindberg et al. (1997) point out that there is also little analysis been done specifically on assessing ecotourism's potential as a sustainable development option.

In addition, most of the limited case studies about China's ecotourism are focused on areas such as natural reserves or national parks that are endowed with an abundance of ecotourism resources. In spite of the growing amount of literature highlighting the significance of ecotourism development practised by rural areas that are not nature-based, and its existing problems, few case studies have been done in these

specific sites to assess the current status of ecotourism to understand its potential for local sustainable development more generally. Further, even though many articles critically point out the current practical problems of developing ‘rural ecotourism’ in China, and aim towards providing possible strategies, many of these are too general and not research-based, but simply comprise authors’ ideas. Therefore, further specific investigation is required in order to overcome this lack of research and guide future strategies.

Overall, the above gaps in the relevant literature justify the aim of this project: to evaluate the potential role of rural ecotourism, such as eco-villages, to contribute to local sustainable development in China, by using Tengtou village as a specific example. This chapter, alongside Chapter 2 on the ecotourism and sustainable literature, provides a contextual and theoretical base for the research in this study and its analysis. The next chapter will focus on the methodological approach and ethical considerations, which can be seen as the first stage of the primary research section of this thesis.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Throughout the preceding chapters, the concepts of ecotourism and sustainable development, as well as their increasingly close relationships within both the global context and Chinese context specifically, have been discussed. This chapter will discuss fieldwork preparation, as well as the methods and the methodological considerations that affected this study. Interviews, participant observation, questionnaire surveys and secondary sources were used in the research in order to assess the current status of ecotourism at Tengtou village in Zhejiang Province, China, where ecotourism is being vigorously promoted as a sustainable strategy for local development.

The chapter starts with an illustration of the positionality of the researcher and a review of the fieldwork preparation. It then considers the ethical issues. This is followed by a discussion of the rationale for the type of methods chosen. Having explained the process of data collection, the data analysis process is considered. Lastly, attention is given to reflecting on the methodology.

4.1.1 Personal motivation in conducting this research

The research topic was born out of my specific context and background as a student and as a person who identifies with Chinese nationality. Firstly, I am interested in the topics of tourism and environmentally relevant issues. I finished my undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies and moved my major to Development Studies when doing my postgraduate diploma. My background studies in these two fields have allowed me to accumulate certain academic knowledge, as well as confidence in understanding the relationships between humans, the environment and development.

In contemporary society, with the rapid development of society, and the increasing levels in living standards, tourism has become a common form of recreation. Ecotourism, in particular, has gained much popularity. Personally, I like travelling to rural areas and experiencing rural life. As a Chinese person, I chose a research site within my own country, since I am familiar with the language and culture. When I typed “ecotourism” into the Google search engine (Chinese version), I found Tengtou eco-village, which is a place I have always been attracted to. There are a great number of articles praising this village as practising successful ecotourism in contributing to local sustainable development, which even more aroused my interest to choose this as my research site.

As far as I am concerned, a vast amount of ecotourism literature draws on rural areas that are endowed with an abundance of natural resources as the focus of research; by comparison there are limited studies targeting a highly modified environment or rural areas without significant natural assets as potential destinations of ecotourists. In addition, as I have learnt from my study, different destination areas have their own understandings of the concept of sustainability, as well as their own distinctive strengths and weaknesses. I am curious about people’s varied life styles, attitudes and behaviours, as well as how they make sense of themselves and others. In order to reflect upon the theories I have learnt, and to gain a deep understanding of the relationships or gaps between theories and practice, I decided to conduct field research in Tengtou. By chance, I knew that my relative’s friends live in Tengtou village, who were then able to help me considerably in conducting my research.

4.1.2 Fieldwork preparation

Research preparation plays a significant role in contributing to smooth and efficient data collection (Bouma, 1996). The preparation work for this research included a comprehensive study of the relevant academic literature; consulting secondary materials that are relevant to the background information about the study area;

careful consideration of ethical issues; design of research questions; and the establishment of initial contacts with potential participants.

Writers like Creswell (1994), Bailey (2007), and Gray (2004) emphasise the necessity and importance of a literature review in conducting research, which offers the researcher a comprehensive understanding of the research topic by reviewing the previous work done by other people. Consequently, it can help to formulate research questions and methods, as well as to facilitate data analysis in the later stages (Creswell, 1994). In addition, secondary materials were consulted in order to help me to become familiar with the development history and the broad social context of the target village and its people. The careful contemplation of ethical issues prior to the research will be discussed in more detail later. This was conducted to guide me to investigate morally, and avoid unnecessary conflicts. According to Scheyvens, Nowak and Scheyvens's (2003), ethical principles are a useful tool to enlighten the whole research process.

In addition to the above preparatory work, all possible participant groups were identified before entering the field. Accordingly, different types of questions and methods were designed for use with the varying groups of interviewees. The research process revealed that local officials who were being interviewed, due to their busy schedules, expected the researcher to be organised and efficient. I made initial contact with perceived key participants through emails and telephone calls during the preparation stage, in order to facilitate my access to the field site. Finally, small souvenirs from my resident country were prepared for my participants as gifts, which represented a token of my appreciation for their participation. Though careful prior field preparation was necessary, I was also aware that there might be many unforeseen or unpredictable events during the research in the field, which required flexibility and an open mind.

4.1.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations, as Schram (2003, p. 137) argues, are “inseparable from the interaction with study participants in the field”. This section focuses on considering the ethical issues as foreshadowed slightly in the preceding section, which includes those matters which emerged before and during the data collection process, as well as the data analysis process and the presentation of data.

Before going into the field to conduct the research, a comprehensive outline of the research was submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. Based on completion of the screening questionnaire, which indicated there was minimum potential harm to participants, and that I was aware of confidentiality and informed consent issues, this project was approved as ethically low risk. Subsequently, an internal ethics review process was conducted in the form of in-house meeting in the School of People, Environment and Planning, which involved myself and my two supervisors. The research methods and the ethical considerations were discussed in this internal department meeting, which prepared me with more guidance on how to conduct the research in an ethical manner.

All the interviews with the participants started with a short introduction relating to my background, as well as the content of the research, and its purpose. In addition, when interviewing people working at the management level, an information sheet and an introduction letter from my supervisor were also provided. When interviewing other participants, I showed the interviewees photos of my University work place to help build my credibility with them. Moreover, I also made clear all the rights that participants have before the initiation of each interview, including their rights to withdraw their participation at any time, to refuse to answer any research questions, and to receive a copy of the findings of the research. All consent was achieved verbally, due to some participants' illiteracy, and others preferring only verbal agreement. In addition to the consent gained from my subjects to participate in the interviews, I also asked for their permission to take notes, and use a voice

recorder.

Further, I was aware of the power imbalance between myself and the research participants, mainly in terms of differences associated with access to money and education. I made efforts to act in a sensitive and respectful manner, and treated the participants as cooperators in the research process, who provided me with valuable information, in order to help me to fulfill the research aims: I wore plain, but tidy and clean clothes, instead of designer labels. I also prepared research questions carefully before conducting any interviews, and was careful to progress quickly to minimise disrupting participants' daily routines.

After the collection of data, I kept all data and tapes in a safe and secure place, only for the purpose of the research. At the later stage, I made efforts to accurately record information and summarise the findings of the research in a professional manner. Permission was obtained from relevant participants to have their photos taken as part of my study, as well as from those whose words I will use as direct quotes in this work. For those participants who provided their names and wanted direct acknowledgement of their contribution, I put their name in the acknowledgements.

4.1.4 Access to the field

As mentioned before, the contact with potential participants had been made before conducting the research. It was suggested politely by the desk clerk of the Tengtou Travel Company that I should meet the head of the village once I arrived at the village, in order to appropriately obtain his permission to do research. On arrival at the study site, I met my relative's friends first, who were local residents of Tengtou village, as mentioned before. Then, we went to the local government office together, and they introduced me to the head of the village, Fu Qiping, who is also the President of Tengtou Group Company, Ltd. After introducing myself and presenting an information sheet to Mr Fu, he welcomed me and allowed me to conduct my

research in this village. Mr Fu also introduced another important person to me, the secretary of Tengtou Group Company, Ltd. I was invited to attend two mobilisation meetings that afternoon run by the latter person, since Tengtou village was currently applying for the highest (AAAAA⁴⁰) level of national scenic spots. During the first meeting that was held within Tengtou village, Mr Fu introduced me formally to all the people in attendance, who included representatives of local residents, as well as those outsiders who were currently working in tourism related industries in Tengtou village. According to Berg (2007) and Patton (1990), gaining access to a field area facilitated by someone who can serve as entrance guide is an ideal approach, since it can help to establish the researcher's credibility.

4.2 Data collection process

4.2.1 Qualitative methodology and methods

I adopted an interpretative epistemology, which held the perspective of “knowledge as created and negotiated between human beings” (Oliver, 2003, p. 122). With regard to my research question concerning the investigation of local people's own understandings of ecotourism and its impacts, the interpretative epistemological approach was considered as appropriate. This maintains that “the social world is local, temporally and historically situated, fluid, context-specific, and shaped in conjunction with the researcher” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109, cited in Bailey, 2007).

The research approaches should be designed to cater to the research aim (Hay, 2005). My research aimed to find the impacts of ecotourism on local people, as well as working out possible strategies to promote ecotourism's contribution to local sustainable development. Hence, I need to explore why and how rural ecotourism

⁴⁰ In China, the tourist areas are ranked using low (A) to high (AAAAA) divisions, based on their quality, and the criteria for ranking is based on factors like travel security, environmental protection, tourism resources, tourism transportation and many others.

was initiated, as well as the local people's own perceptions and impressions of "ecotourism". Given the exploratory nature of the research, and the information I wanted to collect, a qualitative approach was adopted as an appropriate approach. The qualitative approach adopts the view that it is important to understand people's thoughts towards the world around them in order to gain a better understanding of their behaviour (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006). According to Brockington and Sullivan (2003, p. 57), qualitative methods are a relevant technique to "explore the meaning of people's worlds".

In addition, a single case study approach was used as a research strategy. According to Yin (2003), case study approaches are considered as an appropriate strategy in answering research questions which start with "why" and "how" within an actual real life context. Similarly, Berg (2007) also justifies the case study approach as a suitable and systematic technique in exploring a particular person, social setting or event in depth. The case study approach is perceived by Yin (2003) as involving three main stages; the first stage, which is named as the "define and design" phase has been covered in the previous discussion. The following section focuses on the presentation of the data collection process, which is followed by data analysis.

4.2.2 Data collection

I lived in Tengtou village for a period of five weeks from 21 May 2007 to 23 June 2007. A snowballing technique was also used for selecting interviewees. The majority of respondents had strong sympathy for my work. These respondents were then willing to suggest others for me to interview. The data triangulation⁴¹ technique was used in order to strengthen research credibility and promote objectivity in findings. Basically, interviewees included five different groups of participants: local officials; members of staff working at a local travel company; tourists; staff working

⁴¹ Data triangulation: refers to the use of different data sources which should be distinguished from the use of different methods for producing data (Flick, 2002, p. 226). In this research, the researcher asked similar questions to different people and related general findings to several people to obtain their opinions.

at tourist attractions; and other permanent Tengtou village residents.

A semi-structured interview format was the primary means for gathering information. Approximately 45 semi-structured interviews were conducted (Table 4-1). 11 of these interviews⁴² were done with people working at the management level by using a digital recorder; these lasted between forty minutes, to one and half hours. The remaining semi-structured interviews targeted the staff working in tourism related areas and local residents. The longest interview took approximately one and a half hours, while the shortest one took about 20 minutes, depending on whether the interviewees were available or talkative. The majority of interviewees allowed me to take notes, and some allowed me to use digital recorder. There were only three cases where both note taking and digital recorder were discouraged. Hence, a write-up was made immediately after the interview finished, in order to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the content of such interviews.

Different tourism-related questions were designed for different types of targeted groups, but they generally revolved around ecotourism planning, management issues, and the impacts of the ecotourism project. The interview questions also covered issues like the interviewees' perceptions, participation in ecotourism and attitudes towards ecotourism. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, considerable amounts of time were spent talking casually with local residents and tourists. Moreover, participant observation, questionnaire surveys, focus groups and secondary data sources were also used as important techniques to obtain a more holistic understanding of the participants' behaviours and attitudes towards ecotourism. The following will discuss and justify in detail each of the methods used.

⁴² It should be noted semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 people who worked at the management level, but the number of the total number of semi-structured interviews was actually 15, since four participants were involved in interviews twice.

Table 4-1: Interviews conducted in May/June, 2007

Description of participants	Number of females	Number of males	Proportion between local and non local residents	Total amount of semi-structured interviews	Qualitative methods used
Staff working in scenic spots	3	3	3:3	6	Semi-structured interviews
People doing business within scenic spots	4	9	7:6	13	Semi-structured interviews
Local residents	9	6	15:0	15	Semi-structured interviews plus several informal interviews and two focus group interviews and participant observation
Staff of Tengtou Group Company Ltd.	0	7	2:5	7	Semi-structured interviews
Staff of Travel Company	3	2	2:3	4	Semi-structured interviews
Tourists	5	5	0:10	10	Informal interviews plus six questionnaire surveys and participant observation

Source: Author

Note: 1. Although there were five staff of the Travel Company involved in semi-structured interviews, it should be noted two participants involved in one interview at the same time, hence, the total number was 4, instead of 5.

2. From this table, it can be seen that most staff of Tengtou Group Company were outsiders, however, most of the high level government administration positions are filled by local people.

4.2.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they can help to facilitate the researcher to conduct two-way communication with the research participants (FAO, 1990). The flexibility of such a form of interviews, which is guided by less strictly formulated questions, can provide the participants with a more relaxed atmosphere to express their thoughts (Flick, 2002). In this way, the semi-structured interview allows the researchers to explore the participants' views, attitudes, and the meanings of their activities in more depth (Gray, 2004).

Basically, this type of interview was conducted with all the staff working at the

management level, in order to answer the research questions regarding the aims, process, policies and management issues of ecotourism. Prior to each interview, a structured list of issues to be addressed in a certain order was prepared, in order to make sure that the interview stayed focused on the interview subject and saved time for participants. There were a couple of participants who started talking about ecotourism related issues in their own way, and then this left some time for me to ask questions that they had not mentioned. In addition, four out of the ten participants were interviewed twice due to the emergence of further questions later on.

Business owners, staff working within Tengtou ecotourism zone⁴³, and other permanent residents were also targeted as the participants of semi-structured interviews. Both targeted groups were asked similar questions, such as their understanding of ecotourism. However, a distinction was made for the tourism-related questions: business owners were asked to respond with respect to tourism's impact on their business specifically, while other local residents were asked to respond with respect to tourism's impact on their personal lives. Moreover, "impact ladder"⁴⁴ exercises were carried out with local residents to facilitate discussion on the impacts of ecotourism, mainly in terms of economic, environmental and public infrastructural changes (see Appendix 1). Further, the facial and body expressions of the participants during the interview were observed, in order to discern the reactions of interviewees towards interview questions and their willingness to participate.

4.2.2.2 Informal interviews

Informal interviews were used with both tourists and local villagers. Due to the short-stay nature of tourists, ten informal interviews of simple questions were conducted to obtain some general background information on tourists, such as where they came from, what attracted them to visit this village, and what they purchased. In

⁴³ Some business owners and working staff are local residents, while some are from other places.

⁴⁴ Impact ladder: it is considered a useful tool to make qualitative comparison of a before and after situation based on a specific indicator (Guijt, 1998).

addition, some local residents preferred casual conversations over formal interviews. These people politely refused to take part in semi-structured interviews, but they were willing to chat with me. Hence, purposeful chatting was used, aiming to get some general information about villagers' current living standards and their attitudes towards the ecotourism industry.

4.2.2.3 Focus Groups

Two spontaneous focus group interview opportunities occurred in the field. The first focus group was conducted with four women and two men, and the second focus group involved four men and two women. Both of the locations of focus groups were in the residents' houses. In addition, the first focus group interview occurred in the presence of my hostess, who initially wanted to introduce her friend to participate in my interview. When we arrived at her friend's house, there were several other neighbours and relatives sitting there chatting. Hence, my hostess encouraged all of these people to participate in my interview, and they were happy to chat with me. According to Berg (2007) and Bouma (1996), focus group interviews are a useful technique for gathering a wide range of views within short periods of time, and they also allow the emergence of unanticipated issues during the discussion. Indeed, the method of interviewing participants within groups is quite rewarding. The interviews were conducted in a more natural and relaxed atmosphere than the one to one interview. Interviewees were all local residents, and from the same social class (working class). As a result, this helped to encourage the participants to express their ideas.

4.2.2.4 Informal walks and participant observation

Informal walks helped me to be able to understand the context within which ecotourism operates better, which thus contributes to a holistic perspective. On the arrival day, prior to interviewing, a walking tour of the village was completed in order to become familiar with the location of residential areas, the number and types of business relevant to the ecotourism industry, and the distribution of main tourist

attractions. Participant observation, on the other hand, was used in order to complement the data collection process. The study area was visited on multiple occasions over the course of the field research period in an effort to become familiar with the local village, facilities, and the people working or living in this village. I walked around the village early every morning to observe people's daily lives, and chat with some of the villagers.

Participant observation had been used during different days of the week, at different times within a day, and with a different focus. In addition, I also conducted participant observation in a variety of ways, such as being a resident in the research area, and by taking some other functional roles in the field. I served as a storekeeper's assistant, helping to pack and seal ginger candy; served as a temporary tour guide by chance⁴⁵; as well as doing housework with the hostess. I also went to the ecotourism zone and joined in tours, participating as a tourist, which provided me with opportunities to observe the activities of tourists within the park, to listen to and take part in tourists' casual conversations. Meanwhile, I wrote down my own impressions and feelings as part of the data to be used in attempting to understand the ecotourism project.

4.2.2.5 Questionnaire surveys

Questionnaire surveys (see Appendix 2), which contained six open-ended questions that required extended responses were used mainly to target tourists as the participants. The purposes of questionnaires were to generate detailed information about the perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and awareness of tourists towards an ecotourism project, as well as tourists' activities and experiences. I knew these tourist were visiting Tengtou for a limited time (most were there for less than two hours), thus I asked them for email addresses so they could answer my questions at

⁴⁵ On 11th June, 2007, after I conducted an interview with the gatekeeper of Tengtou student social practice base, I met a middle-aged woman, who was asking the way to Tengtou farmer's park. The lady came to Tengtou village with her friends, and did not hire a tour guide. Unfortunately, they got lost. Hence, I introduced myself and told her I was quite familiar with this village and I could be their free tour guide.

their leisure at a later stage. All the tourists who were willing to leave email addresses were literate and well educated, which means that they were accustomed to expressing themselves in writing.

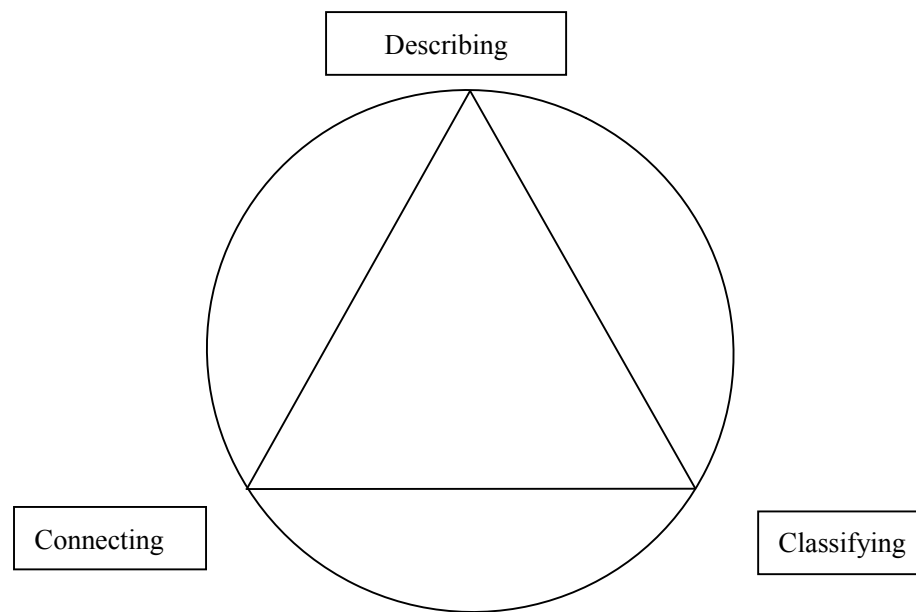
4.2.2.6 Secondary data sources

In addition to the collection of the above primary data, secondary materials including promotional pamphlets, books, and articles in magazines, local newspaper, VCD and local official documents (e.g. written reports, maps, and layout of the village, etc.) were also employed and consulted, in order to gather information on ecotourism management activities, facilities and attractions, which add valuable insights into ecotourism development issues. In other words, the secondary sources of information supplemented the data collected from the primary qualitative methods.

4.3 Analysis of data

The data collection process is the first step in conducting qualitative research, which is followed by data analysis, interpretation and presentation (Patton, 1990). Throughout the preceding sections, strategies for collecting data have been discussed. In this section the task of analysis is considered at length. In this research, data analysis entailed reviewing and interpreting observations and interview responses in light of the defined research objectives and sustainable ecotourism evaluative indicators outlined in the literature review chapters. According to Dey (1993), data analysis is an iterative cyclical process that includes three integral parts, namely: describing the data, classifying the data, and making connections between different categories (Refer to Figure 4-2).

Figure 4-2: The qualitative data analysis procedure



Source: Dey (1993, p. 31)

More specifically, by using Dey's (1993) framework, the first step of data analysis concerns developing a comprehensive description of the research phenomenon. This description includes illustrating the context of an action, the intention of the subject and the process in which the action takes place (Dey, 1993). This step was carried out by transcribing all the raw data that had been recorded using the digital recorder, as well as writing down all the data collected through interviews and observations. All the data collected from the digital recorder and note-taking was transcribed immediately after each interview. In addition, documents collected were also translated to provide context and to aid data interpretation.

The next step is identified as the classification stage, within which the important parts of data from the selected transcriptions, based on the research questions and relevant theory from the literature review, were categorised, in order to make the information comprehensible to others (Dey, 1993). This step was conducted through coding the interview notes and the transcripts by making comments in the margins of the transcripts, and then looking for the relevant key concepts, categories and themes

that will help to organise the discussion at a later stage. In addition, the participants' responses were also categorised and then qualified, which facilitated the identification of their attitudes towards ecotourism. The data were organised according to themes identified by thorough research questions, and emergent themes that arose within the analysis process.

The last stage of the qualitative data analysis is about building and examining connections between the substantive variables, and between the literature review and research findings. During this stage, thematic headings were also considered and constructed. After the analysis of data, the main findings were represented (Chapter 5), and the results of the case study were compared with relevant literature (Chapter 6). Further, recommendations (Chapter 7) based on these findings were intended to help promote the successful sustainable development of ecotourism at the case study site.

4.4 Reflections on methodology

Reflection and introspection are important parts of the field research process (Bouma, 1996). The previous sections have examined the process of data collection and analysis. This section, in turn, will focus on discussing the difficulties experienced during the field work, how I dealt with these problems, and the lessons learnt from field work. Two continually updated research diaries (working diary and personal diary), and field notes were used in the research to assist in reflecting on the ongoing research process. These diaries recorded the process of approaching the field of research, daily interview schedule and logistics, experiences and problems in making contact with the interviewees, applying the methods and reasons for methodological decisions.

Looking back over the five weeks in which the research was carried out in Tengtou village, the qualitative approach used in the field turned out to be an appropriate and

successful tool in exploring the participants' thoughts and understanding their behaviours and attitudes. It allowed for the participants to conceptualise ecotourism and sustainable development in their own way. The whole data collection process was fascinating, but also challenging.

4.4.1 Some difficulties with aspects of the data collection process

One of the biggest challenges in conducting my research was assembling local villagers' definitions of the term "ecotourism", which is a Western concept that has come about within the last two decades. Although a direct identifying question like "Do you have ideas of what does 'ecotourism' mean?" was asked, many local villagers were unable to answer such questions, due to their low levels of education. The majority of old people, in particular, were illiterate. However, this does not mean local participants have no idea. Instead, this is largely because local people had never thought about the definition of ecotourism before. Meanwhile, participants were also aware that they were not well educated; hence, they were not confident in providing me what they saw as a correct answer. When the participants had difficulty responding to these questions, they tended to politely decline to take part in the interviews. Before conducting my field work, I had concerns of this nature; however, there were no apparent solutions.

In order to encourage the participants to express their ideas confidently, I started with explaining what I knew about the concepts, which I had learnt from Western countries. After that, I listed several key elements that characterised this concept in the literature. Then, I asked my participants whether they agreed with these aspects or whether they had any other opinions. Another technique I used was to break down the abstract questions into several simple and concrete questions. For example, instead of asking people whether they had any ideas about the concept of "ecotourism", I asked the participants questions like "have you ever heard of the term of ecotourism?", "what kinds of activities do tourists do in your village?", and

“do you think these tourists are well educated and behave appropriately when visiting your village?”

The research found that there were a certain number of participants who preferred to answer “Yes” or “No” questions. However, such answers rendered little data. Hence, I made efforts to encourage the participants to talk at length by reflecting on their own personal experience. For example, after asking a question like whether ecotourism has brought any benefits, the participants were further asked “why do you think so, could you give me an example that has happened in your daily life to illustrate this?” In some cases, the participants had their own thoughts, but were unable to find appropriate words to express them clearly. In that circumstance, the answers had to be prompted, and my task was to help them to fill in the words, in order to avoid the interviewees feeling embarrassed.

Another problem which occurred during the interviews was that some participants often drifted off to topics unrelated to the research. In that case, I had to politely interrupt and redirect discussion back to the research topic. Basically, I carried out the majority of interviews by myself; however, there were cases when my hostess accompanied me to conduct interviews. The presence of my hostess had both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, she provided much assistance in introductions, explanations and communications. Given the fact that I was an absolute stranger to local residents, the presence of my hostess facilitated the research process, and her support also gave me confidence. After the interviews were conducted, some participants commented that because I was accompanied by their own villager, they felt a kind of security, and they became more willing and comfortable to participate in my interviews. On the other hand, I was also aware that her presence may influence the other participants’ willingness to share their own views. Hence, in the circumstance when my interviewees were the persons my hostess was familiar with, I invited her to take part together as well and encouraged her to share her views. When my interviewees were the persons that my hostess was

not familiar with, I explained my worry to her and politely suggested she went home after she introduced me.

It can be seen that building trustful relationships and rapport with local people was quite significant in smoothing the way for conducting interviews. Many local residents may not have felt comfortable with semi-structured interviews, but they were quite happy to talk to me informally. Hence, I started by chatting with them casually, and when these participants felt more relaxed and confident, I would then turn to ask them my research questions. Both the information collected from formal and informal interviews contributed to the findings of my case study, but from different angles. After the participants met me several times in the village conducting my research, people were familiar with my daily routines. Consequently, they became more willing to share their personal experiences with me on their own initiative.

Careful preparation before conducting either semi-structured or informal interviews was important in showing respect towards the interviewees and obtaining a favourable impression from the participants. However, no matter how well one is prepared, there can always be unexpected difficulties, which, in turn, require flexibility. Being flexible and open was found useful in doing research, as was highlighted by Scheyvens and Nowak (2003). Meanwhile, persistence was also relevant and necessary in completing the research, since the process of collecting data was filled with frustration, depression and other negative feelings.

In addition to the above problems discussed, several other difficulties emerged in the process of doing this research. Accordingly, there were some changes made in my predetermined plan, concerning the list of predetermined key interviewees, and the interview questions, when I realised that the previous plans were not feasible. Firstly, before I arrived at the research area, I had planned to interview at least ten villagers who provided accommodation for tourists, and whose lives would be directly

influenced by tourism development. However, after I arrived, I found only one such guest house, which was confirmed by my host. As a result, the previous plan needed to be changed; with the number of this type of participants reduced to one.

Secondly, the two key participants I planned to interview were unable to take part: the leader of the village, who initiated ecotourism, was busy attending a variety of conferences and was dealing with a great number of local affairs; while the manager of the Tengtou Travel Company politely refused to participate in my research. Subsequently, the leader of the village introduced another local official to participate in my interviews. Similarly, the manager of the travel company also introduced one of the clerks who was willing to participate.

At that time, I felt very frustrated and was quite disappointed. I spent many hours in the archive office, consulting a variety of secondary materials instead. By chance, I found that the current manager was new, while the former manager had been in that position for the last five years. Through the help of the hostess, I acquired the contact number of the former manager and successfully made an appointment with him. There was another important person who participated in the interview, the assistant of this ex-manager, who had also been working in Tengtou for last fifteen years. This interview was indeed one of the most rewarding.

The third important change I made in the field was using questionnaire surveys to collect tourists' views towards ecotourism, instead of focusing on conducting informal interviews. As has mentioned before, the general duration of the tour was fairly short, which is partly due to the hot weather. It was not appropriate and convenient to take them too much time to ask research questions. Thus, although I joined the tour and chatted with several tourists, the information generated from the casual interviews was far from sufficient, with the limited time of tourists. As suggested by one of my supervisors, I adopted questionnaire surveys, as a complement to formal interviews, in order to collect more in-depth views from

tourists.

The local villagers were hospitable and kind, and were really willing to help me with my research. However, they thought the amount of information was more important to me than the quality of information given. Hence, they made efforts to provide me with a large amount of information and suggested that I put it all in my thesis. It took me a long time to explain to these people the nature of my social investigation and research questions.

4.4.2 Limitations of research

As Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 42) argue, “There are no perfect research designs. There are always trade-offs”. A major limitation of this research was the inability to easily access those particular participants who were more likely to assist in a meaningful way, especially the head of the village, who initiated ecotourism. In addition, this research was conducted within a certain period of time, which was in the low season. Hence, the data collected only partially reflected that time period’s impacts of ecotourism development. During the peak season, due to the large number of tourists, environmental, social-cultural and economic impacts brought by ecotourism can differ from those found in this case study. Thus, the current information obtained from tourists may limit the possibility to contribute to the provision of more holistic or comprehensive recommendations towards the management of ecotourism in the field site. Further, due to the time limitation, I did not collect neighbouring villagers’ attitudes and suggestions for Tengtou village’s ecotourism, except for those who working within the ecotourism zone.

4.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the motivations and positionality of the researcher that fueled the research. The preparation of the field work was also covered, including

reviewing relevant literature, considering ethical issues, making contact with research participants, and designing research questions and methods. The chapter then focused on justifying the methodology used in conducting the research, as well as explaining the process of data collection and analysis in detail. Finally, the chapter ended with a reflection on the fieldwork methodology.

One of the important things I learnt from doing my research is that all people have their own knowledge, regardless of education. Further, it is useful in carrying out research if you can place yourself in the position of others when considering an issue and be respectful, so that you can appreciate the diversity of people's views. Another crucial aspect learnt from the field was that treating the process of research as an opportunity for study and learning, combined with the attitudes of tolerance and appreciation, enabled the entire case study to be a valuable journey and a rewarding experience. The next chapter, in turn, will present the main findings of this research in Tengtou village.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: TENGTOU VILLAGE AND ITS ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

1960: the fields and the roads were not even, the yield per Mu⁴⁶ was only two hundred. If you had a daughter, never let her get married to people who live in Tengtou village.

1980: the fields were in north and south directions, each field has four and a half Mu, and natural ditches were available to facilitate irrigation and drainage.

1990: the fields were equally divided, houses were built systematically, green trees were planted for shade, while flowers and fruits sprayed their fragrances, with the blue waters flowing long and winding.

(Folk song)

This chapter begins with a popular folk song among the local people of Tengtou village, China that vividly portrays the dramatic changes that have occurred in the village within the last 40 years. Tengtou has expanded from a desperately poor and dirty village to one of the national representatives of the more advanced villages. The village was also named as a national demonstration zone for an ecological environment, as well as a national environmental education base. More recently, Tengtou village was honoured as one of the world's top ten villages, where the local populations live in harmony with their surrounding environment, based on eight evaluative indicators, including the coverage of green areas, crime rates, employment rates and the like (Sun, Ma & Fan, 2007).

Tengtou village, as a small village without any famous mountains or historic sites, started ecotourism in the late 1990s, largely by taking advantage of its relatively high technology agriculture and comparatively sound living environment. Ecotourism has

⁴⁶ Mu: Chinese measurement of area. 1 Mu equals to 666.67 Square Meters, and 15 Mu equals to 1 Hectares.

been vigorously promoted as a promising tertiary industry to further the village's economic development in a sustainable way. This study targets this eco-village as the object of research to explore, in an in-depth way, the prospects of ecotourism for contributing to local sustainable development.

This chapter outlines the case study site in Section 5.1, including a description of the research area and its people, as well as a discussion of the development history of agriculture, secondary industry, and tertiary industry in Tengtou. Section 5.2 looks at ecotourism in particular. It explains the origin of ecotourism, and considers the development and characteristics of ecotourism, within which, the types and motivations of tourists are also covered. Section 5.3 explores local people's understandings of, participation in, and attitudes towards ecotourism. The chapter concludes with a summary of the local people's own understanding of the concept of ecotourism and their feelings towards the ecotourism industry.

5.1 Site of research: General description of case study area and its people

The site was selected after initial Internet searching (see Chapter Four), as the focus of study for analysing the relationship between ecotourism and sustainable development. This section starts with providing background information about the research village and its people. The information was gained mainly through consulting secondary sources (an official website, local newspapers, other official documents and archival records); interviews with local officials, including the staff of the Tengtou Travel Company, and other local permanent residents; as well as through participant observation.

5.1.1 Introduction of Tengtou village

Tengtou village is located at the North of Fenghua (town), Ningbo city, Zhejiang

province, Eastern China (Figure 5-1 & Figure 5-2). It is 30 kilometers from the main city, Ningbo, which has a population of about 56 million (Ningbo Government, 2006). The village enjoys a favourable climate, with an average temperature of 16.2 °C , and the average precipitation is 1370 mm each year (Tengtou Village Government, 2004). The total area of Tengtou village is 2 km², with 818 Mu of cultivated land and 191 Mu of orchards (Tengtou Village Government, 2004).

Figure 5-1: Map of the location of Tengtou village within China



Source: modified from <http://www.china-labour.org.hk>

Figure 5-2: Map of the location of Tengtou village within Zhejiang province



Source: modified from <http://www.chinatengtou.com/lvyou/jtdt.html>

Note: *Tengtou village is 210 Kilometers away from Hangzhou..*

It is estimated that in 2006, there were 320 local households with 803 people in Tengtou. The natural population growth rate is relatively low at about 0.3 percent (Tengtou local official, personal communication, May 2007). The permanent residents of Tengtou village are found as composing of two main groups: local-born residents and those who are married to local-born villagers. In accordance with Chinese policies, other people without family connection there cannot simply decide to move to Tengtou. Since the early 1970s, after the village gradually developed its economy, many women from nearby villages married into Tengtou and became legal members of this village. There are no official statistics on the exact number of local-born residents, but as told by the participants, generally speaking, those villagers whose surname is “Fu” are locally-born.

According to the local tour guide’s introduction, in addition to the above 803 permanent residents, there are about 7000 people from other places around China

working in Tengtou village currently for a variety of time periods: some have been working in the village for many years, while some are temporary workers. Among these outsiders, there are more than 500 people residing in the village⁴⁷, who are considered as temporary residents. This is largely due to the relatively low rental fees, as well as the clean and safe living environment. The large majority of these outsiders work in secondary industries, such as Aiyimei Clothing Company, which is the largest export producer based on cashmere finery in China, as well as a company which specialises in producing boxes for export; while a quarter of these workers are involved in tourism-related industries, such as work as hotel staff, waitresses, business owners, and doing physical labour (e.g. planting trees, construction).

One of the distinctive features of Tengtou village which differs from many other villages in China is that all its villagers live in houses arranged in neat rows. These identical houses were planned and constructed by the local government. There are basically three main types of houses: the “old houses”, the “apartment style houses” and the “villa style houses”. The old houses, which were established in mid-1970s, have been be refurbished each year by the local government since the initiation of ecotourism.

In addition to the provision of low priced houses to local residents, the Tengtou government also planted trees and potted plants in front of each resident’s house. The green coverage occupies approximately 63 percent of the whole village (The Director of Tengtou Environmental Committee, personal communication, May 2007). This compares with the average green coverage in Ningbo, which is only 20.37 percent (Ningbo Forestry Bureau, 2006). Moreover, local villagers also enjoy relatively low expenses for their use of electricity, gas and water, compared with

⁴⁷ Normally the workers who come from the neighbouring villages live in their own villages. Hence, the majority of these temporary residents are from other relatively poor rural areas that are far away from Tengtou village. Among these 500 temporary residents, some rent houses from local residents, while some live in flats provided by the local government. It should be noted that only the permanent residents of Tengtou village are allowed to buy houses, and only those outsiders who marry Tengtou villagers can officially become Tengtou permanent residents.

those living in cities.

Currently, the majority of the young local villagers are working in secondary industries, especially in Aiyimei Clothing Company. Meanwhile, there are approximately 160 local residents involved in tourism-related industries, either working for the Tengtou Travel Company or running their own businesses (The Chief Accountant of the Tengtou Group Company, personal communication, June 2007). The number of villagers who directly participate in agricultural activities only occupies 8 percent of the total population.

In addition, all the farmers are employed by the Tengtou Travel Company and commit themselves to developing profitable agricultural enterprises (e.g. flowers, fruits, fish, shrimps, etc.), mainly by using organic fertilisers⁴⁸. After the initiation of ecotourism, all of the individual farm lands are rented by the local government to plant flowers, trees and fruits, mainly for developing ecotourism⁴⁹. This is because the previously scattered farming practiced by farmers independently was unfavourable to the whole image of ecotourism venture. Meanwhile, a large number of local residents are working in the secondary industries, which left their land unused. The only difference after the redistribution of the land is that all the farming areas are more organised and centralised. The farmers who plant fruit also plant traditional crops (e.g. paddy rice), which are mainly used as a means to kill bacteria. After several years of fruit planting, there will be potential bacteria within the soil. Hence, normally after planting fruit, farmers will plant traditional crops as a transitional stage, which is a cheap and effective way of cleansing the soil (A strawberry farmer, personal communication, May 2007). This method is well-known among local farmers.

⁴⁸The manager of the agricultural company said that it is unrealistic to not use chemical fertilisers. Tengtou village is focusing on using natural organic fertilisers, which are composed of animal manure, and where appropriate use chemical fertilisers.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that in China, land is not allowed to be privately owned by farmers, but they can secure use rights and can rent it out to others.

5.1.2 Development of three industries in Tengtou village

Tengtou village's development takes highly effective agriculture as its foundation, the village-operated industries as the main body, and the tertiary industry as the new economic point of growth. This section looks at the development process of these three industries and the current industrial structure in Tengtou village, in order to gain a better understanding of the ecotourism development within a broad local historical context.

The development of Tengtou village is closely related to the development of its agriculture. Tengtou village has experienced several main stages of agricultural development over the last 40 years. In the beginning of the 1960s, with basic human effort, Tengtou village carried out land reconstruction⁵⁰ independently, which largely increased the land output and solved most food problems. In the 1980s, Tengtou village practised specialised production of the land and set up collective farms, which were composed of large stock farms, vegetable and fruit farms, gardening farms, fresh water fish and shrimp farms. As a result, 90 percent of the labour force left the land to join the development of the secondary and the tertiary industries, as mentioned before.

At the end of the 1990s, Tengtou village committed itself to improve farmers' agricultural techniques, and set up a modern agricultural production pattern based on ecological agriculture and ecotourism tours, which successfully shifted the traditional agricultural model to highly technological, export-orientated, and economic agriculture. As a result, the productivity and the outcomes of agriculture have been promoted.

At the beginning of the 21st Century, Tengtou village cooperated with the Japanese

⁵⁰ Land reconstruction: The natural conditions of the land in Tengtou village were highly unfavorable, with uneven and low productive farmland. In order to improve the productivity of farmland to feed themselves, the villagers readjusted their farmland according to the local's certain topography, in order to make it even and can facilitate irrigation.

Yamatonoen Corporation in setting up Tengtou Seed and Seedling Company, Ltd. At the same time, the village cooperated with Zhejiang University and Agricultural Academy of Zhejiang Province to establish the Tengtou Plant Tissue Cultivation Center, which targets foreign exotic flowers and trees, as well as local vegetables, fruits and melons as research objects.

There is an old saying in China: “No agriculture no stability, while no industry no wealth”. As shown above, Tengtou village has made good use of its agricultural resources, but it has also developed industries such as the Feedstuff processing factory, a clothing enterprise, a small diamond factory and many other secondary industries since the 1970s. In 2004, Tengtou village established its industrial park zone. Currently, the zone houses a variety of industries, including a mature textile and clothing industry, green food processing and bamboo artworks, and an electronic communication industry.

Tertiary industry in Tengtou, which started in the 1990s and has developed rapidly, includes real estate, gardening, architecture and ecotourism. For example, the Garden and Landscape Project Company, which integrates seedling and flower planting, landscape project design and construction, has become a group enterprise with a first-class national technical qualification. Ecotourism, which distinguishes this small village, will be discussed in detail in the next section. It is estimated that in 2006, the tertiary industry of Tengtou has generated a gross output value of 0.739 billion Yuan, which occupies 32 percentage of the whole village’s total gross output (Office director, Tengtou Group Company, Ltd., personal communication, May 2007).

There is a popular saying within Tengtou village: “We want not only golden hills and silver hills, but also green mountains and dark green water”, which indicates the importance of pursuing both economic development and environmental protection. The local officials hold strong beliefs that the development of the village’s economy

should not be at the cost of its environment. Likewise, developing today's economy at the cost of future development is also not permitted.

Tengtou Environmental Protection Committee, which was the first and only environmental protection institution at the village level, has since 1994 rejected 23 industries that could make great profits, but had serious potential to cause pollution. Tengtou village also has built an environmental survey station to test the village's air quality regularly. Moreover, the local government invites the staff from the City Environmental Protection Bureau to test the village's water and noise quality regularly. On the other hand, Tengtou village has established many rules to regulate its villagers' basic behaviours, and has carried out a variety of activities to enhance the villagers' environmental awareness, such as inviting environmental protection experts to give lectures in the village, and disseminating and encouraging environmental protection knowledge through blackboards and display windows in the village.

5.2 Ecotourism development in Tengtou village

The preceding sections have provided background information about research village and its people, and briefly elaborated the historical process of the entire village's development. This section, in turn, will focus on discussing ecotourism specifically, in order to evaluate the extent to which the sustainability goals of ecotourism have been achieved.

5.2.1 The emergence of ecotourism in Tengtou village

Tengtou villagers started to protect their environment consciously very early, though during that time they had no idea of what the term "eco" meant. Land reconstruction in the 1960s was considered as laying a solid foundation for Tengtou's ecotourism development (Tengtou local officials, personal communication, May 2007). In 1991,

the ex-President of China, Jiang Zemin, visited Tengtou village and praised it as a great village (Ningbo Tengtou Group Company Ltd., n.d). In 1993, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program, Ms Elizabeth Dowdeswell, visited Tengtou. She commented that this village is one of the most beautiful villages she had ever seen in developing countries (Ningbo Tengtou Group Company Ltd., n.d). In the same year, Tengtou village was named as one of the “500 Best Ecological Spots of the Globe” by the United Nations (Ningbo Tengtou Group Company Ltd., n.d). This kind of honour was rewarded to places that have made a contribution to environmental protection.

The managers and planners of the ecotourism project, as well as the other local villagers believed that the visits from the ex-President of China, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Program promoted the later development of the ecotourism industry in Tengtou village. This is because after their visits, many national and local authority officials came to visit and inspect the village. Meanwhile, the number of tourists who came to admire Tengtou also increased. As noted by the ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company: “Some people discovered the village’s beauty, and the village grasped this chance to develop its ecotourism” (Personal communication, June 2007). The director of Tengtou Environmental Protection Committee goes further, claiming that Tengtou village successfully transformed its ecological advantages into political and economical advantages (Personal communication, May 2007). This sentiment is shared by other local officials who concluded that environmental protection can also be a kind of productive force.

Pre-1998 events led to the embryonic stage of ecotourism in Tengtou village. During that time, there was only a reception center dealing with tourism-related affairs, including receiving visitors, providing tea, food, meals, and promotional materials (e.g. video recordings), which were all free for tourists. The local government spent a large amount of money each year in welcoming these visitors. In order to cover the

local government's tourism-related expenditure, as well as to make connection with international ideas⁵¹, local officials decided to start an ecotourism project and build an ecotourism zone specifically. Subsequently, they conducted a meeting at the end of the same year, in which all the villagers attended and were encouraged to participate in tourism related businesses. In 1998, Tengtou village received the National Tourism Bureau's permission to initiate ecotourism. Three years later, the Tengtou Travel Company was established to operate the ecotourism project in a more formal and entrepreneurial way. In the following year, the village started to charge entrance money from tourists, and this amount increases year by year, growing gradually from 5 Yuan, to the current 50 Yuan. It can be seen from the following tables that during 1999 and 2001, there were only rough figures detailing the number of tourists; while since 2002, ecotourism earnings have started to be calculated (Table 5-1).

Table 5-1: Statistics about the number of tourists and economic earnings from 1999 to 2006, received by Tengtou reception center

Year	Number of tourists	Income from gate fee (Yuan)	Total revenues (Yuan)
1999	141,5000	n.a.	n.a.
2000	512,280 ⁵²	n.a.	n.a.
2001	564,000	n.a.	n.a.
2002	590,030	2.82million	12.03 million
2003	590,800	3.59 million	19.00 million
2004	600,000	5.26 million	25.01 million
2005	630,000	6.1 million	28.00 million
2006	762,000	10.6 million	45.00 million

Source: Tengtou Travel Company, 2007

⁵¹ Local officials pointed out the broad global social context in initiating ecotourism in Tengtou village, namely that during that time the world was moving towards an environmental protection movement, due to the increasing awareness of global environmental problems, such as the increasing problem of air pollution, the decrease of wetlands, and degeneration of species. Hence, the emergence of ecotourism was also considered as in line with similar environmentally-friendly trends internationally.

⁵² It can be seen from the above table that there is an unusual increase in the number of tourists from 1999 to 2000, which is due to the following factors. This is because 1999 was China's ecotourism year, and Tengtou government grasped this opportunity to promote the village's ecotourism. In addition, ecotourism in the form of an eco-village started to emerge at the end of the 1990s. Tengtou village, as one of the earliest eco-villages developed in China immediately attracted a great amount of people's attention. Meanwhile, the national government also energetically encouraged other local officials to visit Tengtou village.

Note: There is rapid growth in the income from gate fees and the total revenue, which is because the entrance fee increases year-by-year disproportionately. In addition, there are more and more middle-school and high school students visiting the ecotourism zone, as part of their school programme.

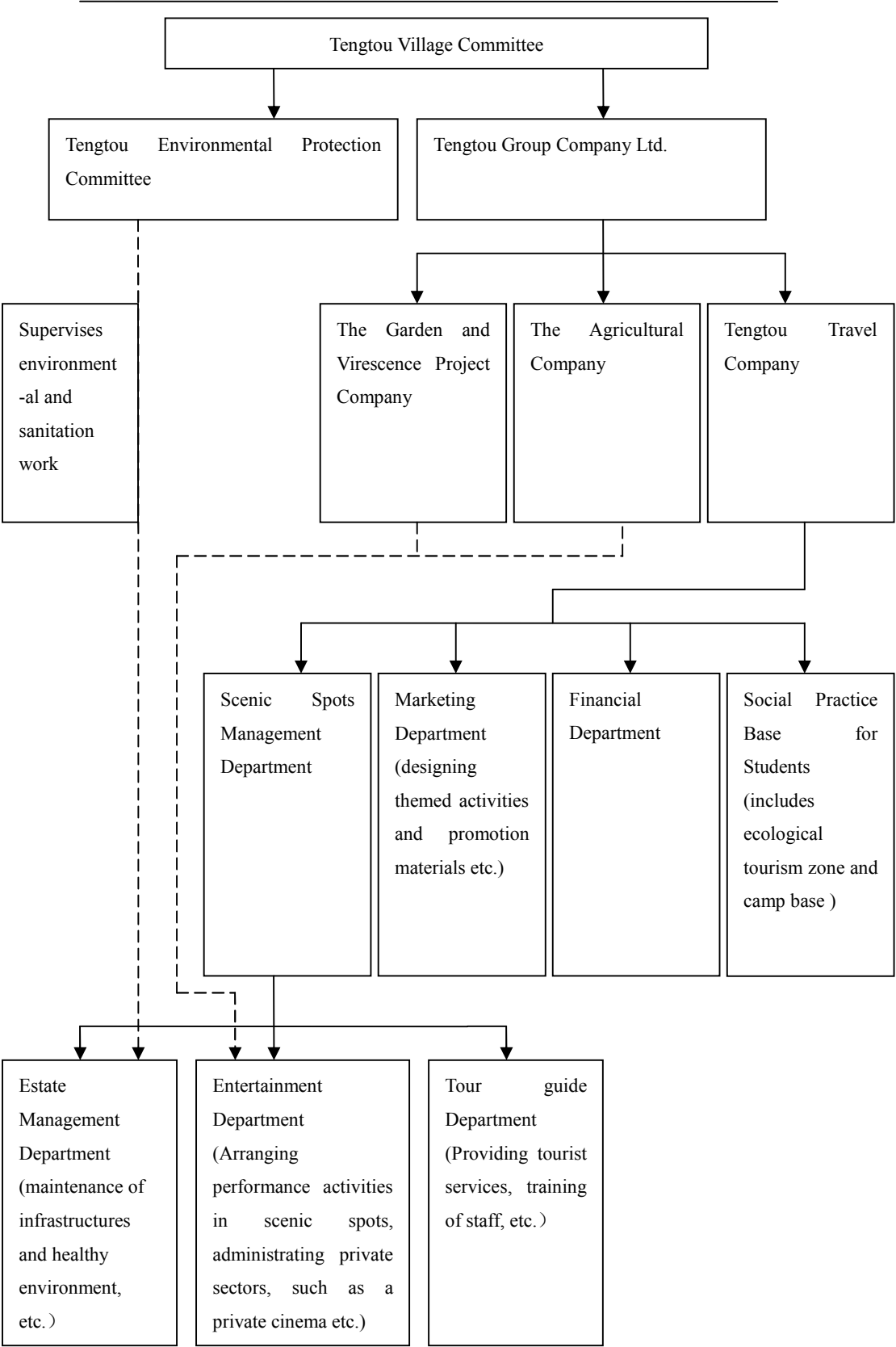
5.2.2 Management issues of ecotourism in Tengtou village

The Tengtou Travel Company is subordinate to Tengtou Group Company Ltd⁵³, which takes charge of all tourism-related affairs. The Travel Company has four main departments which manage tourism events. The revenues earned from the ecotourism industry, as well as from other industries, are handed in to the Tengtou Group Company, which is responsible for the distribution or management of all these earnings. The following institutional diagram (Figure 5-3) shows the institutions and departments involved in the tourism industry, and their subordinate relationships.

Ecotourism in the context of Tengtou village was perceived by the local officials as a kind of tourism that is pursuing human beings living in harmony with the ecological environment. The ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company further elaborated on this by maintaining that ecotourism should not only be considered as a form of tourism that is initiated within a good environment. In addition, it should be facilitated by high quality staff, and have constantly updated infrastructures, with aims to provide local residents with opportunities to raise their standard of living and quality of life (The ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company, personal communication, June 2007).

⁵³ Tengtou Group Company Ltd: is a collective enterprise that was established in 1992. This company is responsible for managing all industries within the village. Currently, the village has 37 enterprises, 4 industrial districts and more than 60 companies in a variety of industries. It is estimated that in 2006, Tengtou village generated a gross output value of 2.31 billion Yuan, with the profits reaching 239 million Yuan.

Figure 5-5: An institutional diagram of departments involved in the ecotourism project



Source: Author

Money to fund the ecotourism project initially came from the village itself (Office director, Tengtou Group Company, Ltd., personal communication, May 2007). The village practises a collective economy⁵⁴, and part of the economic revenues earned by industries was distributed to the Tengtou Group Company to develop ecotourism. Currently, the entrance fees earned from ecotourism are able to cover its costs, and the money used to invest in new ecotourism projects was partly from entrance fees and partly from accumulated revenues (Director of the Marketing Department, the Tengtou Travel Company, personal communication, May 2007).

The revenues and expenditures associated with ecotourism were identified through a review of the village's budget records and interviews with staff working at the management level (e.g. Chief Accountant of Tengtou Group Company and the Director of the Marketing Department in the Tengtou Travel Company). Basically, the revenues from ecotourism included entrance fees, remuneration of guides, shops, accommodation and restaurants. The expenditure was grouped into the following categories: paying operating costs (e.g. the payment for staff, purchase of official supplies, etc.) and maintenance fees⁵⁵, developing new ecotourism programmes, and contributing to donations⁵⁶. Further, part of the revenue is accumulated to support the village's general development along with revenue earned from other industries.

5.2.3 Tengtou village's ecotourism development and its characteristics

The ecological tour in Tengtou village is basically composed of three main parts: visiting the ecotourism zone, visiting the village and the potted plants garden⁵⁷. Tengtou Ecotourism Zone is the first AAAA tourism zone approved by the national government, and is called "park" by the local people (Fenghua Government, n.d.).

⁵⁴ Collective economy: is a kind of traditional economic practice that is common in many rural areas in China, where all the resources belong to the village, rather than being privately owned by individuals. Consequently, the revenues earned from industries also belong to the whole village.

⁵⁵ Maintenance fees: Tengtou village spends a certain proportion of money earned from ecotourism each year to maintain its clean and green environment, which includes planting trees and protecting water quality.

⁵⁶ There are three main groups of donations, namely, donations to the main city's charity organisation, donations to people who are struggling with their lives in the nearby areas, and donations through child sponsorship.

⁵⁷ See photo pages at the end of this chapter for pictures.

The original designer of this zone was the head of the village. Currently, the village has invited professionals from Tongji University to conduct on-going research in the village, in order to redesign more systematic and attractive tourist attractions that are in harmony with the original landscape.

As a small scale and locally initiated project, and due to the limited funds generated by the village itself, ecotourism in Tengtou village initially developed gradually year-by-year. The size of the ecotourism zone, the content of tourism programmes, the types of tourist attractions and the tourism related facilities have been upgraded. In order to promote ecotourism, all the industries moved away from the ecotourism zone, the methane station was destroyed, and the stock farm was removed due to the emission of an odorous smell. In 2002, after the local government started to charge an entrance fee, the village's ecotourism development began to rapidly take off. The village invested 10 million Yuan to initiate a project named the "Blue sky and green water project" (Ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company, personal communication, June 2007). This project modified the existing scenic spots and added many new tourist attractions, in order to encourage ecotourism development. In 2006, the parking area was further expanded from 2800 m² to the current 4200 m² (The Director of Marketing Department in the Tengtou Travel Company, personal communication, May 2007).

In order to attract more tourists, both the local government and the Tengtou Travel Company make great efforts in marketing and promotion by using different ways to promote the ecotourism product, mainly in the domestic tourism market. Documentaries were filmed and were shown to visitors in Tengtou's cultural exhibition hall. Meanwhile, brochures are available for distribution to tourists at tourist spots. Meetings with journalists, radio, and television people, to introduce the ecotourism project in the media are frequently conducted by the local officials and the manager of the Travel Company. There are also articles of introduction and advertisements in newspapers and magazines.

5.2.4 Ecotourism activities in Tengtou

Sightseeing, agricultural and cultural education, as well as participating in agricultural activities, are the main activities of ecotourism in Tengtou village. Specifically, there is a 1000 meter long orange tree forest within the ecotourism zone, with more than 130 different types of orange trees, and the name and function of each orange tree is written down on small stones beside the trees. A small ancient paper-making workshop and a display room exhibiting painting, calligraphy, carving and other artworks provide tourists with opportunities to appreciate the traditional culture; while the plant tissue cultivation center, which was established to exhibit the village's highly technological agricultural products and to share the production processes, also has an important educational function.

A scenic spot named the "farmer's paradise" provides tourists with opportunities to use traditional farm tools, such as field equipment. The design of such tourist attractions aims to promote understanding for tourists of the history and the processes of traditional agricultural production, as well as to provide tourists with a chance to experience rural physical exercise. In addition, tourists can also participate in other local traditional activities, like making lunar New Year's cake and ginger sugar, as well as picking organic fruits, flowers and vegetables.

Moreover, there are 500 pigeons in the square, and hundreds of wild ducks living in the ecotourism zone, which provide another spectacular form of attraction in Tengtou village. The original purpose of buying these pigeons was to set them free in the natural environment, rather than restricting them in cages (Local official, personal communication, May 2007). The willingness of these birds to stay within the village is considered as one of the indications to evaluate the quality of the village's environment (Director of Tengtou Environmental Protection Committee, personal communication, May 2007).

Further, it should be noted that school programmes also constitute another important

part of ecotourism practice. Tengtou village is a base for students' environmental education and extra-curricular activities (Tourist guide in Tengtou village, personal communication, May 2007). These students normally stay in Tengtou Student Field Practice Base for a week, which was established in November 1998, and can cater for more than 1000 people and accommodate more than 500 people.

5.2.5 Profiling the tourists in Tengtou village

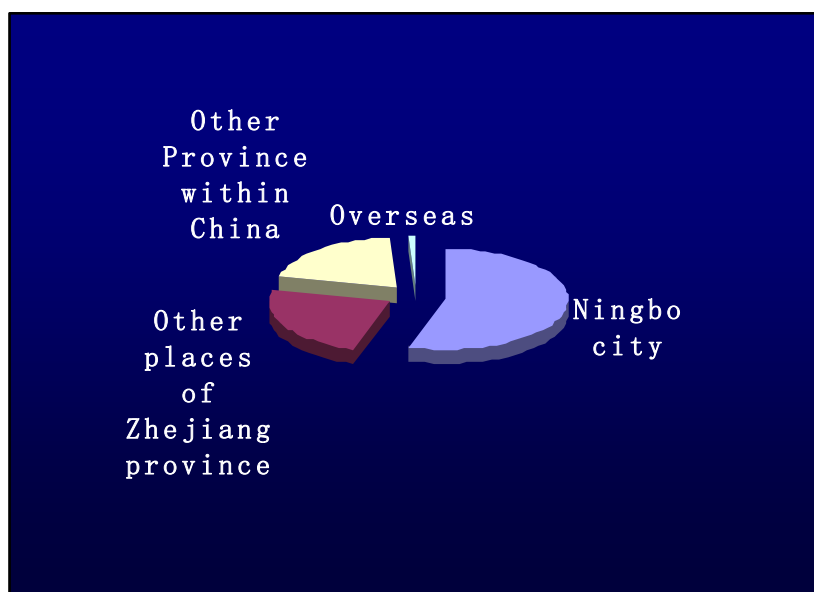
The foregoing section has considered the emergence of ecotourism in Tengtou village, its development process and characteristics, within which the management issues were also covered. This section will focus on exploring tourists' origins, their expectations of ecotourism, and purposes for visiting, in order to assist in analysing ecotourism sustainability in the next chapter. This is because the behaviour of tourists can largely influence the environmental and social sustainability of destination areas; while tourists' satisfaction can have a significant impact on the economic sustainability of host areas (Cater, 1994). The following will start with illustrating the key tourist characteristics, which were identified by the staff of the Tengtou Travel Company, other local permanent residents, and through my own participant observation.

As mentioned before (Section 5.2.1), tourists were initially comprised of officials and local leaders who visited the village for political reasons. However, currently, tourists derive from a variety of sources and include students, teachers, farmers, businessmen, professional people, parents with children, newly married couples, the retired and farmers from other villages. According to the introduction given by the director of the Marketing Department within the Travel Company, students occupy a large proportion of the total number of tourists who came to visit the village as part of their school programmes.

The majority of tourists were domestic, with more than half of the tourists coming

from the main city, Ningbo (Figure 5-4). In addition, it is estimated that 24 percent of the total population of tourists were from other places within Zhejiang province, which has 49.8 million populations (e.g. Hangzhou, Wenzhou, Shaoxing, etc.); while 20 percent of tourists came from other provinces within China (e.g. Shanghai, Beijing). There are a limited number of tourists from overseas, which comprise less than 1 percent of the total number of tourists. Another distinctive feature in considering the types of tourists in Tengtou village is that during weekends, the majority of tourists were from Ningbo city and travelled independently; while on the working days, the dominant type of tourists were those travelled in tour groups coming from quite far places, and were normally organised by schools, companies or local governments.

Figure 5-4: The proportions of tourists from different regions



Source: Based on data from the Tengtou Travel Company, 2007

Most tourists were identified as short stay visitors, except those who came to do research, attend meetings or visit relatives. The director of the Marketing Department within the Tengtou Travel Company admitted that encouraging tourists to lengthen their stay at the village is a big challenge Tengtou village currently faces (Personal communication, May 2007). As a result, the average spending of the

tourists was quite low, where the entrance fees cost the most. The balance of the expenditure was mainly used to buy lunch, soft drinks, ginger candy, and other special local products, which were all inexpensive. Further, like any other ecotourist attractions, ecotourism in Tengtou village also has evident seasonal characteristics: prime holiday weeks (such as 1st May to 7th May; 1st October to 7th October, and Chinese spring festivals), and March, April, and November were identified as the peak season.

The research showed that different tourists had their own different understanding of ecotourism, which was related to their educational background and reflected their expectations of an ecotourism venture. For example, ecotourism was conveyed by a middle-aged male teacher as a kind of tourism that differed from urban tourism, which provided a distinctive rural trait, favorable environment and a considerable level of green coverage. Some tourists who were from other local governments noted further that ecotourism should provide an opportunity for tourists to interact with local people, in order to learn something from each other. To those tourists who came from other rural areas and did not have a strong educational background, ecotourism was considered as a kind of travel experience providing them with an opportunity to view and admire the beauty of rural scenery, which differed from their own villages. This opportunity also enabled them to have a look at local people's daily activities.

Related to the varied understandings and expectations of ecotourism, the motivations behind tourists' visits were also diversified. Some independent tourists came to the village to seek relaxation. With the acceleration of the pace of urbanisation, people who lived in big cities felt stressed and tired, and were yearning for a kind of peaceful rural life to help them escape everyday pressures and psychological challenges. One middle-aged woman tourist said excitedly: "I like visiting this village, because working and living in cities, I always feel stressful, and in cities we cannot breathe such fresh air and the total area of green belt is relatively small compared with this village" (Personal communication, June 2007). Another young lady who was with her added

that they also felt it was fun to have a chance to take photos with the pigeons. This is because although people can see pigeons in cities, they never have a chance to be so close to them⁵⁸.

In addition, there are a certain number of tourists whose purposes when visiting were bound up in nostalgia and the desire to recapture a rural idyll⁵⁹ (Tourists, personal communication, June 2007). This finding was confirmed by a staff member who has been working in the ecotourism zone for the last five years, who noted that these tourists were mainly from cities and had previously worked in rural areas; hence, they had special feelings towards the countryside (Personal communication, June 2007). With a bittersweet longing for things and situations of the past, this type of tourist comes to visit rural areas in order to experience the rural lifestyles again as they once did (Tourists, personal communication, June 2007).

Those parents who came with their young children were largely motivated by the educational purpose of tourism here. In current modern society, children from urban areas are lacking knowledge about agricultural production and farmer's lives. Hence, many parents liked to bring children to this village, admiring, enjoying and experiencing rural scenery, as well as learning agricultural-type knowledge. Similarly, the motivation of those school pupils was to learn environmental protection knowledge, such as how to classify different types of garbage and how to test air quality.

Further, for those tourists who visited the village in tours, organised by either companies or local governments, their visits were often linked to the purpose of learning about the experiences of this village in developing its economy without

⁵⁸ In many cases, pigeons are fed within an enclosure and are commonly used as a cuisine for Chinese people. It is very unlikely that pigeons are comfortable in close encounter with humans so if pigeons are willing to stay in a place, the Chinese people think it is an encouraging sign of a benign relationship among the environment, birds and human beings.

⁵⁹ In the Chinese context, rural idyll means living a simple life in rural areas, practising basic agricultural activities, breathing fresh air, and enjoying green scenery, which is distinguished from the highly stressful and environmentally polluted urban lifestyle.

destroying its environment. These kinds of tourists also tended to have high expectations and were critical towards the current status of ecotourism development. For example, they wanted to know the management issues, rather than simply enjoying the eco-tours; and these tourists were also interested in exploring the daily lives of host populations more in depth, rather than the superficial aspects. A woman who came from the local government of another village remarked:

Ecotourism should aim towards the improvement of local people's lives, it is not good enough if only one person lives a good life alone, it is more desirable if that person's friends and relatives can also live good lives. Speaking of this point, Tengtou village is worthy of praise. The residents of this village show strong solidarity in developing their village. But we also want to know how the operational institutions work in this village. Our leader is trying to arrange a meeting with Tengtou local officials, so that we can ask more in-depth questions in considering the management issues of ecotourism development (Personal communication, May 2007)

5.3 Local people's perceptions and impressions of tourists and ecotourists

5.3.1 Local people's understanding of ecotourism

All the permanent residents of Tengtou village who participated in the interviews were familiar with the term "ecotourism", and some told me proudly that they knew their village was practising an ecotourism project, because tourists thought their village was clean and beautiful. However, as has been discussed in section 4.4.1, many participants could not explain clearly what "ecotourism" actually meant, and some admitted that they had never thought about this question before. An interview with an old woman revealed that many Tengtou villagers, especially the older residents, were not well-educated, and could not even speak and understand Mandarin. Hence, people were not always confident in voicing their thoughts. This participant told me further that she could not read or write, because in those days, her

village was very poor, and she had to do much farm work.

Local people were not confident in defining the term “ecotourism” fluently at the beginning of the interviews; however, they did do some thinking during the interviews and produced their own conceptualisations of the term. Among those who responded, the perception of ecotourism was largely linked to a good environment. Generally, these respondents shared similar feelings about ecotourism being a kind of tourism based on a sound environment and helping to protect the environment. For example, a forty year old female participant who works in local government said that: “Ecotourism, to my understanding, is a kind of tourism that is green and environmentally protective. It protects the ecological environment, and at the same time it also creates the ecological environment” (Personal communication, May 2007). Similarly, another old male participant also considered ecotourism as an environmentally protective industry that allows the local people to enjoy a sound living environment. The ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company maintained that:

It does not matter whether the local residents know the words “eco” or “ecotourism”. The important thing is that people do practice eco-activities in their daily life, and protecting the environment has become their instinctive activity or their habit unconsciously as times goes by (Personal communication, June 2007).

5.3.2 Local people’s involvement in ecotourism activities

After discussing participants’ perceptions of ecotourism, the following moves the focus towards local people’s participation in ecotourism. The earliest involvement of the local population, as mentioned earlier, was through a welcoming meeting where people were informed that their village would start to initiate ecotourism. In addition, the local villagers also participated in ecotourism in a variety of other ways. Firstly, because the Tengtou ecological zone is open to local people without paying any entrance fee, all the participants visited it. The old residents, in particular, went to the

park frequently in the early morning, doing exercises; while the working residents would sometimes have a walk in the park after dinner with their children, since young children love playing in the park. After the initiation of ecotourism, more entertainment facilities were established within the park for tourists, including swings, which have also become entertainment for local children. Local people thought they deserved to enjoy local resources for free, and they were quite satisfied with the current living environment. However, some residents also pointed out that they were really familiar with the park, and without any new tourist attractions, they gradually lost interest in visiting the park.

Secondly, local participation also manifested through people's involvement in diverse tourism-related employment. Ecotourism's development provides more job opportunities for local residents, which has been touched on in the previous section. Specifically, some villagers were working for the Tengtou Travel Company, such as working as tour guides or as gatekeepers; some were running their own businesses, such as restaurants and shops; and some signed contracts with the Tengtou Travel Company to plant vegetables, fruits or flowers within the ecotourism zone. One male shopkeeper within the ecotourism zone told me that his back had been injured, and he was unable to work in industries which required physical labour. After the village started with ecotourism, he was encouraged to operate a small shop, and this job was much easier with better earnings, compared with those workers working in the secondary industries. This person also mentioned that his wife also had secured a job with the Travel Company, though the payment was not so high.

Thirdly, the research found that a small proportion of local families provided a special feature to tourists, which was exhibiting their houses⁶⁰. Since the Travel Company could not afford to pay a large amount of money, only two families were selected each year. In addition, there was only one local household providing a guest

⁶⁰Local officials found that many tourists are curious about the residential property. Hence, they created a related tourism activity with local participation which allowed tourists to visit local houses. Tour groups and times are arranged by tour guides. These tours allow tourists to enquire about daily village life.

house to tourists. The hosts were an old couple, who told me the following:

Our children have their own house. We feel lonely sometimes living in such a big house, so we rent two rooms to tourists. When tourists move in, we can chat with them, and we like to chat with people from different places, sharing their experiences. Normally, villagers don't rent their rooms, because they prefer to live with their own family members, and of course, there are not many tourists staying in the village (Local household, personal communication, May 2007).

With the increasing number of tourists and their high expectations, local residents' interaction with tourists has become more frequent and involved. Many individual tourists liked to drop by and asked questions about local people's living standards. An old female participant told me happily that last year a young tourist, who was very curious about her village's dramatic development from a poor and dirty village to become such a clean and comfortable living environment, knocked on her door, and chatted with her with serious admiration. Another retired female resident shared her experience as a tour guide with great excitement:

One day, a young woman tourist from Ningbo city, I guess, according to her dialect, knocked at my door, and asked me whether I could accompany her to tour around the village, since it was expensive to hire a tourist guide for herself alone. I thought I was not busy; hence, I went with her and told her something I knew about my village. She was quite satisfied with my introduction, and we took a photo together for remembrance (Personal communication, May 2007).

Indeed, the research indicated that the local residents were quite familiar with tourist attractions, and they could easily inform the public of the normal schedule for eco-tours. However, a language barrier was revealed as a major problem in interacting with tourists from other provinces, especially for old people who always stayed at home during the day and therefore, had a greater chance to interact with tourists, compared to other residents. Several old local participants told me they could not speak Mandarin, hence, each time when they encountered tourists who

spoke Mandarin to them, they felt awkward and had no idea of how to respond. A young man who works in a local company explained that:

My mother likes chatting. If tourists were from Ningbo, or other areas nearby, that is not a big problem to communicate, since we share similar dialects, but if the tourists came from other places who were speaking Mandarin and with their heavy local accent, my mother gets a headache in talking with them (Personal communication, June 2007).

5.3.3 Local people's impressions and attitudes towards ecotourism

The above discussion has covered local people's conceptualisations of and involvement in the ecotourism venture. This section will sum up the general feelings amongst the local participants towards tourists and ecotourism, and the detailed impacts of ecotourism will be discussed in the next chapter, in considering the sustainability of the ecotourism industry. The research revealed that most of the local residents interviewed held neutral or positive attitudes towards tourists; likewise, local people also had a very optimistic perspective towards the whole ecotourism project. When asking about local people's impression of tourists, it was found that almost all of the local participants interviewed thought that a large proportion of tourists were well educated and polite, especially those from cities.

The participants mentioned that their village was so clean and beautiful that normally tourists would feel ashamed if they littered anywhere. However, it cannot be denied that there were a small number of tourists who did litter. When such a situation occurred, many local participants told me that they would pick up rubbish by themselves, and some would also politely remind tourists to clean up next time. A large proportion of the local residents who participated in the research believed that those tourists who littered could be guided towards fostering good habits.

To summarise, the local residents have the strong belief that ecotourism will generate

broad-based benefits for their village. When asked whether ecotourism in their village was good or bad, the majority of the participants gave the answer of “good” without hesitation, especially the old villagers. A sentence was used by nearly half of the participants when answering the question “Do you think ecotourism can bring you any benefits?” — “Yes, ecotourism can bring benefits to our village, and if our village could get benefits, we can also get benefits.” Although there was an awareness of potential and existing negative impacts of ecotourism identified by the participants, such as waste pollution, noise pollution, and disruption of daily lives, this did not affect the overall positive impressions of ecotourism. Consequently, the villagers wanted more tourists to visit in future.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the case study area, Tengtou village in China, which serves as a context within which to explore the relationship between sustainable development and ecotourism. The main findings of the fieldwork conducted in this village were presented. The research explored the emergence of ecotourism in Tengtou, and discussed its characteristics. According to the local population’s own interpretation, ecotourism was largely perceived as an environmentally protective industry, which, in turn, helps to protect and beautify the village’s environment. The research has also shown that the most of the residents interviewed had neutral or positive impressions of ecotourism. Although there was an awareness of potential and existing negative impacts of ecotourism, local participants still hold affirmative attitudes towards ecotourism and its further development. Altogether, in the view of the people of Tengtou village, ecotourism could assist in achieving sustainable development in their village.

The next chapter will focus on looking at whether the current level of ecotourism development in Tengtou village can contribute to the local sustainable development, and how this can be achieved, by using the framework that has been produced in the

literature review chapters. This will be achieved by taking into account this chapter's findings, in considering local people's understanding of ecotourism and the way the ecotourism practice is approached in this particular research area. Further, the impacts of ecotourism, which have been mentioned briefly in this chapter, will be discussed in length in the following chapter, in order to analyse whether the practice of ecotourism can move Tengtou towards sustainability.

Photo page 1: Images of Tengtou village and tourist attractions within the ecotourism zone

Photo 1: Old houses in row



Photo 2: Villa style houses



Photo 3: Ancient paper making workshop



Photo 4: Staff member feeding pigeons



Photo 5: Making manual ginger candy



Photo 6: Wild ducks within the ecotourism zone



**Photo page 2: Images of agricultural related
tourist attractions in Tengtou village**

Photo 7 Plant demonstration areas



Photo 8 Crop planting areas



Photo 9 Potted plants garden



Photo 10 Traditional field equipment



Photo 11 Plant tissue cultivation center



6. CHAPTER SIX: ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TENGTOU VILLAGE

Chapter 5 detailed ecotourism development in Tengtou village and its characteristics, within which tourists' origins and motivations, as well as local people's interpretations of, involvement in and attitudes towards ecotourism, were also covered. This chapter will take a closer look at these research findings, in order to analyse whether ecotourism in Tengtou village is a viable vehicle to contribute to local sustainable development, in light of the research framework and context outlined in the literature review chapters. This chapter consists of four sections: firstly, redefining the notion of ecotourism according to the local people's own understandings, in comparison with those conceptualised by the existing ecotourism literature; secondly, investigating the sustainability of ecotourism in Tengtou village through examining its economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts; thirdly and fourthly, in turn, identifying the specific factors that enable or limit the prospect of ecotourism to contribute to the village's sustainable development.

6.1 Interpretations of “ecotourism” in Tengtou village

As the literature review revealed, there is a wide range of definitions of ecotourism, based on a variety of contexts and perspectives. It is worth exploring the research participants' own conceptualisation of ecotourism, in order to be able to assess ecotourism's impacts more practically. This is because the understanding of the term can reflect local people's and decision makers' aspirations, and will also influence the way ecotourism is implemented to achieve its perceived expectations. Based on the review of the definition of ecotourism in Chapter 2, it can be seen that the majority of studies, including those by Beeton (1998), Blamey (1997), Orams (1995), as well as Wearing and Neil (1999), to name a few, assume the practice of

ecotourism takes place in relatively undisturbed natural environments, especially in relation to wildlife. Accordingly, the main ecotourism destinations are largely reduced to forest parks, nature reserves and protected areas. More recently, commentators like Gibson et al. (2003), Higham and Lück (2002), as well as Weaver (2006), challenge the limitations of conventional definitions of ecotourism by extending the destinations of ecotourism operations from the narrowly nature-based environments to modified areas, reclaimed sites, urban environments and the like.

The research in Tengtou village conveyed that the interpretation of ecotourism by the local population differed from the majority of the prevailing literature which emphasised natural attractions as the key dimension. This is because the main attractions of ecotourism in this research field are basically an artificial park and the environmentally healthy image of the village, rather than distinctive natural landscape or famous historic sites. Based on interviews with the ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company, local officials, and other local residents, it appears that overall there is fairly broad consensus that ecotourism does not necessarily need to be a form of nature-oriented travel. Rather, it is regarded by them as a type of tourism that is careful about its impact on the environment, no matter whether it is natural or modified. In other words, a sound environment is considered as a crucial element of ecotourism by local participants in conceptualising their own views of the notion of ecotourism:

Ecotourism in our village is due to the sound environment. Since we have a beautiful park, and the whole village is beautifully clean, the number of tourists coming to visit our village increases. See, all the streets are cleaned twice a day, and all these flowers and trees are well looked after by certain staff (A retiree, personal communication, May 2007).

As such, the understanding of ecotourism in the context of Tengtou village reflects Tisdell's (1996) classification of 'environmentally sensitive tourism', as discussed in Chapter 2. Meanwhile, the results of this research show support for suggestions

proposed by those more recent ecotourism writings, by arguing that the destination areas of ecotourism can be expanded beyond a variety of nature reserves or pristine nature-based areas, to the natural rural scenery, manufactured parks, green land and other scenic spots with carefully protected environments. The significance of an environmental dimension in defining ecotourism shows in the findings is in line with the prevailing ecotourism literature, such as Lindberg et al. (1997), Weaver (2001), and many others. Therefore, it can be argued that aside from focusing on the natural environment as the vital component of ecotourism, the interpretations of ecotourism in the research suggest that it shares similarities with other dimensions, such as those identified by the conventional ecotourism literature, especially in emphasising ecotourism's environmental protection and educational roles.

Moreover, in the context of Tengtou village, local participants also mentioned that pursuing human beings living in harmony with their living environment is a distinctive theme that characterises their village's ecotourism. Such an understanding indicates that ecotourism is not merely pursued as a matter of presenting beautiful scenery from several tourist attractions to attract tourists. It is also about working towards a kind of friendly relationship between local people and their surrounding environment. Ross and Wall (1999) mirror the view that ecotourism is justified on the basis that it pays particular attention to fostering symbiotic relationships between natural areas and local populations.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that as mentioned in Chapter 3, it is typical for ecotourism practised in China to involve a large number of tourists and with a highly modified entertainment infrastructure. This is also the case in Tengtou, which, to some extent, may not meet Western views of the definition of ecotourism, but may be appropriate given the large numbers of domestic tourists for which China must cater. As discussed in Chapter 2, Western countries attach great importance to the environmental and social-cultural aspects of ecotourism, which justifies the small scale and limited infrastructure development as the ideal ecotourism. However, in

the context of China, due to its large population, it is more realistic and desirable to practise large scale ecotourism. Thus, the development of a wide range of tourism-related infrastructure is also necessary, in order to meet the needs of tourists and bring sufficient tangible benefits to local people.

6.2 Does ecotourism contribute to local sustainable development?

The above discussion analysed the definitions of ecotourism in the context of Tengtou village, in comparison with interpretations provided by the current ecotourism literature. This section goes on to investigate the feasibility of ecotourism in implementing sustainable development, through considering its impacts on the village and villagers. Due to the limited time frame, this research has mainly focused on collecting ecotourism related data, while detailed information in considering the research populations' own perceptions of the meaning of "sustainable development" was not generated. Therefore, the theoretical framework for researching and evaluating the achievement of sustainable development by means of ecotourism was generated from the literature review in Chapter 2. This guides the case study evaluation.

Economic viability, environmental protection and socio-cultural appropriateness were three main dimensions referred to by authors like Alexander and Whitehouse (2004), Buchsbaum (2004), and Wall (1997), in evaluating the sustainability of ecotourism projects. These dimensions aligned closely to Elliott's (2006) three principles of sustainable development, as seen in Chapter 2, which produced a framework identifying the sustainability goals of ecotourism. This framework has thus been used to guide this evaluation into whether ecotourism can yield sustainable development in the case study area, by comparing with those possible consequences revealed in the research area. The following table summarises the impacts of ecotourism in Tengtou village, which will be examined in detail.

Table 6-1: Impacts of ecotourism identified by local participants

Economic impacts	Social-cultural impacts	Environmental impacts
<p><u>Positive impacts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increases employment opportunities for local residents - ecotourism directly creates jobs for tour guides, staff of the ecotourism zone, etc. - ecotourism indirectly creates jobs through tourist demands for food, accommodation, souvenirs, etc, which in turn drives the development of tourism related industries * Helps complement other activities and diversity in the local economy * Upgrades local infrastructure, such as public toilets, electricity (e.g. street lamps) and roads * Increases additional income to local residents - through the distribution of economic revenues of ecotourism directly since 2002 - through renting houses to outsiders who are currently working in the village - through renting land to the local government 	<p><u>Positive impacts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Improves social welfare (similar to the improved infrastructure) * Boosts the reputation of the village * Builds up local people's confidence, self-esteem, pride, and dignity * Encourages inter-village communication and appreciation * Improves health and contribute to improvement of well-being * Increases enjoyment of tourist attractions by local people for free 	<p><u>Positive impacts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Promotes environmental protection and improves quality of living environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - substitutes environmentally destructive industries - annually, a certain amount of economic revenues earned from ecotourism development is used for the maintenance of the existing green areas * Provides environmental education and helps foster healthy attitudes and behaviours towards nature, especially among students. * Increases public environmental awareness and directs people towards appropriate behaviours <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improves local people's environmental protection consciousness, as well as subtly influences previously uncivilised behaviours of tourists and people from other places working in this village
<p><u>Negative impacts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Limited incomes earned from the ecotourism industry, especially during the low season * Increases food prices sold in the village (a few local residents mentioned). 	<p><u>Negative impacts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Disrupts daily life * Inconveniences local people's movement with traffic jams, especially those working residents. Meanwhile, increasing number of cars is particularly dangerous to old residents and children who walk in the streets. * Language barriers can inhibit effective communications between tourists and local residents 	<p><u>Negative impacts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increases air pollution and noise pollution by increasing number of cars * Potential for over carrying capacity * Increases amount of waste disposal * Environmental pollution caused by inappropriate behaviour of some tourists * Potential for increase in a series of environmental problems via expanding of parking areas and other tourism related infrastructure.

Source: Author

6.2.1 Economic sustainability of ecotourism in Tengtou village

This section starts by looking at the impacts of ecotourism from an economic perspective to assess its prospects in contributing to local sustainable development. The research found that ecotourism development in Tengtou village has several economic benefits, both directly and indirectly. By quoting the words of the ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company: “Ecotourism development promotes local economic development and efficiently solves the remaining unemployment issue of the village” (Personal communication, June 2007). Specifically, one of the direct economic impacts of ecotourism is that it provides more job opportunities for both local people and people from neighbouring villages. This positive economic benefit was widely cited in the ecotourism literature (Beeton, 1998; Lindberg, 2000; and Weaver, 2001). Due to the dramatic rise in ecotourism, workers were obviously needed to fill positions in the emerging restaurants, hotels, and other related businesses in Tengtou village. As mentioned in Chapter 5, approximately 20 percent of local villagers are involved in jobs that are related to the ecotourism industry directly and indirectly. Meanwhile, the size of these hotels and local restaurants are increasing year by year. Chinese authors like Fu (2006) and Mu (2002) take a closer look at the significant role played by ecotourism in creating more job opportunities for agricultural populations, by arguing that ecotourism can help to solve problems of surplus labour. This is the case in this specific context of Tengtou village.

In addition to the generation of employment, another local economic benefit from ecotourism can be reflected in the forms of sharing in the distribution of revenue. Local residents can get a certain amount of money from the Tengtou Travel Company. This policy started two years ago, but increased dramatically from 700 Yuan to 2000 Yuan. These revenues were not distributed earlier because at first the government invested a great amount of money in developing ecotourism. Also, local residents were not stakeholders of the ecotourism project, since they did not invest any money in it. Hence, they were happy the revenue has been shared with them.

Moreover, local residents can earn benefits through renting their houses to the outsiders. As mentioned previously, the emergence of ecotourism has increased more job opportunities for the outsiders to work in Tengtou village. Due to the village's sound environment and growth of industries, there are a sizeable number of migrant workers living in Tengtou village. These temporary residents made contributions to Tengtou village's development and increased the local people's income through renting their old houses.

Meanwhile, local residents can also obtain rental fees from the local government due to their farm land being rented by the government. The amount of rental fees is relatively small, and there were differing interpretations of whether or not it is adequate. Nevertheless, it can not be denied that ecotourism development in Tengtou village promoted productive use of land, and increased the farmers' incomes. As mentioned in Chapter 5, prior to the development of ecotourism, many local villagers had already worked in secondary industries, which left a large amount of land unused:

If the local government could give us more rent, it would be good. I am working in the clothing company, and have no time to look after the land. Since the land is left unused, by renting it to the government, at least we can earn some additional money without working (A male participant, personal communication, May 2007).

Meanwhile, farmers had to go to markets and sell their products by themselves in the old days, often receiving low prices. However, today, all the land is fully utilised and farmers can directly sell their products to tourists, at relatively high prices. This is because tourists are looking for more natural or green food produced by the local people, such as the locally produced eggs, pears, and cucumbers.

As has been highlighted in Chapter 2, a substantive ecotourism literature reveals that in many developing countries, ecotourism can deprive the local people from practising their traditional activities, for example, extraction of natural resources

may become illegal. This is the case in Khao Yai National Park of Thailand, the Royal Chitwan National Park of Nepal, Tortuguero National Park in Costa Rica, as well as Jiangfengling and Diaoluoshan regions of China (Stone & Wall, 2003; Wall, 1997; Weaver, 1998). The problem of pursuing environmental conservation at the cost of local people's traditional use of natural resources, as brought by ecotourism, is also addressed by Tihagale (2004), citing the Pilanesberg National Park in as an example. By comparison, in the case of Tengtou village, the initiation of ecotourism does not either deplete local people's previous economic base or result in reduced access to resources for them. Instead, all farmers can continue to farm, but under a unified management system.

Further, another indirect economic benefit derived from ecotourism is manifested in terms of the upgrade of local public infrastructures, such as broadening the roads, increasing number of street lights, increasing level of local security, and improvement of the quality and quantity of public toilets, which also can be classified as social benefits. Taking the refurbishment of old houses as another example, this is portrayed by a retired woman:

Our old houses were built about 30 years ago, and during that time, these houses were not neat and unified. After ecotourism development, our government renovated these old houses and refurbished them each year, in order to make them look tidy and to give tourists a good impression (Personal communication, June 2007).

This finding supports Beeton's (1998) view by arguing that ecotourism can promote improvements in the quality of local facilities and infrastructure. An interview with a group of residents further revealed that Tengtou's ecotourism development has brought benefits to the adjacent villages. A woman who was in her late sixties informed me proudly that:

Ecotourism is good. Xiao Qiao village had the problem of regular power cuts before; it is our village helped them to solve this problem. Our Tengtou village also invested money to help the neighbouring villages to construct concrete roads (Personal

communication, May 2007).

On the other hand, the case study also identified several concerns in considering the economic aspects of sustainability. Firstly, the economic earnings gained from ecotourism are fairly limited, as mentioned by many local participants. Compared with those famous nature based ecotourism destinations in China, such as Jiuzhaigou and Mountain Huang, the number of tourists and the entrance fees charge are comparatively small. Meanwhile, due to the short stay nature of tourists, the consumption level of tourists is also relatively low. Low level of spending by tourists and the low probability of tourists' return to the village are challenges that will curtail the economic earnings for the village and villagers. The problem of insufficient profit generated from ecotourism industries to local people is also highlighted by authors like Cater (2006), Hass (1997) and Wall (1997), as an important concern that can weaken ecotourism's economic viability.

In addition, the seasonality of ecotourism also discourages the generation of economic benefits. For example, it was estimated that there were 92,800 tourists visiting Tengtou village during October, 2006; while there were only about 48,320 visitors during December, 2006. The owner of a local restaurant also pointed out that during the peak visiting periods almost all the seats are taken and the revenue is higher; while during the low season only a couple of tables are occupied. Although the seasonal nature of ecotourism does not lead to unemployment occurring in the low season, it can mitigate against the overall economic sustainability of ecotourism development. Further, another concern of the negative economic impact brought by ecotourism, as identified by a small number of local participants, is that ecotourism has led to increasing prices of foods sold in the local market, presumably due to increased demand from tourists.

6.2.2 Environmental sustainability of ecotourism in Tengtou village

Environmental advantages were widely recognised as the most distinctive benefit by the majority of the local participants. Almost all the respondents justified their support for increased ecotourism in terms of environmental benefits. There are a variety of considerable environmental benefits to the village and the villagers, with some differing from those identified in the ecotourism literature. Closely related to the conventional definition of ecotourism, a substantial number of studies (Alexander & Whitehouse, 2004; Lindberg, 2000; Weaver, 2001) consider the conservation of natural areas as one of the significant advantages of ecotourism. This is not the case in Tengtou village, where the ecotourism was not based on presentation of nature. Nevertheless, the research findings as discussed in Chapter 5, revealed that ecotourism in the research area does contribute to environmental protection, but for different reasons. Specifically, the local government spends a certain proportion of money in maintaining the whole village as clean and green (e.g. employing a large number of people planting trees, doing cleaning, improving the sanitation facilities, etc.). The careful environmental protection is also reflected in terms of testing the quality of air, water and noise frequently, in order to detect the environmental problems early and to adopt necessary strategies efficiently.

The local participants commented that their village had a good environment before the initiation of ecotourism; however, ecotourism's development made their village more beautiful and clean. One elderly man explains his attitude towards ecotourism:

Ecotourism is good. After ecotourism's development, more trees were planted, which makes the air of my village so fresh. In summer, the average temperature here is normally two centigrades lower than the temperature in the city. The more important thing is that such a comfortable living environment is not only good for our villagers' health, but can also benefit our next generations (Personal communication, June 2007).

Other regulations help to facilitate the environmental sustainability of the village as a

whole, including the prohibition of fuel-based cooking⁶¹, and the distribution of rubbish bags among residents to strengthen the solid waste disposal system. In addition, scientific research into the improvement of the ecotourism zone and the whole village is carried out, in cooperation with Tongji University in Beijing. The research includes detailed work into a wide range of areas, such as the carrying capacity of the river system, the specific landforms of the village, the level of current public infrastructure development, the appropriateness of the usage of land, solid waste disposal systems, the scenic landscape and sanitation management. The main underlying guiding principle of ecotourism development is to create a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, meeting both local people's and tourists' satisfaction.

Another positive environmental impact of ecotourism lies in the fact that its development provides an environmentally sound alternative to those industries that have no longer been seen as environmentally appropriate for the village. This finding confirms authors like Beeton's (1998) and Lindberg's (2000) ideas in considering ecotourism as a useful tool in providing environmentally protective alternatives to destructive industries. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, after the initiation of ecotourism, the diamond factory, stock farm and methane station were moved out, due to different levels of pollution. Local officials considered ecotourism as an environmental protection industry, and believed that the development of ecotourism is more beneficial than other industries that can cause a variety of pollution over time: "The intangible value of 1 Yuan gained by ecotourism industry is far more than 10 Yuan earned by the secondary industries" (Personal communication, June 2007).

Further, ecotourism is believed to foster environmental awareness among tourists and the local population (Blamey, 2001). The environmental education role of

⁶¹In many rural areas of China, people use direct combustion of biomass fuels (e.g. dung, crop residues and fuel wood), or coals in inefficient and polluting equipment, as their main cooking and heating fuels, which can lead to serious environmental pollution, rather than relying on electricity.

ecotourism is identified as an important tool in facilitating sustainable development (Tlthagale, 2004; Orams, 1995). The findings of this research support this statement. As has been discussed in Chapter 5, many respondents treasured their current green and clean living environment, and believed that tourists would also cherish such an environment. Meanwhile, the local participants also specified that their environmentally protective life styles have helped to direct temporary residents and tourists towards appropriate, environmentally sensitive behaviours.

The positive environmental impacts brought by ecotourism were quite evident to almost all of the local participants in Tengtou village. However, the increasing number of tourists also has the potential to bring some adverse environmental impacts, though these environmental problems are not as serious as those identified within the nature based ecotourism destinations. Specifically, the majority of tourists were identified as well behaved; however, there were cases where tourists misbehaved themselves in terms of destroying flowers, trees and potted plants, as well as littering. There was also more waste produced after the initiation of ecotourism. This problem was worse during the peak season, which increased the cleaners' work load. A worker responsible for transporting all the daily rubbish to the nearest town's waste disposal terminal made the following comment: "After the village initiated ecotourism, the amount of daily rubbish increased heaps, compared with the previous year" (Personal communication, May 2007). The problem of increasing solid waste disposal is also addressed in the literature by Han and Ren (2001), Stem et al. (2003), and Tisdell (1996).

In addition, the growth of ecotourism also increased the levels of contamination in terms of noise pollution. For example, the music fountain and entertainment playgrounds start to play music when the ecotourism zone opens. Some participants whose houses are close to the ecotourism zone mentioned that this disruption prevented them from having a good nap during the afternoon. Meanwhile, the growing number of tourists also increases the level of noise pollution, through the

increasing size of traffic.

Moreover, the research found that the expansion of the parking area⁶² and the establishment of tourism related entertainment facilities (Children's playground, Three-D cinema, and theme park), in order to attract increasing numbers of tourists and meet their demands, can have potentially negative impacts on the environment if their further development is without any restriction. Taking the parking area as an example, although its expansion did not cause any removal of flora and fauna, the more cars parked, the more exhaust fumes will be produced, hence, from a long term perspective, the growing capacity of the parking area can bring serious air pollution, and noise pollution, which is also detrimental to the local residents' health.

On the other hand, the emergence of an increasing number of entertainment facilities invested in by individual persons, were found as not necessarily fitting the theme of ecotourism. The establishment of recreational facilities is quite common in other destination areas within China, which is used to assist tourism industries in generating more revenue. However, if these entertainment facilities expand without any strict regulations, they can reduce ecotourism to eco-sell tourism⁶³. To some extent, it can be argued that local officials do not always support the sustainable development of the environment consistently, since they were not aware of the potentially indirect negative impacts on the environment of these other entertainment facilities, and focused too much on attracting tourists and encouraging them to spend more money locally. The negative environmental problems caused by the expansion of massive infrastructure construction, are also addressed by writers like Tisdell (1996), Weaver (2001), and Young (2006). Ceballos-Lascurain (1993) suggests that the construction of physical buildings should be kept at a suitable level, in order to

⁶² It should be noted that during weekends, tourists normally come to visit the village by using their own cars; while during other days, visitors tend to join tour groups and come to visit the village by taking tour buses. There are limited numbers of people coming to Tengtou in public transportation. Thus, the parking area is sometimes not big enough during the peak season.

⁶³ In many cases, the term 'ecotourism' is misused. Tourism operators label tourism as 'ecotourism', but without actually implementing its theoretical principles. In other words, tourism, prefixed with 'eco' is merely used as a marketing tool to attract tourists, in order to increase interest and sales.

ensure the appropriate performance of tourism services, while not undermining the quality of environment at the same time.

Further, another potentially adverse environmental impact of ecotourism is related to the carrying capacity problem. The local government has adopted strategies like reducing the visiting time⁶⁴, using tour guides to regulate tourists' behaviours, and creating four entrances to the ecotourism zone, in order to reduce visitor pressure on the main road, and to minimise the negative environmental problems. However, there is no strict rule on the number of tourists. Since ecotourism in Tengtou village is not based on pristine environments, the tourists' visits may not bring any serious environmental problems as have occurred in sensitive fragile areas. Meanwhile, the local residents' perception of and tolerance towards crowding are found as quite generous, with only a small proportion of local participants mentioning several social concerns lightly, which will be covered in the next section. Nevertheless, in considering the finite area of the ecotourism zone and the whole village, as well as the small size of local people, the growing number of tourists can pose a challenge for the local environment, and consequently reduce the quality of tourists' experiences. Hence, if the number of tourists continues to grow rapidly without any control, there will be a danger that environmental carrying capacities will be unintentionally exceeded due to a rapid growth rate of tourists, especially during the peak season.

The carrying capacity problem has also been noticed by authors such as Croy and Hogg (2003), Steam et al. (2003), and Weaver (1998), as a drawback of ecotourism that can threaten environmental and socio-cultural sustainability. Hence, the capacity of ecotourism in Tengtou village to fulfill sustainable development in the future will, to a large degree, depend upon the ability of managers to implement effective policies to regulate the number of tourists. Otherwise, the increasing number of

⁶⁴ In considering the possibilities of problems of tourist congestion and negative environmental impact, the tour guides normally restrict the touring time for each tourist attraction.

tourists will eventually reduce ecotourism to uncontrolled mass tourism. In contrast, in the case of Galapagos, Ecuador, the problem of carrying capacity is well managed through distributing tourists in small groups among sites and by increasing the cost of visitor fees (Nolan & Nolan, 1997).

6.2.3 Social-cultural sustainability of ecotourism

In addition to the aforementioned economic and environmental impacts, ecotourism in the study area also has contributed to several social-cultural impacts, both positively and negatively. The first social advantage of ecotourism is that the ecotourism zone is accessible to the local population for free, and the permanent residents living in the Tengtou village can breathe the fresh air and view the beautiful scenery every morning. In other words, ecotourism development in Tengtou village enhances local people's enjoyment of their living environment. As suggested by Cater (1994), an important element of true participation practised by sustainable ecotourism should encompass local people's enjoyment of their own natural attractions. This is the case in Tengtou village, where the local villagers are enjoying their local resources for free, and people are satisfied with the current living environment. Meanwhile, local people can also enjoy the additional income brought by tourists. Further, the research findings also indicated that local people believed that the sound environment was not only good for their health, but also could bring benefits to their next generation in the future. This potential social advantage of ecotourism in improving the local people's health is also acknowledged by MacKenzie (2004). Hence, the majority of local residents had a good impression of ecotourism and tourists. This advantage brought by ecotourism can be considered as a distinctive strength in contributing to the village's social sustainability, since the negative sentiments among local people towards tourism can ruin the whole industry (Long, 1993).

In the case of Tengtou village, there is no evidence of resentment sentiment shared

by local people towards tourists. In contrast to this research, other studies have found that in many cases, the initiation of ecotourism has often undermined local people's livelihood, and reduced their access to their own resources, which consequently triggered local residents' discontent and even antagonism towards tourists and ecotourism projects (Lindberg & McKercher, 1997; Stone & Wall, 2003; Weaver, 2001). The resentment arising among these poor local populations towards ecotourism projects is detrimental to social sustainability. At the same time, it can also lead to a reduced number of tourists and subsequently restrict economic revenue. This point has also been mentioned in the section 6.2.1, in considering the economic impact of ecotourism.

Secondly, as mentioned in Chapter 5, a number of respondents pointed out that there were many tourists who felt envy and admiration towards the quiet and clean living place where the villagers resided. Some local participants pointed out that many tourists came to visit their village with respect, and the appreciation of their villagers' past several years' hard work. Accordingly, the local villagers gained a sense of pride in showing off their village. Examples of such positive contributions have also been documented for Thailand (Ross & Wall, 1999). Indeed, ecotourism has brought a good reputation to Tengtou village, and enhanced both the local government and other ordinary local residents' self-esteem and pride. This point reflects Scheyvens's (1999) framework of empowerment in analysing the impacts of ecotourism, especially in forms of social and psychological empowerment. As one of the local officials commented, economic benefits gained from ecotourism are very limited; however, the value of the ecotourism industry does not only lie in its revenue gained from entrance fees, the intangible assets achieved from ecotourism are substantial (Personal communication, June 2007). This was a sentiment shared by other local residents:

Ecotourism is good, although money is not enough. We were ashamed of our village's poor and dirty image before. Now we are proud of our village, and can communicate confidently with outsiders. When people hear about Tengtou village, they

spontaneously relate it with ecological village and harmonious living environment (A 40-year-old female local resident, personal communication, May 2007).

Many tourists are quite interested in the great changes that our village has experienced within the last 40 years, I am so proud to be a Tengtou villager...you know our village was once so poor, now everything has changed. Many people who come from cities said if the outsiders were allowed to buy houses in our village, they would be very willing to live in this beautiful place. Yes, our village is a good place to live (An elderly male participant, personal communication, May 2007).

Another point that comes to light in this study is that ecotourism provides opportunities for local people to meet and have contact with tourists. The communications between the local residents and tourists are rewarding to both the tourists who want to learn more about local people's lives, and the local residents who can learn new things from tourists. The local participants gave examples of particular cases in which some tourists who were undergraduate students, helped them to repair their electrical appliances and to examine their health conditions:

Last year, several undergraduate students came to visit our village, and they helped me to fix my TV, when they found it could not receive clear signals. My eyes cannot see clearly, so normally I only listen to the news. The pictures of TV do not bother me much. They are very nice (A retired female participant, personal communication, June 2007).

In addition, the increasing level of interaction with tourists also improves local people's self-confidence. A middle-aged male participant who worked in the real estate company told me that the villagers have met so many different tourists from different backgrounds, hence, people felt quite confident in talking to tourists. This is not like other villagers where the local villagers are very shy when outsiders try to communicate with them. Similarly, a young local born tour guide took pride in her role, and she remarked, "I like to be a tour guide. It is a challenging but rewarding job. It

provides me an opportunity to improve my communication ability, and it has trained me from being an introverted person to a self-confident person” (Personal communication, June 2007).

According to Beeton (1998), as well as Ross and Wall (1999), the two-way interaction is quite beneficial, since it can not only provide an opportunity for the tourists to learn the hosts’ culture and living styles, but also provide the opportunity for the hosts to get to know the visitors’ cultures and beliefs. This research found that in Tengtou village, tourists are particularly interested in chatting with local people. Therefore, it suggests that there is a potentially great opportunity for the exchange of ideas between tourists and local people. However, it is also worth noting that the strong desire of tourists to communicate with local people can also bring pressure or embarrassment to those residents who cannot speak Mandarin, which, then, can be detrimental to meaningful communications. This is because the dominant language among Tengtou locals is their own local dialect.

Moreover, closely related with the economic advantage, mainly in terms of the provision of job opportunities, ecotourism also effectively decreases the crime rate to some extent. This is because, before the initiation of ecotourism, the young, strong and capable people were able to find jobs in secondary industries, while the remaining illiterate and the physically weak were unemployed. Those who were unemployed were more likely to commit a crime, such as stealing or to spend their time gambling:

Before the emergence of ecotourism, there were many lazy young men always stealing something from their neighbours, since they were unable to find a decent job, and were physically weak to do heavy jobs. They smoked, and indulged in gambling everyday. These bad people brought a discredit to our village. Now, they are employed by the local government to work for the travel company, which is good (Sixty-year-old male participant, personal communication, May 2007).

Further, as discussed in Chapter 2, Butler (1974) cautions that the considerable differences between hosts and tourists can lead to negative social impacts. This was the case, for example, in Niue, South Pacific, as cited by Haas (2003). However, in Tengtou village, because the majority of tourists were domestic and a great proportion of tourists were from neighbouring cities, tourists and the local residents seemed to share similar cultures or values. Hence, social problems like the destruction of local values and intrusion on traditional cultures did not occur.

In regard to the negative socio-cultural impacts, the main concerns voiced by several local residents were the disturbance of people's daily lives by frequent tourists' unexpected visitations and the inconvenience brought by traffic congestion. More specifically, the increasing frequency of tourists visiting the local residents by directly knocking their doors made some residents feel that their lives were intruded upon by these unexpected visitors. This is reflected in comments by a forty year old man, who worked as a local patrolman:

Actually we are happy to share our lives with tourists. You know people are interested in your village, it is a good thing, but there are too many tourists that come directly without any notice in advance. Anyway, this is my house, not a tourist attraction (Personal communication, June 2007).

The disruption of the regular routines of daily village life is consistent with the findings of an ecotourism development project in the rural highlands of Fiji (Bricker, 2001). In addition, some residents pointed out that during the peak seasons, there was a large number of cars, which sometimes led to serious road congestion; consequently, this brings much inconvenience to those residents who ride bikes to work everyday, as well as those residents who have private cars. Meanwhile, with the large number of cars running within this small village, it becomes dangerous for the elderly and young pedestrians (A middle aged female, personal communication, May 2007).

In summary, the research indicated that the overwhelming proportion of local villagers involved in interviews held fairly optimistic perspectives about ecotourism's positive influences, and they were confident that ecotourism growth would eventually generate more benefits for their village and themselves. The negative consequences, as identified by some local participants, did not dampen the desire to see its level increase, since those participants generally felt that the potential benefits would outweigh any associated costs. This finding is similar to the study of King, Pizam and Milman (1993) in Nadi, Fiji, as well as Campbell's (1999) research in Ostional, Costa Rica, that the awareness of negative effects of tourism did not lessen the aspiration for increased tourism development.

On the other hand, this section also identified several potential threats that can impede ecotourism's achievement of sustainable development, within which some were overlooked by the local participants, such as the expansion of tourism related physical settings and entertainment facilities. Nevertheless, the local residents' supportive attitude and the achieved favourable effects suggest that ecotourism can be a desirable tool in forwarding the goal of sustainable development. The next section intends to take a closer look to investigate the possibilities for ecotourism to contribute to local sustainable development, through examining how ecotourism is practised in Tengtou village to achieve the current level of success, and the potential obstacles that may threaten its further development in a sustainable manner.

6.3 Factors in the comparative success of Tengtou

Having assessed the local residents' own understanding of ecotourism and thoughts towards the impacts of ecotourism in Tengtou village, as well as the researcher's analysis, in relation to the evaluation principles derived from the literature, it shows that ecotourism in Tengtou village has achieved a considerable number of encouraging benefits. Although ecotourism development also brought several unfavourable effects, it can be argued that Tengtou village has worked to move

towards sustainable development, by practising ecotourism. This section seeks to explore the specific mechanisms that enable ecotourism to contribute to the current level of comparative sustainable development in this village, in order to find some relevance to ecotourism development in other rural areas. This is followed by a discussion of the potential obstacles that may impede it from gaining more benefits.

According to a large amount of existing literature (Buchsbaum, 2004; Ross & Wall, 1999; Scheyvens, 2002), appropriate and effective planning and management, as well as the active involvement of local populations in the process of ecotourism development, are considered as the crucial dimensions in achieving sustainable ecotourism. Correspondingly, the fact that ecotourism has successfully contributed to local sustainable development in the circumstance of Tengtou village, compared to other villages of China, is due to three main interrelated factors: strict regulations and favourable policies, which indicate careful management and holistic planning; the open-minded and considerate attributes of local officials; and the attitudes and efforts of ordinary local residents. The following will discuss these specific contributions by first outlining the key characteristics of ecotourism. It is important to detail the characteristics of ecotourism in Tengtou village that enabled its sustainable local-level development.

6.3.1 Characteristics of ecotourism in Tengtou village

The first key characteristic of ecotourism in Tengtou village is that it is a locally initiated, owned and operated, small-scale venture. The locally-based nature in this specific village enables the local government to maintain a firm control over the development of the industry, rather than being influenced by outsiders. Consequently, this allows the flexibility to make and impose policies that would maximise both the village's and villagers' benefits. Specifically, the money to develop ecotourism came solely from the village itself, which helped to reduce the risk of dependence on outside organisations. Conversely, if the money to fund the ecotourism venture came

from outsiders, there would probably be a risk of pressure from the investors to pursue economic profits, rather than giving priority to improving local people's living standards. This is the case in Monteverde, Costa Rica, as cited by Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster (2002). Meanwhile, the involvement of a number of agencies, with their different goals and objectives, can also lead to weak management, which lacks coherent policies to regulate the ecotourism industry in a sustainable direction (Whelan, 1991).

In addition, the local government's control over the ecotourism project can ensure that benefits earned from ecotourism are less likely to leak out of the village, through utilising local resources and labour. For example, the majority of plants and flowers planted in Tengtou village to develop ecotourism were bought from Tengtou Gardening Company, instead of being imported from other places. This is in comparison to the case of Komodo National Park, Indonesia, where there is a high proportion of economic leakage due to the large magnitude of importation of goods from outside the destination (Goodwin, 1994). Taking local employment as another example, local officials of Tengtou village placed a priority in employing local people to support ecotourism⁶⁵. Local people were also given the priority to open shops, and if they did not want to run businesses, the local officials would then consider encouraging people from outside to invest. In contrast, in the context of Labuan Bajo in Indonesia, external operators generated greater benefits from ecotourism projects than local residents, which led to serious economic leakages (Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). Similarly, in the cases of Montverde and Galapagos Islands, the outsiders benefited much from ecotourism, which, in turn, largely undermined the stability of local communities (Weaver, 1998).

It is noteworthy that there is another advantageous policy made by the local authority that can contribute to the successful development of ecotourism. As mentioned

⁶⁵ It should be noted that although the initiation of ecotourism provides more job opportunities for local residents, a limited number of ordinary residents are employed in the higher management level jobs, which is largely due to their low education and lack of specific management skills.

before, local residents are provided with free entrance to the ecotourism zone. This finding supports Cater's (1994) argument in maintaining that comprehensive participation of local participants should include both the involvement of local populations in tourism related industries, and their enjoyment of the tourist attractions. Similarly, Sherman and Dixon's (1991) view resembles Cater's (1994) point by suggesting that it is appropriate to charge reduced rates for local people in accessing parks, in order to ensure these people's participation in terms of enjoyment of their own resources. This is the case in Rwanda, where local people were only charged a small fee to access mountain reserves (Whelan, 1991).

Secondly, the research revealed that the development of ecotourism in Tengtou village is closely combined with the development of the whole village and the improvement of the local infrastructure. Local officials attached great importance to the whole village's environmental protection, prior to and within the ecotourism development process. The whole village has actually become special scenery for tourists, which reflects careful and holistic planning. This priority given by the local government in maintaining the sound environment of the whole village can be argued as a crucial factor that contributed to the sustainability of ecotourism. On the one hand, the local government spends a considerable amount of money to maintain the village to keep its clean and green image. On the other hand, it also established many rules to guide local residents' behaviour and to foster their healthy lifestyles, with the local leaders and officials taking the initiative.

In addition, the manager and the planners of ecotourism insist that ecotourism is aimed towards improving local people's living standards. In reality, a large proportion of revenue earned was spent on improving the living environment and upgrading the infrastructure for its villagers. In contrast to this research, Wearing and Neil's (1999) study found that in many cases, governments charged user fees from tourists, but did not invest that money to improve the quality of parks and the local areas, which obviously does not help to contribute to the destination areas'

development.

Thirdly, another strength of ecotourism development in Tengtou village lies in the fact that its initiation was based on a favourable foundation of agricultural development and a well-balanced existing industrial structure, rather than being developed on an ad hoc basis. In other words, Tengtou village had already developed high-tech agriculture, and owned a certain level of secondary industry, before the initiation of ecotourism. In this way, it paved the way for ecotourism's development, especially in terms of the provision of revenue to initiate the ecotourism venture and other related aspects. As a result, ecotourism was better able to contribute to the mutual relationships among the existing industrial structures. In comparison, in the case of Tortuguero, a village in the Caribbean, local businesses were not integrated into ecotourism, and this brought a series of negative consequences.

In addition, the ecotourism industry does not occupy the most significant proportion of the village's total economic revenue ecotourism, and emerged as only one of the tertiary industries. This can help to facilitate the village's further development in a more sustainable way than those ecotourism ventures that dominate the whole region's economy, which leads to vulnerability due to the fluctuating nature of ecotourism operations. Many studies (Boo, 1990; Stem et al., 2003; Sustainable Development-Based Ecotourism, n.d) caution that due to the seasonal nature of tourism, and the changeable nature of tourists' tastes, too much reliance on tourism contributes to the destination area becoming unsustainable. Hence, ecotourism is proposed by authors like Boo (1990), as well as Stone and Wall (2003), to be more desirable when it is developed as one of several activities in harmony with local traditional activities, which is the case in Tengtou village.

6.3.2 Attributes of local officials

The above discussion has illustrated the nature and characteristics of ecotourism

development in Tengtou village. Each of the characteristics of ecotourism in the research area is beneficial in that it enables the ecotourism industry to develop in a sustainable way. It can be seen that the comparative sustainable development of ecotourism in Tengtou village is closely related with many sound policies and favourable pre-existing industrial structures, which reflect careful planning and integrated management. Accordingly, the sensitive and innovative attributes of local officials, who made the conscious decision to implement ecotourism, can also be argued as playing a crucial role in developing sustainable ecotourism.

Specifically, the local officials have strong vulnerability awareness: they know that if their village does not continue to make progress, it will diminish. Therefore, during the process of developing ecotourism, the local officials frequently went to other places to attend a variety of tourism related meetings, in order to learn about others' successful experience in developing their tourism. Meanwhile, the local officials have also sought people with special ability in managing or administrating tourism related affairs from throughout China. The ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company, who had experience in the tourism industry as discovered by the leader of Tengtou village in a tourism conference, is an example.

Moreover, local officials also invite professionals and experts to come to Tengtou village to do research and to provide constructive suggestions. The main research projects listed are in the areas of river ecosystem management, the provision of water, the scenic landscape, waste disposal management, and local population dynamics. Further, the research indicated that the local officials have also carefully considered questions concerning concessions, accessibility, safety and the distribution of social welfare when developing and managing the tourist attractions.

6.3.3 Attitudes and endeavours of local people

In addition to the decision makers' distinctive attributes, other ordinary local

people's attitudes and endeavours cannot be neglected in playing a crucial role in ensuring ecotourism's contribution to local sustainable development. The permanent residents of Tengtou village cooperate with policies and rules established by local government. People are willing to accept the need for regulation, and they obey different regulations consciously⁶⁶. The research found that this is largely because the villagers treasured their hard-won current situation, and they know that if their village was dirty and out of control, tourists would not come to visit any more, which, in turn, would curtail their tangible benefits.

On the other hand, this is also because the local leaders and officials took the initiative first. A young resident who is operating a shop told me that when he was young, he littered unconsciously; each time when the elderly former leader of the village saw this, this former leader would educate him. Now this young man admitted that he would never repeat this action in his own village. Many other participants also mentioned, even today, when this old ex-leader of the village observed any litter on the streets, he stopped to pick it up. Thus, other ordinary residents would normally do the same thing.

Further, as discussed in Chapter 5, local residents have applied themselves to various forms of small business enterprises, as well as many other tourism related activities, since ecotourism began in Tengtou village. Local people have the spirit of hard work, the desire for self-learning, and are active in seeking opportunities to generate benefits from ecotourism in their village. A middle-aged woman who is operating a restaurant with her two siblings told me where her idea of running a business came from:

After my village started to initiate ecotourism, many factories were moved away from nearby the current ecotourism zone. Hence, this left many empty houses. With the

⁶⁶ It should be noted that in rural areas of China, any decisions made by the local governments have to be approved by the majority of local villagers, in order to be implemented. In other words, although local officials are decision makers, common villagers also have certain political rights to reject any decisions they disagree with.

increasing number of tourists, I discussed this with my siblings and we decided to open a restaurant, providing tourists with local traditional meals. Of course, (another reason is that) the rental fee of that house is very cheap. Doing a business should take certain levels of risk, you know. In the first several years, we invested a lot, like buying tables, chairs, and other stuff, and not too much money was earned. However, from a long-term perspective, I think we can earn money since the number of tourist increases each year. It is a good indication anyway (Personal communication, June 2007)

Taking another example, a 40 year old female, whose family had produced hand-made ginger sugar for several generations, was selling breakfasts (e.g. steamed buns), prior to ecotourism development. After the start of ecotourism in her village, the local government provided many favourable policies to encourage local people to operate their own businesses, such as flexibly charging minimum management fees according to the amount profits earned during different months. Enlightened by the ex-manager of the Tengtou Travel Company, this woman thought of her idea of opening a ginger sugar shop to sell hand-made candy to tourists. The earnings from selling these sweets are more profitable than selling the breakfast, when each package of sweets is sold at 5 Yuan, while one steamed bun is only sold at 0.5 Yuan.

6.4 Limitations of sustainable ecotourism development in Tengtou village

The preceding discussion has considered several factors that combined together to facilitate ecotourism to contribute to the village's sustainable development. This section will focus on specifying the weaknesses that can limit the prospect of ecotourism achieving sustainable development. One of the significant limitations of ecotourism development found in Tengtou village was that the local residents were not actively involved in the management and operations of ecotourism. As a result, this can mitigate against the prospect of ecotourism to fulfill sustainable

development. A considerable number of authors like Garrod (2003), Page and Dowling (2002), Scheyvens (1999) and Sofield (2003) emphasise the importance of empowerment of local residents for ecotourism to increase ecotourism's likelihood to promote sustainable development.

Specifically, although local populations were encouraged to be involved in a variety of tourism related activities, the scope and depth of local participation was inadequate, due to the limited number of ordinary local people occupying higher managerial jobs. Villagers elected their own representatives to communicate with the local government, to voice their concerns, and were invited to be involved in any tourism related meetings. However, the people normally have little political power in the decision making process. The lack of empowerment within local populations can also be reflected in their reactions towards the questions asked in the interviews. Participants thought that the ecotourism project was initiated and promoted by the local government; hence, some of them advised me to interview local officials who knew the definition better. Similarly, when the participants were asked about their own suggestions towards ecotourism's future development, some carefully suggested that I should ask the local officials who made the decision.

This is not overly surprising, since in many other areas of China, such as Jiuzhaigou Biosphere Reserve in Sichuan Province, as well as Jianfengling and Diaoluoshan National Forest Parks in Hainan Province, local governments also tend to possess great authority in regulation and control, rather than empowering the common people (Dombroski, 2005; Stone & Wall, 2003). Although the local residents of Tengtou village trusted their leaders in initiating this new industry⁶⁷, and the local government did make a definite effort to increase its people's well being and the quality of their living environment, the authoritarian style of management might inhibit local people's creativity and enthusiasm, which, in turn, will undermine the

⁶⁷ The research identified that there is a strong social coherence in this village, with local leaders being highly among ordinary villagers. This is because in the old days, the local leaders led the villagers out of poverty through their collective efforts.

village's ability to achieve its long-term sustainability.

The problem of the exclusion of the local population in the decision making process is not unique in Tengtou village, China, but also has been identified as a common phenomenon in many other ecotourism destinations around the world (Garrod, 2003). For example, Costa Rica, which is regarded as developing some of the world's most successful ecotourism industries, also has a problem with the local population's involvement in the planning and management processes of ecotourism (Weinberg et al., 2002). Goodwin (2003) further specifies the low levels of education as the potential cause that affect local people input in the ecotourism industry by employing the Komodo National Park in Indonesia as an example. Similarly, in Tengtou village, the absence of relevant skills, including language and management skills, restrict some local residents from playing a meaningful part in the ecotourism project.

In addition to the lack of political empowerment, another limitation of ecotourism development that needs to be addressed is that the case study village lacks professionally trained tour guides. Tour guides are largely drawn from Tengtou village itself, and from the villages nearby, whose educational level and communication skills are relatively low, compared with qualified personnel acting as tour guides as occurs in many other destinations around the globe. The lack of trained human resources is identified as one of the crucial barriers that can prevent local people from generating more benefits, as well as threatening environment, which, in turn, can pose a challenge to the whole industry's successful development (Woodley, 1993; Han & Ren, 2001).

6.5 Summary

This chapter has redefined the notion of ecotourism within the specific context of Tengtou village, noting the similarities and differences of the interpretations of

ecotourism between the case study village and the existing ecotourism literature were discussed. In addition, the chapter also critically analyses the impacts of ecotourism, by taking into account both the local participants' own opinions and the views of the researcher as an outsider. It can be seen that ecotourism has produced a considerable number of desired outcomes that can contribute to local sustainable development: economically, ecotourism has provided more economic opportunities and additional earnings to the local people; socio-culturally, ecotourism has contributed to the improvement of local infrastructures and social welfare, as well as promoting local residents' self-esteem and pride; while environmentally, ecotourism has largely improved the quality of the living environment for local people, and has facilitated fostering healthy living habits among both local residents and outsiders. The research has gone further to explore the factors that enable the comparatively successful development of ecotourism, which are closely linked with the combination of the endeavours made by the local officials, managers and other local people. Within this context, careful planning and appropriate management can be argued as making an important contribution to facilitate ecotourism to fulfill its potential role.

In addition to the encouraging benefits, there also have been several negative impacts brought by ecotourism, including the increasing levels of noise pollution and waste pollution, traffic congestion, and disturbance of daily lives and the like. Moreover, the increasing number of entertainment facilities, as well as the growing number of tourists, can also pose challenges to the future sustainable development of ecotourism. Further, the case study also identified the importance of effective involvement of the local residents in management processes of ecotourism, and the role of qualified tour guides in accomplishing sustainable development, which were lacking in the research area.

These negative consequences and the weaknesses in developing ecotourism suggest that sustainability has not yet been fully achieved in the research area. It can be

concluded that currently, ecotourism in Tengtou village is still in the initial and developmental phase that has not yet fully matured, with several areas of management of the ecotourism industry still needing to be enhanced. However, overall, it can not be denied that Tengtou village has made great efforts to move towards sustainable development, and through the means of ecotourism, the village has achieved a certain level of sustainability.

7. CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to assess ecotourism's effectiveness as a viable strategy for achieving local sustainable development in non-nature-based destination areas. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were identified: 1) what are the management body's and local residents' definitions and expectations of ecotourism? 2) what are the perceived impacts of ecotourism? 3) what factors that influence ecotourism's possibility to achieve sustainable development? A case study in Tengtou village, China, was employed to answer the research question and to achieve the research objectives.

A theoretical framework was devised to guide the processes of data collection and analysis. This occurred mainly in considering the concepts of ecotourism and sustainable development, as well as the evaluative indicators of the achievement of sustainable development. The research findings were, then, compared to those key themes identified in the relevant literature, with similarities and differences identified.

In this chapter, the main findings of the research are summarised. This is followed by the formulation of possible suggestions to improve the current approach to ecotourism in the research area, with the aim to assist ecotourism's capacity to enhance the village's sustainable development for the future.

7.1 Summary of the research findings

Firstly, this study redefined the concept of ecotourism according to the local participants' own understanding, within which the similarities and differences of this concept, as perceived by the research population and the existing ecotourism literature were presented. The definition of ecotourism in the context of Tengtou

village was found as challenging the conventional conceptualisation of the term, mainly in terms of focusing on the natural environment as the key essential component. Ecotourism was understood by the local participants as a kind of environmentally protective industry, rather than a kind of tourism that is based primarily on a natural setting. Hence, it can be concluded that ecotourism operations do not necessarily need to occur in rural areas that possess outstanding natural qualities, nor emerge merely in terms of nature reserves or national parks. Rather, it is possible for ecotourism practices to take place in areas without the endowment of distinctive natural features. In this way, such an understanding tends to be more in line with recently emerging schools of thought, in expanding ecotourism initiatives to modified areas, as long as the tourism in destination areas is protective of the environment and performs educational roles.

Secondly, the research revealed that ecotourism in the case study area has brought many benefits to both the village and villagers in a variety of ways: local residents' incomes have increased through the provision of more job opportunities, and the recent distribution of revenues; social welfare and public infrastructure were recognised as having been improved in substantial ways; and the local people's living environment has been beautified. In addition to the above tangible benefits, ecotourism development has also enhanced the reputation to the village, which consequently increased local residents' confidence and self-esteem. Meanwhile, ecotourism has helped to adjust the industrial structure, and contributed to the provision of an empirical model of development for other villages to study.

Thirdly, on the other hand, the research identified several potentially negative consequences of ecotourism to which attention needs to be paid. These existing adverse impacts include the seasonal nature of the ecotourism industry that can curtail economic benefits; noise problems; increasing levels of waste disposal; problems of traffic congestion; and the disruption to local people's daily life. At the same time, the study also found that the increasing number of tourists, as well as the

expansion of tourism-related entertainment settings, can pose challenges to ecotourism's role in fulfilling sustainable development, from a longevity perspective.

In spite of these existing and potential limitations of the ecotourism industry, it is evident that the advantageous influences of ecotourism in Tengtou village outweigh its negative impacts. The fairly optimistic attitude held by the ordinary local residents, as well as the managers and planners of Tengtou village towards ecotourism development also implies that the ecotourism industry can be a viable tool for facilitating local sustainable development. On balance, it can be seen that the local officials and the other ordinary villagers have made a great effort to move ecotourism towards sustainable development. A certain level of sustainable development, to some extent, has been achieved through the means of ecotourism.

Fourthly, the research explored factors that enabled the ecotourism, practised in the case study area, to achieve the above mentioned favourable advantages. In line with many ecotourism writings, the locally initiated, owned and operated nature of the ecotourism industry was found as a favourable factor that can help to facilitate sound development. In addition, the strict regulations and sound policies, which were closely related to the holistic planning and considerate management, were also revealed as important contributions in enabling ecotourism to achieve sustainable development. Such an observation supports the argument made by a number of existing ecotourism writers, such as Buchsbaum (2004); Lindberg and McKercher (1997), as well as Ross and Wall (1999), in maintaining that careful planning and appropriate management play a significant role in ensuring sustainable ecotourism. Specifically, the managers and planners of the research area focused on the development of the whole village as the aim, instead of solely targeting the ecotourism zone as the objective of development. This gave priority to the whole village's environmental protection.

Another distinctive feature of the case study area, in developing its ecotourism

successfully, lies in the fact that ecotourism development was based on a balanced existing industrial structure. Ecotourism emerged as only one of the many tertiary industries, with a role in diversifying the local economy. Consequently, the ecotourism industry was found to be more able to develop in a sustainable manner and in balance with the local economy. This strength of ecotourism development in the specific research area differs from ecotourism in many other destinations as reported by the literature, such as Campbell (1999), and Weaver (1998), where ecotourism is, to a large extent, used as a main economic activity, rather than being based on an already mature industrial structure.

Further, local people's willingness and commitment to contribute to protecting their living environment also help to enhance ecotourism's role in advancing sustainable development. This indicates the importance of the cooperation between different levels of people at the destination area in ensuring the successful implementation of successful ecotourism. It also implies the significance of effective management.

Fifthly, the research also explored limitations which can inhibit the village from generating more benefits. Both these disadvantages and the above mentioned advantages contributed to the in-depth understanding of the possibilities of ecotourism contributing to sustainable development. The case study raised the importance of effective and active participation of local people in ecotourism development, which was found as lacking in Tengtou village that might restrict ecotourism's prospects to achieve sustainable development in the long term. Specifically, although local people were participating in the ecotourism industry in many ways, there was a limited number of local residents involved at the management levels. In other words, the ordinary local people were not actively involved in the processes of planning and decision making within the ecotourism project. This is partly because local people were lacking certain skills in tourism management marketing and business, which, then, inhibited them from obtaining more economic benefits. In addition to the inadequate level of intensity of local

participation, the study also observed that the current regulations towards tourists and the establishment of physical settings need to be strengthened, in order to facilitate ecotourism to develop as a more ideal vehicle to satisfy the long-term sustainability of local development.

The problem of local residents' lack of empowerment in being actively involved in the entire process of ecotourism development is widely acknowledged in many ecotourism destinations (Dombroski, 2005; Goodwin, 2003; Stone & Wall, 2003; Weinberg et al., 2002). Much of the literature on ecotourism development addresses the crucial need for local empowerment as the key determinant to successful ecotourism (Garrod, 2003; Ross and Wall, 1999; Sofield, 2003). However, different places have their own distinctive contexts; thus, there is no absolute formula that can be argued as suitable to all ecotourism destinations, as the key determinant in measuring the achievement of sustainable development.

In many communist countries, States make decisions for their people, and people become used to this decision-making mechanism. This is also the case in China. As mentioned in Chapter 2, due to its unique history and context, the Chinese approach to development is state-led development, where decisions are often made for the people and with sustainability reliant on the benevolence of the administration. Since 1978, the Chinese government adopted the 'open door' policy, with the aim of pursuing high economic development, while more recently the government pays particular attention to improving rural areas' economic development, in order to reduce the widening regional income disparities. Accordingly, the nature of ecotourism development, which is one of the promising industries, is also influenced. Eco-villages like Tengtou that are constructed in areas of modified nature, but set up with the aim of advocating environmentally friendly development practices, are purposefully promoted by the national government as a new form of ecotourism, in order to drive rural areas' sustainable development. It can be seen that this top-down mode decision making works well in looking after rural population.

In this specific study area, ecotourism was initiated by the local government, who made the decision on local people's behalf. Local people are accustomed to rely on their government to lead them develop their village, and they are happy with the benefits through their government's benevolence. However, it also should be noted that although this decision making mechanism is desirable in this specific area, local people's economic benefits can be limited without their active participation and effective interaction with the local government. In other words, local people's benefits could be maximised with their valuable inputs in the decision making process. Thus, it can be argued that the most important things are to encourage people in developing their own capacities, to respect their opinions, and to incorporate their concerns when making decisions.

7.2 Recommendations

In light of the study's findings and the salient literature, the following subsection will offer several suggestions that could enhance the capacity of ecotourism to generate more sustainable benefits for both villagers and the village, from a long term perspective. These suggestions can be summarised into three main recommendations, mainly for local officials, as well as the managers and planners of the ecotourism project in Tengtou village:

- 1) The research revealed insufficient involvement of local residents in the planning, implementing and decision making processes of ecotourism development, which may prevent them from receiving more benefits. Encouraging and incorporating local residents' concerns into the decision-making process can help to build local residents' self-confidence and enthusiasm. Local villagers' effective involvement in the ecotourism industry can be achieved through identifying and strengthening their capabilities. For example, training programs to improve local people's language ability and tourism related knowledge, could be useful in facilitating their effective communication with tourists and enhancing their self-esteem and confidence. It is

desirable if training programs can be provided for local people, rather than largely employing workers from other regions that have already possessed the necessary skills.

In addition, appropriate and timely communication between local villagers and people working within management levels is also necessary, in ensuring the comprehensive involvement of local people in the ecotourism industry. Although many local residents are not well educated, people do have their own knowledge and thoughts, which can offer a valuable and diverse contribution to the provision of relevant suggestions towards ecotourism development.

If local people were able to develop together with the ecotourism industry, and they were more aware of the ecotourism development process from the beginning until the end, people would feel more psychologically empowered. Moreover, they would become more confident in playing a monitoring role and providing their suggestions as early as possible. Further, if local residents were informed about what was happening with ecotourism, the villagers who were running businesses would be able to facilitate the operation of their businesses more successfully. As Buchsbaum (2004) argues, only when people are central to ecotourism, will they become more interested in devoting their time and energy to it, since they are aware that the success of ecotourism will be influenced by their capacity, which can bring them more direct personal benefits. Overall, then, if ecotourism is to bring more benefits to local residents, the facilitation of local people's effective participation is important.

2) If ecotourism is to achieve sustainability in the long term, the management of the numbers and behaviours of tourists should be strengthened. For example, the decision makers should establish certain specific regulations to deal with the increasing number of tourists, especially during the peak season. This is beneficial to maintain the village's environment in a sound condition, as well as to provide high

quality ecotourism experiences to tourists. Accordingly, this can promote tourists' satisfaction levels and encourage them to return in the future. The research also found that it is useful to reinforce prudent policies to control the expansion of the construction of entertainment facilities, and other tourism related physical buildings. The quality and environmental sensitivity of tourism-related infrastructure development should be given priority, rather than the size of the infrastructure.

3) Finally, the qualifications of current tour guides, as well as other staff involved in the ecotourism industry, need to be improved in the case study area. For example, professional training is particularly required to provide tour guides with relevant ecotourism knowledge and communication skills, within which a mastery of multiple languages is important.

In conclusion, this thesis has used the example of Tengtou to explore how ecotourism can facilitate local sustainable development. The study has shown that ecotourism should not be limited to primarily pristine nature-based areas; rather, it is possible for ecotourism practice to take place in modified areas and urban areas, where efforts are made to contribute to environmental protection. Appropriate regulation, sound planning, and local population's cooperation were found as important factors that can help to move ecotourism towards sustainable development. Further, the importance of local people's active participation in enabling ecotourism to bring more benefits to its people has also been emphasised, though whether decisions are made for or by local people was not argued as the key determinant of the achievement of sustainable development.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Samples of Impact Ladder results

Impact Ladder completed by a woman who works in the clothing company

A: changes in terms of incomes

	Economic earnings before ecotourism development	Economic earnings after ecotourism development
10		
9		
8		
7	⚙	⚙
6		
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		
0		

B: changes in the provision of infrastructures

	The quality and quantity of infrastructures before ecotourism development	The quality and quantity of infrastructures after ecotourism development
10		⚙
9	⚙	
8		
7		
6		
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		
0		

C: changes in environmental quality

	Quality of environment before ecotourism development	Quality of environment after ecotourism
10		⚙
9		
8	⚙	
7		
6		
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		
0		

Impact Ladder completed by a retired male local participant

A: changes in terms of income

	Economic earnings before ecotourism development	Economic earnings after ecotourism development
10		
9		⚙
8		
7	⚙	
6		
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		
0		

B: changes in the provision of infrastructures

	The quantity and quality of infrastructures before ecotourism development	The quantity and quality of infrastructures after ecotourism development
10		⊗
9		
8		
7	⊗	
6		
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		
0		

C: changes in environmental quality

	Quality of environment before ecotourism development	Quality of environment after ecotourism
10		
9		⊗
8	⊗	
7		
6		
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		
0		

Appendix 2: Questionnaire surveys for tourists

1. What is the purpose of your visitation? Or what attracted you to come to Tengtou?
2. What activities you did within the village? And what kinds of tourist attractions you think are most interesting? What kinds of tourist attractions you think are not so good?
3. What is your impression about the village and the villagers?
4. Have you been to other eco-villages or been a tourist elsewhere, how does this compare to this village?
5. How is your spending in this village (such as did you buy any stuff from tourist attractions)? And what is the duration of your visitation?
6. Are there any suggestions that you have for the future development of ecotourism in that village?

Thanks for your participation!

Completion and return of this questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question. Respondent's names will not be used in the written thesis.

